

# ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

SCOTTISH CHILDREN'S REPORTER ADMINISTRATION



ENSURING POSITIVE FUTURES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



## ABOUT OUR REPORT

This report covers the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

It summarises SCRA's achievements and performance during that period and includes an update on progress against our Business Plan.

As part of our continued commitment to the environment, we have not printed our Annual Report for many years now, however, you can still view all our information online, including a full set of our annual audited accounts and performance report, as well as our Official Statistics and interactive statistical dashboard at [www.scra.gov.uk](http://www.scra.gov.uk)

# CONTENTS

**OUR COMMITMENTS TO YOU:**  
SCRA's Vision, Mission, Values **03**

**FOREWORD:**  
A welcome message from our  
Board Chair, Michelle Miller **07**

**OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE:**  
Some of our highlights from 2019/20 **12**

**OUR PROGRESS:**  
A summary of progress against  
our Business Plan 2019/20 **16**

**OUR STORIES:**  
A round up of some of our key areas of  
achievements in 2019/20 **23**

**OUR STATISTICS:**  
Some of our key statistics in 2019/20 **25**

**OUR BOARD:**  
Information about our Board and members **26**

**LOOKING AHEAD:**  
Our Principal Reporter/Chief Executive Officer,  
Neil Hunter reflects on 2020/21 so far **28**

# OUR COMMITMENTS TO YOU

## OUR VISION



Children and young people will be listened to, protected and supported to have a positive future where they are safe, valued and respected.

## OUR MISSION



We protect and support Scotland's children and young people, by making high quality decisions, upholding their rights and working collaboratively as compassionate, inclusive Corporate Parents to enable the most positive and personalised experience of the Children's Hearings System.

## OUR VALUES



Our values are the shared motivations, beliefs and behaviours that underpin all that we do.

**Supportive:** We work with kindness to support children, young people and families, our partners and each other.

**Child Centred:** Children and young people are at the heart of everything we do.

**Respectful:** Everyone is respected and treated fairly, inclusively and lawfully.

**Accountable:** We are responsible for our decisions, our ethics and our learning.



# FOREWORD

## **Michelle Miller, SCRA's Board Chair**

2019/2020 saw SCRA working strenuously to put our values of listening, respect, rights, equality and accountability into action. The year has seen the most detailed and intensive programme of equalities-related work we have ever undertaken. Our equalities programme permeates every part of our organisation and involves a critical mass of our staff and others in striving to deliver ever improving, child centred, sensitive and responsive services.

We made steady progress in the completion of the business priorities and performance targets set out in our Corporate Plan 2017-2020. SCRA's focus on being the best Corporate Parent we can be, was a dominant theme throughout the year. It cuts across everything we do from the development of our practice guidance and training; the design and delivery of our hearing rooms improvement programme; the development of sensory kits and public information for children with autism; our partnership work with others; and our ongoing support and commitment to the work of Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV). OHOV had an incredibly exciting year of development and activity, bringing young people's voice and experience to the heart of the Hearings System - posing questions and challenges and helping us drive improvement.

The Independent Care Review concluded and reported during the year. SCRA was very pleased to be involved in its work - through a number of formal workstreams - and contributed freely and enthusiastically to the emerging findings.

The Promise was published in February, and SCRA welcomes this as one of the most powerful pieces of work for decades, driven by children and young people's own experience and packed with detailed findings, to which all of us now must respond with energy and focus. SCRA is fully committed to doing so. Our Better Hearings programme will be one major contribution to the Promise. The commitment to high quality, personalised and bespoke experiences for children and young people who have contact with the Hearings System is driving change. It is challenging all of us, SCRA and partners alike, to change the way we work, with more detailed planning, discussion and communication with young people and their families, support, care and attention to detail, and transparency on rights and advocacy.

Our highly respected research programme published two key reports last year in relation to contact between siblings. The report revealed huge inconsistencies in how the system respects, takes account of and facilitates strong positive relationships between brothers and sisters. SCRA is proud to be a founding member of Stand Up for Siblings and our research and communications teams have been a key support to this important partnership. The second of our reports in 2019/2020 related to home supervision and was published as series of 8 interlinked reports, ranging from wellbeing outcomes for children and young people on home supervision; care planning and interventions; trust and relationships; views and experience. This research was used to stimulate extensive partnership engagement and reflection on the steps we need to take to improve children,

young people and their families' experience and outcomes of home supervision.

The health and wellbeing of SCRA staff continued to be a major organisational priority this year. Not just in terms of reducing absence, but in ensuring that all SCRA staff feel well supported and motivated at work. Our health and wellbeing programme has focused on 'mental wealth', recognising the social, emotional and psychological stress inherent in the nature of the work, and trying hard to both prevent and overcome this, proactively offering support and help for individuals and teams, reducing stigma and promoting openness. Access to opportunity and professional and personal development has also been key this year - with a focus on learning and progress within and between roles in our organisation.

No report on the past year is complete without recognising the devastating impact the gradual move to lock down had on our service over the course of late February and March. It is too early to tell what long-term effect this will have, but SCRA will continue to work hard with partners across the system to mitigate the impact and provide support, care and protection to the children and young people of Scotland.

# YEAR AT A GLANCE 2019/20

## APRIL

Business Plan 2019/20 is published

Roll out of free sanitary products in Hearing centres

Corporate Parenting Plan for young people produced

## MAY

Sensory toolkits guidance for staff issued

LGBT and Questioning staff consultation published

SCRA shortlisted for ENEI Equalities Award

## JUNE

New complaints material for children and young people launched

SCRA takes part in National Carer's Week

Research report 'Relative strangers: Sibling estrangements experienced by children in out of home care and moving towards permanence' produced

## JULY

Appointment of new Senior Operational Managers announced

SCRA's Cycle to Work scheme re-opens

Official Statistics 2018/19 are published

## AUGUST

Film for young people with autism launched

Health and wellbeing resource for staff announced

Flu vaccination scheme launched

## SEPTEMBER

Research on Home CSOs published

Equalities Ambassadors take part in Dundee Pride

SCRA responds to consultation on incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

## OCTOBER

EMT back Show Racism the Red Card campaign

Annual Staff Survey is issued

SCRA takes part in Love Rally

## NOVEMBER

Updated Dignity at Work Policy published

Annual Equalities Monitoring campaign launched

New Transgender guidance for staff and managers issued

## DECEMBER

SCRA achieves LGBT Youth Charter

Gift drive for care experienced children launched

Easy read guide for victims of youth crime published

## JANUARY

Refreshed social media guidance for staff produced

Corporate Parenting Annual Report published

Consultation on our equalities outcomes launched

## FEBRUARY

SCRA supports Purple Friday

SCRA responds to Care Review final recommendations

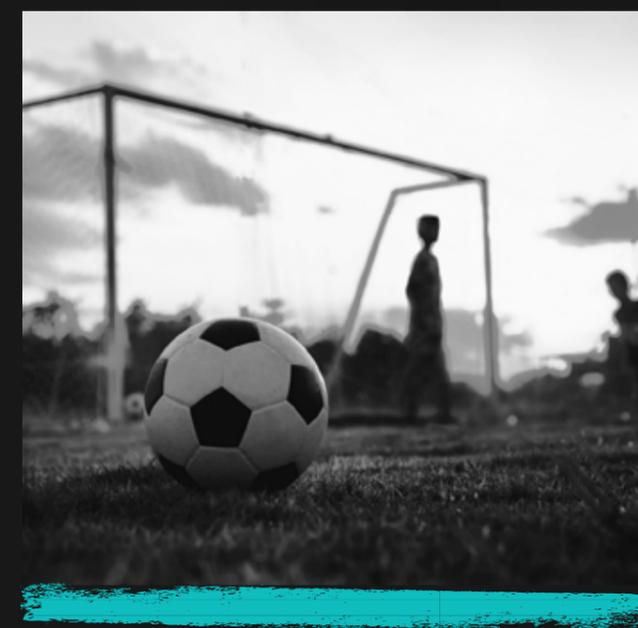
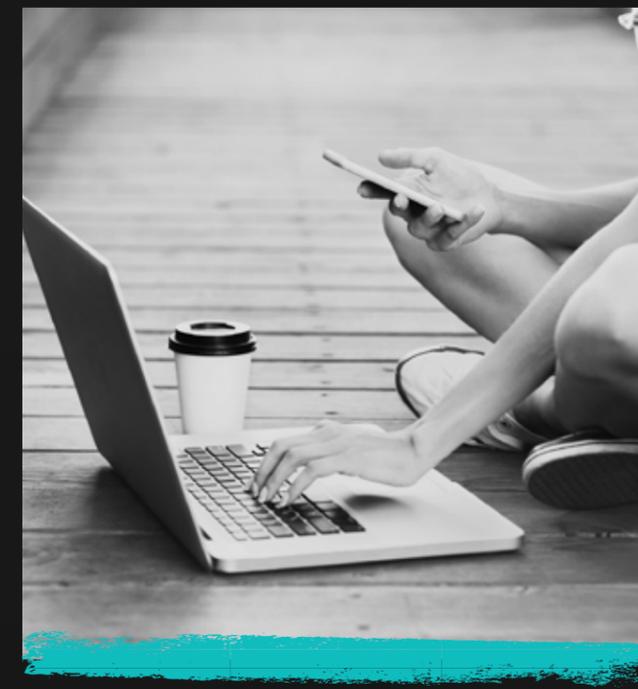
'Made with Care' art goes on display

## MARCH

SCRA starts Coronavirus contingency planning

Interim Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy launched

Response submitted to Gender Recognition Reform





# OUR PROGRESS ...

## SCRA'S PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2019/20

Throughout the year, our focus has been on delivering the core outcomes as outlined in our Business Plan 2019/20.

### OUR THREE KEY OUTCOMES WERE:

**1. A PROGRESSIVE, USER FOCUSED SERVICE:** Anticipating the needs, expectations and priorities of all children, young people and their families that come in contact with us.

**2. HIGH QUALITY DECISIONS:** Ensuring that we consistently

achieve the stretching professional standards that we set for ourselves.

**3. EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION:** Enhancing alignment of our activity with that of other agencies with whom we work to jointly progress core areas of service delivery.

We successfully completed a high proportion of the actions in our Business Plan during 2019/20.

More detailed information is available in the Performance Review section of our Annual Accounts.

More detail is available [here](#).

## OUTCOME I: A PROGRESSIVE, USER FOCUSED SERVICE

### OUR PERFORMANCE AND TARGETS

Our performance for 2019/20 reflects the continued work undertaken in recent years to improve services to children, young people and families.

Overall, six of the 10 targets within our 2019/20 Business Plan were met with two rated as amber (nearly meeting the target) and two as red (target missed).

Of those met, performance in 'percentage of initial Hearings proceeding to disposal' is particularly important for children, young people, and families as this ensures, where possible, decisions about compulsory measures are made at the earliest possible opportunity. The 80.6% outcome for this measure was 3.6pp above the target and 1.1 percentage points (pp) above 2018/19.

Also met was our target for short term absence, which at 1.9% was 0.1pp below the 2% target despite absence being 0.1pp higher than 2018/19. The other targets met were around compliance with property standards, revenue spends and savings and meeting the Scottish Government efficiency savings target.

The 'percentage of decisions on referrals within 50 working days' indicator decreased by 2.5pp to 75.0% from 2018/19 and was rated as amber against the 77% target. Continued focus on performance around this measure ensures that children and young people are receiving a timely service from SCRA.

Hearing scheduling was down 0.9pp in the year to 73.9%, leading to the indicator being rated as amber and missing the target by 3.1pp. Missing these targets has been partly due to the Better Hearings approach which is reflected in exceeding targets on referrals, a significant



## OUR STORIES

increase in the volumes of referrals, staff absences and performance inconsistencies across some areas, which are being addressed.

Two further targets were narrowly missed in the year, staff long term absence, at 3.3%, was 1.3pp above the 2% target and 0.3pp higher than 2018/19. SCRA continues to put policies and procedures in place to ensure that staff are supported to return to work, where appropriate, at the earliest possible date.

The capital budget was underspent by 25.5% (below the 5% variance target). This excludes digital project budgets and spends. This was mainly due to slippage of minor property works and a review of spend within capital which resulted in substantial spends being charged to revenue.

SCRA's performance against targets can be seen in detail in Table 7.3 of the [Statistical Analysis 2019/20](#).

### EQUALITIES AND INCLUSION

In 2019/20, we continued our focus on equalities and inclusion and full detail of our activity is reported in our [Equalities Mainstreaming Report 2019/20](#). This section of our report gives a flavour of our work in the past 12 months.

#### POLICIES

On International Transgender Day of Remembrance, we launched our Transgender Policy which outlines the support available to anyone going through the process of transition, as well as information on managing the process at work. Guidance documents were also published for both managers and staff who were considering, were in the process of, or had transitioned to help navigate the process at work.

To mark Anti-Bullying Week, we published our revised Dignity at Work Policy. The policy aims to support and sustain a positive working environment for all staff, free from any form of inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour, make it clear that discrimination and harassment are unacceptable and everyone in SCRA has a role to play in creating a thriving environment, free from discrimination and harassment. To support the updated policy, a mandatory e-learning course on bullying and harassment is to be completed by all staff by the end of 2020.

During the reporting period, work got underway to revise our Recruitment and Selection Policy by refreshing our approach and processes to encourage greater diversity and inclusivity. This was due to be re-launched in 2020/21.

### INTEGRATED EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

In 2019/20, we integrated our equality impact assessments with the protection of human rights and the promotion and safeguarding of the rights of children and young people and launched a new impact assessment process and supporting guidance.

We developed new training materials and our Executive Management Team were the first to receive training on the new approach. We also established a new Equality Review Group to promote and encourage a consistent and high quality approach and provide quality assurance to the use of Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments across the work of SCRA.

### EQUALITIES AND INCLUSION ACTIVITY

In December 2019, SCRA was awarded the LGBT Scotland Youth Charter (Foundation level). Working together with dedicated staff from LGBT Youth Scotland, the programme enabled us to proactively include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in every aspect of our work, protecting our staff and providing a high quality service to people accessing our services. We undertook training and reviewed our policies and practice to make sure we were being as inclusive as we could be.

In February 2020, for the third year running, SCRA took part in Purple Friday. Colleagues across the country took part, and activities involved purple themed coffee mornings, as well as wearing purple and organising purple-themed quizzes. In addition, a number of offices created eye catching LGBT History Month displays.

In October 2019, SCRA backed the national campaign Show Racism the Red Card. The campaign is the UK's largest anti-racism educational charity and Friday 4 October is its national day to stamp out racism. SCRA's Executive Management Team signed the pledge to end racism and stand up, speak out and challenge hatred and prejudice.

## EQUALITIES MONITORING CAMPAIGN

In November 2019, we launched our second data monitoring campaign providing information about the purpose and value of disclosing their personal and sensitive data whilst reassuring staff that it is optional and anonymous. Currently, we monitor all protected characteristics except care experience for all staff and applicants. Age, sex, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, religion/belief and ethnicity are established with data available. Robust and accurate equality evidence, properly understood and analysed, is at the root of effective compliance with the general equality duty. The campaign resulted in an increase in reporting across race (1.4%) and marriage and civil partnership (3.2%).

## WOMEN INTO LEADERSHIP NETWORK

Our Women into Leadership Network continues to support and encourage women across all localities and in all roles by inspiring and enabling them to take on and seek opportunities for development, maximise their potential, foster valuable connections, and facilitate success through personal and professional growth.

During the year, the network met twice. Inspiring external speakers shared their journey into and through



leadership and in December 2019, Network members participated in an interactive workshop entitled "Five tools to becoming an unstoppable resilient leader." Feedback from the sessions has been unanimously very positive with one staff member describing the event as "life altering."

## PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Participation activities in 2019/2020 have continued to strengthen across SCRA and during this time multiple pieces of engagement work have taken place to enhance our commitment to improved service for children, young people and families.

In April 2019, building on the launch of the highly successful autism-friendly tool kits in Hearing centres rolled out across SCRA in March 2019, staff from the

Participation Group designed and launched SCRA's first large sensory garden at Ochil House, Stirling. This garden was specially designed for children and young people with a range of Neurodiverse conditions, but is open and accessible for all families as well as staff. The garden has been so successful that the Participation Group is aiming to expand this work to additional spaces in the near future.

In May 2019, Reach for Autism delivered an extremely successful, well attended and highly interactive training session on improving services and practice in relation to people with autism for staff in our Glasgow office.

SCRA's Participation Officer attended the Care Experience and Employment Summit in August 2019, hosted by Who Cares? Scotland. At this event Disclosure Scotland ran a number of workshops on unconscious bias in relation to vulnerable groups, particularly care-experienced young people. Disclosure Scotland subsequently invited SCRA to deliver training on the Children's Hearings System, and participation of children and young people within it. Building on this partnership, Disclosure Scotland reciprocated by delivering a tailored session on care-experienced young people involved in offending to SCRA in November 2019.

In partnership with Children's Hearings Scotland and the local Area Support Team in Glasgow, workshops on the Modern Apprenticeship Programme in SCRA was delivered to Glasgow Panel Members during their Partner

Awareness Day. This was delivered by our Participation Officer and our Modern Apprentice.

Growing our partnership with Articulate and Glasgow City Council's Arts in the City (a Glasgow Social Work Service provision for care experienced young people), we launched our Made With Care exhibition in February 2020 in Glasgow's SCRA office. The exhibition comprised of two displays - one a bright and colourful exhibition of cloths, ceramics and song lyrics written by young people, the other a formal gallery-style exhibition of paintings, sketches and photographs created by young people.

In March 2020, SCRA's Modern Apprentice based in Edinburgh completed their SVQ in one year and is our first Modern Apprentice to have done so. The Modern Apprentice continues to offer great support to many of our participation work streams including the Participation Group, the new Hearing rooms, script writing for our new film, and attending the Equalities Network. Alongside this, working in partnership with the Local Authority in Aberdeen, SCRA successfully recruited a fully funded work experience placement for a care experienced young person. We expect them to join us in 2020/21.

Funding was obtained for a new Film 'Going To A Children's Hearing' in March 2020; the script was written in consultation with SCRA's Modern Apprentice. Filming was ready to complete in April 2020, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic has been delayed until later in 2020.



# CORPORATE PARENTING

Our Corporate Parenting activity links closely with our Participation and Engagement Strategy and our Better Hearings work. 2019/20 was the final year of our three year Corporate Parenting Strategy. During the past 12 months we worked with Hearings-experienced young people and our partners to deliver on our commitments in the 2017-20 strategy.

In February 2020, we published our third annual report for young people reporting on our Corporate Parenting activity over the final year of the strategy.

Some of our highlights of the year include:

- Working with Champion's Board across the country to make "Better Hearings" (thanks to Mid Lothian Champion's Board for creating a fantastic mural in Dalkeith Hearings Centre).
- Celebrated with our partners at Stand Up For Siblings the announcement by the Scottish Government to strengthen sibling relationships
- Helped the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership write and publish a Better Hearings report for young people and another report for partners

- Worked with Who Cares? Scotland to understand the importance of privacy to children and young people
- Celebrated Universal Children's Day and the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Provided free sanitary products in our Hearing room toilets

October 2019 saw SCRA supporting Care Experienced Week in a number of ways. Staff joined the Love Rally and we hosted a fundraising coffee morning in Glasgow, supported by staff from SCRA's Participation Group and the Disability Sub Group and attended by staff from across the organisation. All proceeds went to Who Cares? Scotland for their Christmas campaign and support to young people in care.

In December 2019, SCRA's Equalities Lead and the Participation Officer and staff from various groups including the Disability Sub Group and the Participation Group co-ordinated a Christmas present collection campaign for Who Cares? Scotland which were delivered just before Christmas.

A key part of our Corporate Parenting activity is our ongoing work with Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV). SCRA

continues to host and support the OHOV team. We were delighted to attend the Board's multi media event on Thursday 21 November 2019 in the Scottish Parliament. At the event we got to meet and hear from the young people about their work over the past year as it had been a year since they first got together as a Board.

At the event, OHOV also launched its new website. The website was designed and built by SCRA's Press and Communications Team and it contains all the latest news from OHOV including blogs by young people. You can find it at [www.ohov.co.uk](http://www.ohov.co.uk).

## OUR PROPERTY

SCRA is responsible for providing suitable and sufficient facilities to accommodate Children's Hearings. Property is central to the delivery of our services and is one of the organisation's key areas of expenditure.

Throughout 2019/20 economic and budgetary pressures remained, and required us to constantly review how effectively and efficiently we managed our property assets. We are constantly looking at ways to reduce our costs wherever possible (without detriment to the service we deliver), or to use our premises more efficiently and effectively, whilst prioritising delivery of services across our estate. During 2019/20 we continued to review SCRA's estate and surplus property is made available either for sale or lease.

For the sixth year in succession, we have continued with the roll out of the new style Hearing and waiting rooms in our properties as part of our commitment to provide improved facilities through our Better Hearings work and as a Corporate Parent. We have again employed a consultant to assist us with the delivery of three themed options that were developed in consultation with children, young people and partner agencies, to use colour and furniture to provide a relaxed and friendly Hearing room in their building. The latest new style Hearing rooms have been introduced in our Aberdeen, Dundee and Arbroath centres. It is intended that the programme of Hearing room improvements will continue to be rolled out across all of our permanent Hearing centre locations.

Following on from feasibility studies carried out last year, major projects have been completed in 2019/20 in Kilmarnock and Glasgow.

In Kilmarnock, the Locality Management team wished to locate the entire staff group on a single floor, and to introduce elements of smarter working. Using these smart working principles, a modern flexible office space has been created that accommodates the full staff group. By moving away from allocated workstations, this allowed more varied and interesting workspaces to be created that included spaces to collaborate as well as different workstation styles along with both formal and informal work and meeting spaces. All staff are now allocated a laptop computer that permits greater flexibility over where they can work. Fewer desks are now allocated and staff have access to lockers to store work and personal items to ensure that a clear desk policy is achieved. The first floor of the building was completely refurbished, and initial feedback is that the project has been well received, although the COVID-19 lockdown has prevented a full evaluation at this stage.

A smaller, but similar exercise was undertaken in Glasgow, to the two main staffed office floors. This provided additional flexible workstations and provides the basis for further works to be undertaken in due course as smarter working becomes embedded in the culture of the organisation.

## OUTCOME 2: HIGH QUALITY DECISIONS

### OUR PRACTICE

2019/20 was another busy year covering the full range of providing Practice support and advice to Localities, developing Practice materials, developing and delivering Practice training, managing appeals to the higher courts, providing Practice support to internal SCRA groups and projects, and working with partner agencies at national level. In the last weeks of the year, attention turned to the development of Practice materials to support casework practice during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Particularly significant subjects during the year included work with the Scottish Government on implementation of the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019, supporting implementation of the new Joint Investigative Interview training for interviewers,



supporting implementation of the Evidence and Procedure Review, ensuring specific issues relating to victims and witnesses within the Children's Hearings System are recognised, dealing with preparation of cases to be heard at the UK Supreme Court relating to the definition of 'relevant person', and providing Practice support to CSAS development (our new child record system).

In terms of materials to support reporters, Practice Direction on Information for Victims of Children's Conduct was published, and Practice Direction on Drafting Statements of Grounds was updated. The Protocol with COPFS on the Sharing of Evidence and Information was updated and extended to include Police Scotland and a Practice Note developed to support implementation by reporters. The Agreement with COPFS in relation to Jointly Reported Cases was updated and a Practice Note produced. A Practice Note on the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019 was published along with training and briefing materials for use by Localities. A practical guide to obtaining extract convictions was published.

A full schedule of Core Practice training was delivered for much of the year, though was curtailed in the latter part of the year to accommodate the roll-out of CSAS, with modules being delivered on 23 occasions.

The core module on Drafting Statements of Grounds was extended to a two-day module to help ensure good assessment and decision-making by reporters on the evidence for, and content of, statements of grounds. The more specialised Practice modules were delivered on 11 occasions during the year to meet demand. Bespoke training for Assistant Reporters on Domestic Abuse was developed and delivered on 3 occasions, and a further delivery of the Domestic Abuse training for Reporters took place in partnership with Scottish Women's Aid.

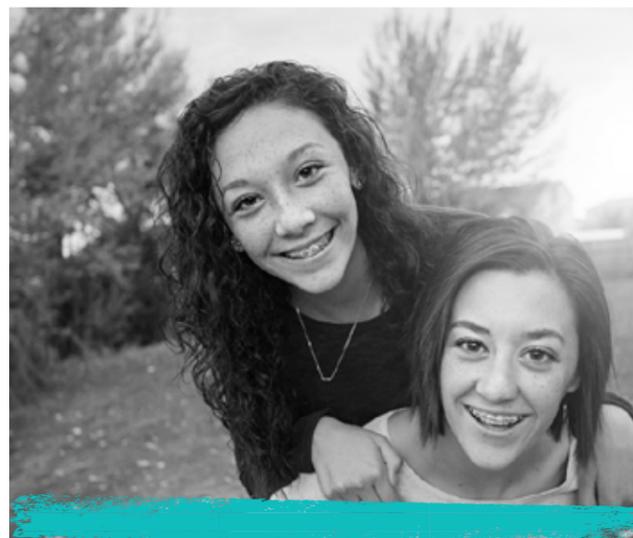
There was no ongoing mandatory training for reporters during the year given the anticipated impact on Localities of CSAS, however development work started in relation to creating new training on Harmful Sexual Behaviour by Children and Young People. In total 63 days of national Practice training were delivered to reporters or Assistant Reporters during the year.

The Practice Team also supported Locality-led training and Practice sessions on request. National external

training was regularly delivered to various partner agencies including police, procurators fiscal and joint investigative interviewers.

Twenty-three cases in the higher courts concluded during the year. Significant issues raised in appeals included jurisdiction, dealing with disputed information within a hearing, and reliance on hearsay evidence before the sheriff. Of those that concluded, four were initiated by us - three were not proceeded with and one successfully suspended a sheriff's interlocutor.

Of the nineteen cases initiated by others, in one the sheriff refused to state a case, eleven were abandoned, four were refused after full consideration, in one we were successful in having an interdict recalled, in one we were successful in having a sheriff's decision in other proceedings suspended and one we did not oppose. In addition, we made submissions in a High Court trial in relation to use of acceptance of a statement of grounds in criminal proceedings.



Law Reports were published to support Reporter awareness and knowledge of developments in the case law, including cases involving the Principal Reporter and relevant cases in external proceedings.

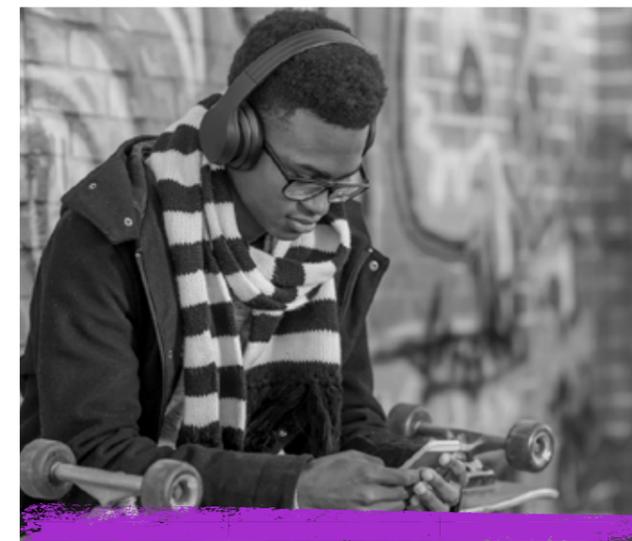
## QUALITY ASSURANCE

SCRA is committed to reviewing our own practice in a number of ways, one of which is to deliver our quality assurance case sampling programme. This runs across all our Localities, whereby our Managers and Senior Practitioners review an agreed area of practice and process, using defined and robust methodology. We report our findings to the Audit and Risk Committee, and use these to develop improvement activities in our operational business, and provide feedback to staff about their practice. Every year we normally complete four exercises on a national basis. During 2019/20, we delivered a reduced programme due to our plans for preparing to implement our new case management system.

In August 2019, national findings and an action plan were approved in relation to sampling of two types of non-disclosure provisions (whereby a child's whereabouts can be withheld from a person if it would cause significant harm to the child if they were disclosed). The findings highlighted the specific practice improvements that were required - including proper and justified application and use of the legal test for withholding whereabouts under the 'Rule 16' type, and understanding of the minimum requirements under the 'Measure in an order' type.

In November 2019, our Audit and Risk Committee scrutinised a report on national sampling of reporter decision making on referrals. This is core activity of reporters, and the exercise was conducted following mandatory refresher training for all reporters. The findings provided a significant level of assurance that for the majority of cases (92%) the levels of investigation and decision making were appropriate, proportionate and justified.

From both exercises we have highlighted and progressed practice and process improvements, and we continue to learn from our national programme of activity.



## OUTCOME 3: EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

### OUR PEOPLE

We continued to support our staff group in 2019/20 with training being a key focus. We have trained our managers and provided supports which are flexible, individually focussed and adaptable to provide care for staff vulnerable to vicarious trauma. We continued to work with staff from across the organisation on the development and testing of the new CSAS case management system.

We launched SCRA's new Corporate Induction process for new members of staff and offered training to Support Staff on the introduction to the Role of the Reporter. We have developed a shadowing and mentoring scheme for staff internally and externally to the organisation and implementation plans are being developed.

We have offered our Professional Managers Programme to non-management roles to increase our management capacity across SCRA. In addition, we are continuing to develop succession plans for key roles in SCRA. Meanwhile, engagement with staff remains a key focus and we carried out our annual Staff Survey in October.

Colleagues in HR, along with input from our Inclusion Ambassadors, completed the review of our revised

Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedures, which include new policies on Internal Transfer Scheme and Probationary Period. This will be launched later in 2020.

In April 2019, SCRA's updated Leave and Associated Allowances Policies were re-launched. We also launched our revised Dignity at Work Policy in November and provided e-learning training to all staff. In addition, in January 2020 we also launched our updated Social Media Policy for staff which was developed in conjunction with our Information Governance Locality Leads.

In March 2020 we launched a new interim Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy to replace our previous policy. The interim policy was accompanied by a briefing note and a briefing session for staff.

During the year, with input from staff, we reviewed the Assistant Reporter role and recommended a national Assistant Reporter working model which Localities will work towards achieving over the next two years.

We have continued to explore smarter and more efficient ways of work, exploiting the flexible working technology available to us and supporting Localities to develop their approaches to Smarter working. This will continue going forward.

During the year, we had 89.5 vacancies and welcomed 45 new employees to SCRA. We also appointed a new Head of Practice and Policy and appointed two Locality Reporter Managers to become temporary Senior Operational Managers.

We undertook a small voluntary exit programme in 2019/20 to support organisational transformation programmes, with a number of colleagues leaving the organisation. As always, we worked closely with UNISON on the development of the 2019/20 pay offer and in line with the Scottish Government Pay Policy Guidance. This was accepted in October.

We continued the development of our Women into Leadership Network holding two events during the course of the year. While in February, we supported the Time to Talk initiative and a number of events took place across the organisation aimed at raising awareness of mental health issues.

During the year, we developed our 2020-2023 three year People Strategy which will support our Corporate Plan 2020-2023 and is aligned to other key organisational strategies. This was due to be launched in spring 2020.

From the start of March 2020, we responded to the COVID-19 pandemic ensuring that our staff were supported during these unprecedented times - through regular contact with managers, permissions and supports to manage personal and work-life, including special leave and reduced working hours if required, additional kit to work from home, access to clear and regular advice whilst working from home.

## OUR RESEARCH

As part of SCRA's involvement in the Stand Up Siblings partnership, in May 2019, SCRA with Strathclyde and Robert Gordon Universities, published a paper: 'Relative Strangers: Sibling estrangement experienced by children in out of home care and moving towards permanence' (Jones C., Henderson G. & Woods R. Children & Youth Services Review 103, pp. 226-235).

This study found very high rates of sibling estrangement with seven in 10 relationships between a child in out-of-home care and a sibling being estranged, and half of all

siblings being strangers to each other. We also found that sibling estrangement increased significantly as children moved through the care system.

The main project for SCRA's research team in 2019/20 was our research with Barnardo's Scotland on 'Sexual exploitation of children involved in the Children's Hearings System'.

This research sought to answer the questions:

- What are the pathways of children to becoming at risk of sexual exploitation?
- When Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) vulnerability indicators first emerged, were these recognised as such by agencies and interventions made to protect and support the child?
- What are the backgrounds, vulnerabilities and trajectories of boys most at risk of sexual exploitation in Scotland?
- Is CSE considered in decision making by Children's Hearings for children who are victims of sexual exploitation?

The research is nearing completion and will be published later in 2020. Emerging findings show that there are children who are victims of sexual exploitation across Scotland - in rural, island and urban areas. This is also the first study on CSE and boys in Scotland, and its findings show that there is under-reporting of boys as victims and that the extent of CSE and boys is likely to be higher than is known.

SCRA started research in late 2019 on children placed into residential care before they are 12 years old. This is a mixed methods study involving statistical analysis of data generated through a content analysis of reports held in SCRA's case files in its Case Management System; and semi-structured interviews with Foster Carers, Residential Care providers, Social Workers and Children's Panel Members.

The research aims to answer four questions:

- What are the characteristics and family backgrounds of children placed into residential care before age 12?
- How is placement into residential care before age 12 associated with health and social wellbeing, including education and offending outcomes?
- What are the decision making processes and operational constraints that underscore the placement of children under the age of 12 into residential care?
- Are there identifiable points for earlier intervention in the case histories of under 12s placed into residential care? And if so, what are these?

This research will be completed in late 2020.

In January 2020, the Age of Criminal Responsibility (ACR) Advisory Group commissioned SCRA to carry out research to inform its considerations if the ACR in Scotland should be raised to higher than 12 years old. This research aims to characterise the backgrounds and offending by children aged 12 to 15 years old, by addressing the following questions:

1. What are the trends in numbers of children referred for offending (by age and gender), and volume and gravity of offending over the past 5 years?
2. To what extent are the lives of these children characterised by adversity and trauma[1]?
3. What factors are associated with or influence their harmful behaviours?
4. What are the patterns of offending by this age group in terms of volume, gravity, and recidivism?
5. Who are the victims of offending by children aged 12 to 15 years?
6. What are the responses of statutory agencies to these children's behaviour (including decision making in Children's Hearings System and criminal justice system, interventions and service involvement).

The findings will be reported to the ACR Advisory Group and Scottish Government in 2021.



## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Partnership working has been a key focus of 2019/20. We continue to be a core member of the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) and this has formed a significant part of our partnership commitments in the past 12 months.

SCRA has contributed to a wide range of consultations on a variety of different topics, with particular note in relation to the incorporation of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and has given evidence to Parliamentary Committees in relation to some of these, in particular the Disclosure (Scotland) Bill and the Children (Scotland) Bill.

As with previous years, in 2019/20 SCRA has developed and delivered an extensive range of training in relation to the Children's Hearings System for many partners, including Safeguarders, education, police, universities and social workers.

SCRA has supported the Independent Care Review and been directly involved in the Care and Justice work stream. In February 2020, we welcomed publication of the Care Review findings - The Promise.

During the year, we have been involved in a number of partnership task forces, including the Victim's Taskforce and the Judicial Led Review into the handling of sexual offences. We have also been involved in the group looking at standards for applying the Barnahus model in Scotland.

We have been involved in a number of other significant developments in the child protection arena. We sit on the Equal Protection implementation group in relation to the Children (Equal Protection from Assault) Act 2019.

In addition, we have supported the consultation in relation to the proposal for all 16 and 17 year olds to have access to the Children's Hearings System for the full range of grounds of referral. SCRA has chaired a group of partners to examine this possibility.

We are involved in the national review of the 2014 Child Protection Guidance. We sit on the steering group and we



have a core group of interested professional staff who are providing comment about the new Guidance as it is being written.

Advocacy for children and young people in the Children's Hearings System will be rolled out during 2020. SCRA is involved with partners and the Scottish Government in working to implement the advocacy provisions of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act (Section 122) in 2020. We are involved in working to develop communication materials for children and families about the provision of advocacy services; we are involved in the development of the training which will be given to advocacy workers and we are also involved in discussions around the statutory rules and regulations which will need to be developed for the sector.

We welcomed the news that the age of criminal responsibility in Scotland has been raised to 12, and we are involved in the strategic groups tasked with the implementation of this, and reviewing the age of criminal responsibility. SCRA will continue to work with partners and the Scottish Government to review the impact of the change to the age of criminal responsibility and we will be doing further research work to look at the offending behaviour of young people between 12 and 15 to inform discussions about whether the age of criminal responsibility should be raised further.

We continue to be active members of the Youth Justice Improvement Board and the Justice Board, and help to support and promote Early and Effective Intervention (EEI) and Restorative Justice services for children and young people planning.

## BETTER HEARINGS

Better Hearings is an important and interlinking aspect of our partnership work which spans everything from property to practice, rights to reports. 2019/20 saw a great deal of shared learning and consolidation of ideas into new ways of working.

In October 2019, SCRA produced the Better Hearings Progress Report on behalf of the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership. This report gave real insight into some of the fantastic work that local partnerships are undertaking across the country to embed Better Hearings in their areas - and make it 'real' for those experiencing it. It also highlighted areas that required further focus and drive to consider in planning for the year ahead.

Local partnerships were seen to have strengthened over the year with joint training, awareness raising and focus groups taking place. The report highlights the importance of good partnership working and effective collaboration in successful delivery of Better Hearings and we would look to see further improvement in this to fully realise the benefits of Better Hearings.

Better Hearings will continue to be a national focus for us that will be driven through local areas in their own planning. We will continue to evaluate change and improvement, learn from this and share identified good practice.

## TECHNOLOGY

The major focus in 2019/20 was the ongoing development of our replacement case management system 'CSAS'. This replacement system is a key part of our ambitious Digital Delivery Programme which is a joint initiative with Children's Hearings Scotland to create an integrated platform between the organisations. The aim of the Digital Delivery Programme is to improve the services we provide to children, young people and families and increase participation and engagement through the use of technology.

CSAS will ensure we have a robust and stable platform to build future services from. During the year, the emphasis

was on finalising the build of the system, with testing undertaken by our Digital Leads who are staff members from across the organisation. The Digital Delivery Programme underwent several audits with no concerns or issues raised. CSAS will be rolled out during 2020/21 in managed phases.

Throughout the year, our IT Team continued to improve the availability of technology across the organisation with the deployment of dual monitors to support CSAS delivery with an extended desktop area for users. A major upgrade of SCRA's financial systems was completed which introduced a fresh user interface and efficiencies in business processing, alongside ensuring that SCRA's system meet more recent security standards. SCRA's email domain changed to scra.gov.uk in response to the GSI network infrastructure being retired by the service provider.

In November 2019, Our Hearings, Our Voice, an independent board for the Children's Hearings System, launched a new website. This was built and is hosted and maintained by SCRA. In January 2020, SCRA launched a new staff intranet on an upgraded SharePoint platform. The intranet is available to all staff and includes secure spaces for collaborative working. This was a joint piece of work between colleagues in IT and our Press and Communications Team.

As the year drew to a close, our focus turned to the growing pandemic and how we responded to it. Colleagues in IT had a critical role to play in quickly identifying a suitable secure platform to enable us to continue to undertake hearings during lockdown.

We introduced Virtual Hearings that allowed participants to join remotely from home and established a team to assist hearing participants with testing the video conference technology in advance of attending the Hearing. Virtual Hearings were implemented in a phased basis and as we went into the new business year we turned our attention to providing secure access to electronic Hearing papers.

There has been ongoing monitoring of these and there is now a good understanding of the improvements needed to enable robust virtual solutions to become part of the estate moving forward.

# OUR STATISTICS 2019/20

You can view our Official Statistics  
2019/20 - including our interactive  
dashboard - on our website

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

12,849

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
REFERRED

30,363

CHILDREN'S HEARINGS HELD

10,823

CHILDREN REFERRED ON  
CARE AND PROTECTION  
GROUNDS

8,875

CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
ON CSOS

21% WITH

A CPO WERE AGED  
UNDER 20 DAYS OLD

14 AND

15 YEARS

IS THE MOST COMMON  
AGE OF REFERRAL

LACK OF PARENTAL  
CARE IS THE MOST  
COMMON GROUND

547

CHILDREN AND  
YOUNG PEOPLE ON CPOs

# OUR BOARD

SCRA operates under the direction of an eight person Board. As a Non-Departmental Public Body, SCRA's Board - although acting independently - is ultimately accountable to Scottish Ministers, and Board Members are appointed by Ministers.

Our Board Members reflect a wide range of experiences and backgrounds in relation to children and young people. The Board plays a significant role in setting the strategic direction of SCRA, and in challenging the organisation to ensure we deliver our plans.

## CHAIR

**Michelle Miller (appointed 2018)**

## BOARD MEMBERS

**Catherine Robertson (re-appointed 2017)**

**Anela Anwar (re-appointed 2018)**

**Sam Anderson (appointed 2016)**

**Martin Toye (re-appointed 2020)**

**Suzanne Vestri (appointed 2016)**

**James Edgar (appointed 2017)**

**Tam Baillie (appointed 2018)**

More information about our Board, including a full Register of Board Members' Interests, can be found on our website at [www.scra.gov.uk](http://www.scra.gov.uk)

# LOOKING AHEAD

## Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter/Chief Executive Officer

It has already become clear that 2020/21 is likely to be dominated by the Coronavirus pandemic and our ability as a society and agencies to adapt to its implications. At this early stage it's clear that the Childrens Hearings System is going to be profoundly impacted by the crisis and there will be a need for firstly rapid, emergency responses, followed by planned and recovery focussed interventions.

Our overriding commitment will, as always, be to ensure that children and young people in the greatest need of legal protections will be able to have access to them. As the response to Coronavirus develops, we will bring forward new ways of working which builds on the skills, experience and professionalism of our SCRA workforce. It's already clear that public health measures such as physical distancing are going to challenge our existing infrastructure that will require us to look at new solutions and approaches. Some of these will be challenging and interim - but others may lead us more quickly down a path of reform and modernisation of how we work, where we work and how we deliver safe, effective Children's Hearings with Children's Hearings Scotland, Local Authorities and other partners. A collective dialogue and strong partnership work will be key to this - as a willingness to change, adapt and seize opportunity where we can.

Notwithstanding Coronavirus, we launched our ambitious Corporate Plan 2020-23 this year.

This sets out SCRA's ambitious plans over the next period. These plans will help deliver our commitment to care, connect and protect and our values of support, child centeredness, respect and accountability. The plan focusses on both SCRA's specific statutory role and functions - but also our wider role in children and young people's services, acting as a positive, influential contributor and leader of progress.

We underscore our commitment to meaningful engagement and participation of children and young people at both individual and collective level. We are enormously privileged to be able to work with groups like Our Hearings, Our Voice in giving focus to young people's lived experience of Children's Hearings and our common desire to move forward together to improve and transform what we do. In 2020/21 we will work to keep The Promise and move forward with the Independent Care Review's recommendations for change within Hearings. The Promise sets out an energising programme of work - both short and medium term to refresh and update the ethos of Kilbrandon, to promote our collective response to bringing the UNCRC into reality in Scotland and to offer new ways of helping children and young people ensure that their views and opinions are well understood by decision makers.

2020/21 is clearly going to be a year like no other. Here in SCRA we remain committed to helping build recovery and delivering change and improvement for children and young people across Scotland.

**PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2020**

**[WWW.SCRA.GOV.UK](http://WWW.SCRA.GOV.UK)**