

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

SCOTTISH CHILDREN'S REPORTER ADMINISTRATION



CARE



CONNECT



PROTECT





## ABOUT OUR REPORT

This report covers the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

It summarises SCRA's achievements and performance during that period and includes an update on progress against our Business Plan 2020/21.

You can also view this report's supporting information online, including the full set of our annual audited accounts and performance report, plus 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

04

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

06

**OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE:**  
Some of our highlights from 2020/21

08

**OUR PROGRESS:**  
A summary of progress against our  
Business Plan 2020/21

11

**OUR STORIES:**  
A round up of some of our main  
achievements and activity in 2020/21

12

**OUR STATISTICS:**  
Some of our key statistics in 2020/21

28

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

30

**LOOKING AHEAD:**  
Our Principal Reporter/Chief Executive,  
Neil Hunter reflects on 2021/22 so far

32



# OUR COMMITMENTS TO YOU

## OUR VISION



Children and young people will be listened to, protected and supported to realise 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



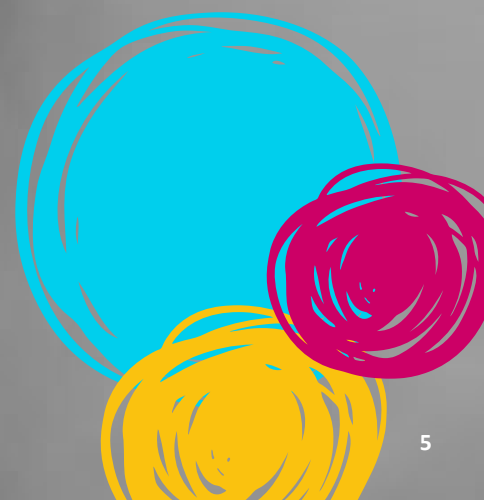
Our values are the shared motivations, beliefs and behaviours that underpin all that we do.

**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

The year covered by this Annual Report is one that none of us could have foreseen. A year of unimaginable fear and uncertainty for all, and pain and loss for so many.

The cost in human, social and economic terms will be felt for many years beyond the receding of the pandemic, the impact of which will have a particularly damaging effect on the children, young people and families who most need our support, protection and care.

For all its challenges and hardship, it has also been a year that has seen public services step up to the plate and continue to deliver in the face of the most difficult of circumstances.

I would like to pay particular tribute to the staff of SCRA whose commitment, resilience, adaptability and creativity have been both humbling and inspiring to witness and have made me and my fellow Board Members extremely proud to be part of their work.

This report sets out the key elements of that work, where staff have worked hard to maintain a protective service to Scotland's most vulnerable citizens. But as you will see, it hasn't all been about maintenance and keeping afloat. SCRA has also been at the heart of the

changes that are needed to the whole system of services in Scotland if we are to realise our ambitions for our children and young people.

Tackling the challenges of the restrictions created by the pandemic, has simultaneously allowed the acceleration of digital opportunities for better, more secure sharing of information and improved participation of children and young people in the decisions affecting their lives. We will make sure we build on these opportunities.

We have wholeheartedly supported full incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law in Scotland and the work of The Promise Scotland to begin to make a reality of the intentions of the Independent Care Review.

This latter is one of the greatest challenges of (and to) our society, but also one of the greatest opportunities.

We have to go beyond the rhetoric of equality, inclusion and ambition for our children and young people and to make these a meaningful reality for them all.

SCRA is excited to be at the heart of designing and supporting the

changes we need to see. Our efforts continued throughout the challenges and restrictions of the pandemic, and with the easing of these, we hope to see a consolidation of the work and an acceleration of the positive impact we know it will have on the lives of the children, young people and families we serve.

I commend this report to you and reiterate my thanks and appreciation to the staff of SCRA whose extraordinary efforts in extremely difficult circumstances have made it possible.





# YEAR AT A GLANCE 2020/21



## APRIL

We implemented a swift and ambitious response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 comes into force

Virtual Hearings are now taking place

## MAY

We launch our first Virtual Hearings feedback survey

Mental Health Week has a strong focus on staff wellbeing

Our Corporate Parenting Plan for 2020-2023 is launched

## JUNE

Detailed planning is underway following easing of restrictions

Public Health Scotland approves our re-opening plans

We carry out a consultation on face to face Hearings with Our Hearings, Our Voice

## JULY

The first face to face Children's Hearings resume

A sensory kit pilot is launched in Hearing centres

Official Statistics for 2019/20 are published

## AUGUST

Our Virtual Hearings survey results are issued

We unveil our Recovery Plan

We launch our new Recruitment and Retention Policy

## SEPTEMBER

Incorporation of UNCRC is announced

Updated suite of fact sheets is launched to include our latest data and updates

## OCTOBER

New research 'Sexual exploitation of children involved in the Children's Hearings System'

SCRA welcomes Our Hearings, Our Voice The Zine

Then we commit to the 40 Calls to Action

## NOVEMBER

Information to make it easier for people to make subject access requests launched

Privacy and participation briefing published

Annual Staff Survey is issued

SCRA supported the launch of the national Children's Hearings advocacy scheme

## DECEMBER

Winter wellbeing supports for staff unveiled

SCRA Victim Information Service report published

New Reporter staff appointed to our Recovery Team

## JANUARY

Compulsory Supervision Orders film for young people launched

Face coverings now mandatory in Children's Hearings

Guidance on cyber threats issued to all

## FEBRUARY

SCRA marks Time to Talk Day

Our 13th Hearings-experienced Modern Apprentice joins us

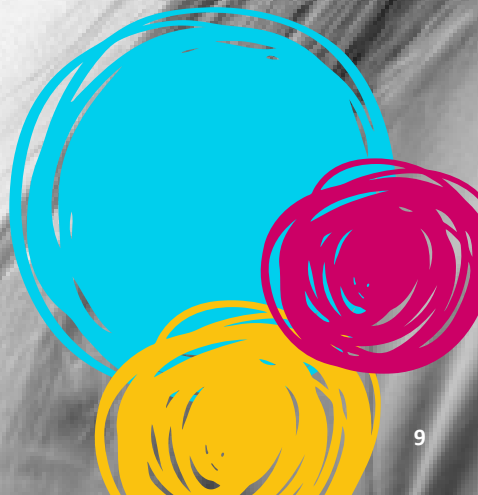
RAVHI the Virtual Hearings Robot is created

## MARCH

We celebrate the talent in SCRA on International Women's Day

Our British Sign Language Action Plan is published

As co-founder, we mark the third anniversary of Stand Up For Siblings





# OUR PROGRESS ...

## OUR PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2020/21

The year 2020/21 was a year like no other. However, throughout the year, our focus remained on delivering the strategic aims as outlined in our Business Plan 2020/21.

### OUR THREE STRATEGIC AIMS ARE:

#### 1. CARE

Delivering a service that feels right for each child, young person and family that experiences it.

#### 2. CONNECT

Working together to receive the right referrals, for the right children, at the right time.

#### 3. PROTECT

Making high quality and timely decisions for children and young people, using the right information that is relevant, clear and secure.

Despite the pandemic, we successfully completed a high proportion of the actions in our Business Plan during 2020/21. This section of our Annual Report gives readers a flavour of some of our activity.

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



## OUR PERFORMANCE AND TARGETS

Operational information and the Key Performance Indicators derived from them have been significantly impacted by the pandemic in terms of impacts on partners and our ability to deliver services. For most of the reporting period we have been operating under emergency legislation which was designed to reduce pressures on the system in a number of ways including:

- Removing the requirement for 2nd working day Hearings for Child Protection Orders.
- Extending Compulsory Supervision Orders for an additional 6 months (over and above the standard 12 month limit).
- Extending interim orders from 22 to 44 days.

More detail can be found on our website [Coronavirus legislation – changes to the law](#). During this year SCRA has also been transitioning to a new and upgraded case management system which has impacted on our performance.

SCRA has 8 Key Performance Indicators which are reported to the Board on a quarterly basis. Targets were not applied to the operational indicators around decisions within 50 working days and Hearings within 20 working days due to the impact of the pandemic. They are instead monitored for trends currently with targets to be applied in due course when the situation returns to normal.

The percentage of decisions on referrals within 50 working days indicator decreased by 4 percentage points (pp) to 71% from 2019/20. This measure ensures that children and young people are receiving a timely service from SCRA. As would be expected, the pandemic provided particular challenges for Reporters around decision making in



terms of time taken to receive the appropriate information from partner agencies, while having reduced availability due to home schooling etc. It was also impacted by the move to the new case management system as the time available for staff to make decisions was reduced as significant periods of time were required to train in the new system.

Hearing scheduling was down 20pp in the year to 54%. There had to be a strict prioritisation approach to allow the core business of Children's Hearings to continue through the pandemic with reduced availability of Hearing spaces due to social distancing and other constraints. At the start of the pandemic in early April 2020, SCRA focussed only on those Hearings required for the urgent and immediate protection of children, or where required to protect an expiring order. All non urgent Hearings were rescheduled to take place at the earliest date

possible. This meant a sudden and considerable decrease in the number of Hearings taking place. This obviously had an impact on the ability to schedule grounds Hearings within the 20 working day timescale. These constraints continued through the year and throughout different lockdowns and this can be clearly seen through the drop against the prior year.

Short term absence at 1% was within the 2% target and was 0.9pp lower than the prior year. However long term absence was up 0.4pp from the prior year and at 3.7%, missed the 2% target.

Of the finance targets, both the revenue savings and the efficiency savings targets were met, while the revenue and capital spends targets were missed.

Revenue spends were 3.1% below budget. The target for this measure is to be within 1% of the budget. Capital spends were also

below budget – 27.1% underspent, against a target of being within 5% of budget.

## AIMI - CARE CORPORATE PARENTING

We are a proud Corporate Parent and the importance of our role was never more felt during the COVID-19 pandemic. A key part of our communications strategy was regular engagement and providing information to children and young people.

We created a series of child and young person friendly information to keep them up to date with developments including cartoon animations, online visuals and built new sections on our website for children and young people.

For the return to face to face Hearings, we consulted with Hearings-experienced young people from Our Hearings, Our Voice - an independent board for the Children's Hearings System – and acted on what they told us.

As we had to remove toys and books from Hearing centres, we launched take away colouring in packages for young children. We also introduced take away sensory kits suitable for children and young people attending face to face Hearings.

For the return of face to face Hearings, we created child-friendly cartoon signage to highlight the changes and physical distancing in all our Hearing centres.

We also asked about children and young people about their experience of Virtual Hearings via an online survey. We asked about the technology, the support and the information to see what we could do to make them better.





Partnership was also a key part of our Corporate Parenting activity during the pandemic. We partnered with Children 1st's Parentline to offer support to parents and carers of children and young people in the Children's Hearings System. We also drafted a training and information pack designed for use by their specialised team to offer support and information to callers.

Despite the pandemic, much of our usual Corporate Parenting activity continued. Here's a flavour of some of our work...

### **Our Hearings, Our Voice**

SCRA continues to host Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV) on behalf of the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership. In October, we welcomed publication of OHOV Zine and the 40 calls to action.

SCRA responded and thanked the board members with an update report on our work and a short cartoon animation. As well as the consultation on the return to face to face Hearings, we held consultation sessions with the young people on siblings and advocacy. Our Participation Group has been leading on the work to ensure SCRA considers and implements any of the calls to action which are within our remit. We also hope to work with other key partners, including Children's

Hearings Scotland on some of the calls to action in 2021/22.

### **Information materials**

As part of our ongoing commitment to improve our information materials for children and young people, we launched another new film this year. This one was all about Compulsory Supervision Orders (CSOs). The short film covers what a CSO is, what it means for children and young people and how long it can last. It also covers the right to appeal, advocacy and legal representation and where to get more information. The film was made at the end of 2020 following strict physical distancing measures. There is also versions available with BSL and subtitles. The idea for a film about CSOs came from young people at Our Hearings, Our Voice and was created in consultation with one of our Hearings-experienced Modern Apprentices.

We also produced the latest in our series of easy read guides for people with learning difficulties which are all available on our website. The latest online guide is focused on Compulsory Supervision Orders.

In addition, we worked with a Champions Board to start to redesign our All About Me form and Going to a Hearing leaflet for young people. These will be launched later in 2021.

### **Advocacy for children and young people**

To prepare for the introduction of children's advocacy services in the Children's Hearings System, we created a brand and built a website for children and young people providing them with information about the new service. We also designed a poster for Hearing centres and a leaflet which was customised with the individual advocacy provider's contact details.

### **Dolly Parton's Imagination Library**

SCRA teamed up with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to launch a pilot initiative as an extension of their book gifting work with looked after and adopted children across Scotland. From November 2020, any child aged five and under attending face to face Children's Hearings in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling received a free book. The plan is to roll out the initiative across the rest of our Hearing centres from spring 2021.

### **Hearing room improvement programme**

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to fulfil our commitments to the Hearing room programme in 2020/2021. The rooms which underwent a transformation were in Ayr, Cumbernauld, Glasgow, Paisley, Selkirk and Thurso. Each location chose one of three options from a portfolio of designs which were created with Hearings-experienced young people, Reporters, SCRA's Participation Officer and our Property Development Officer. The programme includes taking away the big table and making the space more welcoming and child-friendly. More rooms are set for a revamp in 2021/22.

### **Requesting information**

In November 2020, we launched a new suite of materials to make it easier for people to understand how to make a request to SCRA to access their information. We worked with our friends at Who Cares? Scotland to make our information more accessible and improve how we deal with requests for information, particularly from children, young people and Care Experienced people. We introduced an

updated full guidance document, an online leaflet for children and young people, an easy read guide, information specifically for Care Experienced people and a jargon buster which explains what words like redaction and data controller mean. As part of this work we have also consulted with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which is responsible for enforcing data protection law.

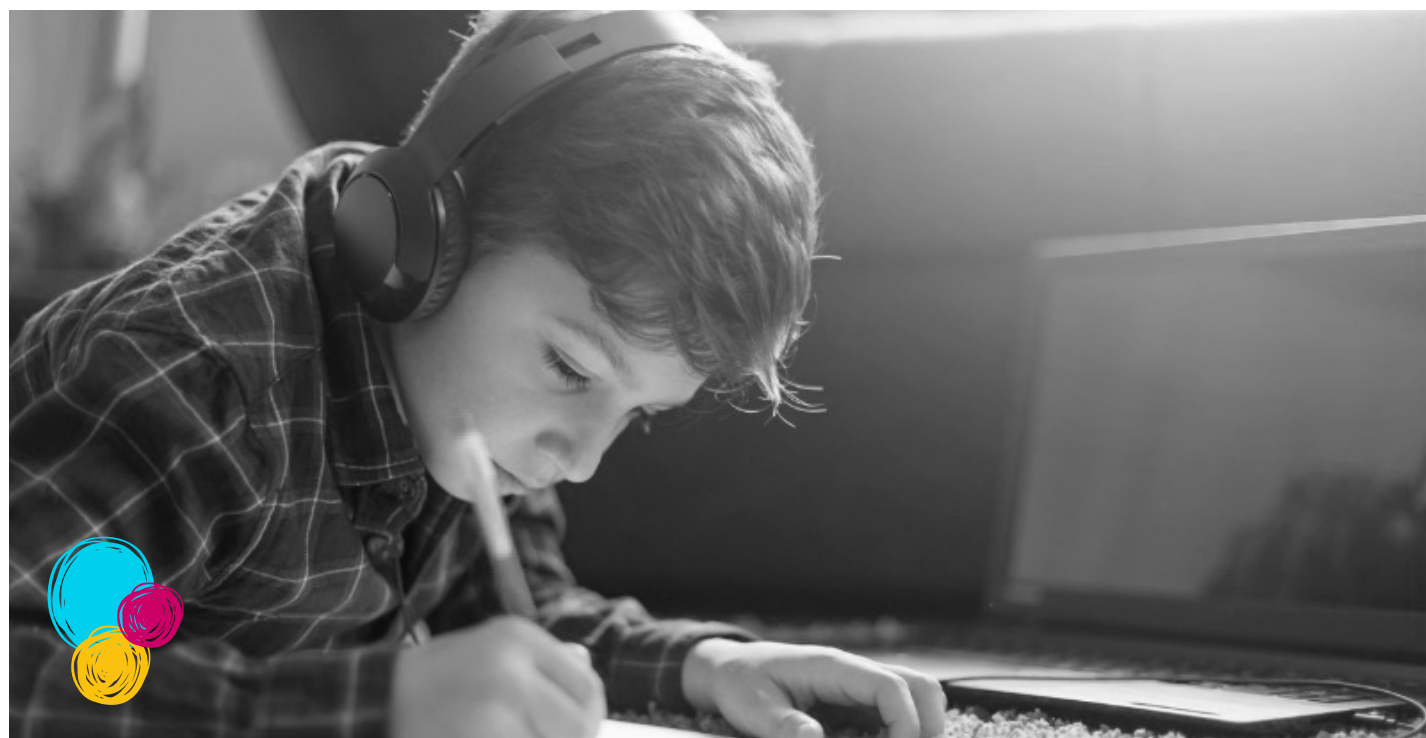
### **Privacy and participation**

We also commissioned Who Cares? Scotland to carry out a piece of research in order to fully understand the relationship between privacy and confidentiality in the Hearings System. The research explored how privacy and confidentiality impacted on the participation of young people and their parents and carers in the Children's Hearings System and what was the relationship between advocacy and privacy and confidentiality.

The research also looked at what solutions could be found to help young people and their parents and carers be heard and involved in decision making. A total of 129 young people, adults and parents/carers with experience of the Hearings System took part in the research.

### **Modern Apprenticeship Programme**

In January 2021, our Modern Apprentice scheme celebrated a milestone. It was 10 years since the official launch of our Modern Apprenticeship scheme for Hearings/care-experienced young people when we welcomed our first four Modern Apprentices to the organisation. Then in February, we welcomed our 13th Modern Apprentice to SCRA in our North Strathclyde Locality. During the two year programme, our Modern Apprentices undertake an SVQ in Business Administration which is overseen by West





Lothian College. In addition, they also work with SCRA's Participation Officer on multiple engagement initiatives such as the new Hearing room programme, a variety of information streams for young people, and consultations and training.

### The Promise

SCRA welcomed The Promise findings that were published in February 2020 and committed to #Keeping The Promise. Throughout 2020/21 we worked closely with our partners, The Promise Scotland team, NES, the Scottish Government and others as we looked at what it would really mean to Keep The Promise – what would a fully Rights respecting, Trauma Informed, Inclusive and Participative Hearing look like and how can we re-shape and reform to enable this?

There is a lot of work ahead as we develop SCRA's Route Map to Keeping The Promise - to deliver long term sustainable change, improvement of re-design, but it will be an exciting journey and one that we look forward to taking.

## INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

The COVID-19 pandemic, the consequent impact on our workforce and on children and families, has served to emphasise the impact of inequality and inequity. Despite the difficulty of the past year and the challenges that face all of us as we recover, there has never been a more important time or such a significant opportunity for a re-energised focus on reducing inequality and promoting diversity and inclusivity in everything that we do.

Whilst the pandemic undoubtedly hindered our achievement of some of our equality outcomes in 2020/2021, it also provided a unique opportunity to positively influence and progress the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda in SCRA in ways that

we would not have done otherwise (for example, a move to Virtual Hearings which positively impacted upon those living in remote and rural areas and a significant focus on the mental health and wellbeing of our workforce). Despite the challenges of 2020/2021, we remained committed to our inclusion and diversity journey, the details of which are available in our [Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Mainstreaming Report 2020/2021](#).

### Embedding inclusion and diversity

We have always been committed to going over and above our statutory duties and legal compliance with equalities legislation. The impact of the pandemic has emphasised that our holistic approach to equality, inclusion and diversity is the right one and we have renewed our commitment to being as inclusive and diverse as we possibly can be in all that we do – for our workforce, our partners and for children, young people and families.

In response to The Promise – and because it is the right thing to do – we are in the process of integrating our inclusion and diversity programme of work with our work around human rights and corporate parenting. This approach will ensure that rights, inclusion and corporate parenting underpin everything we do. It will also ensure that inclusion and diversity is reflected in all organisational strategies and plans and an SCRA where inclusion and diversity is part of everyone's job.

### Integrated Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA)

Following the development of our integrated and holistic approach to impact assessment combining human rights, equalities and children's wellbeing; the EHRIA process was officially launched in June 2020. Our trained Equality Review Group (ERG) assess all EHRIA's, providing accountability, transparency and quality assurance for all impact assessments. For the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, 16 EHRIA's were

submitted to the ERG. Of these, the majority were able to proceed without revision.

Our EHRIA approach was used to assess the impact of our responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant public health guidance – for example, for Virtual Hearings, the Electronic Transfer of Hearing Papers and our workforce CSAS Training Plan. The quality assurance provided in the ERG assessment of these EHRIA's were invaluable, identifying mitigating actions to limit the impact of the proposed practice and processes on inclusion and human rights.

Our approach to impact assessment is one of continual improvement. We continue to revise the process and our approach in line with best practice and feedback from internal and external partners. Our approach has been widely praised and we have shared our EHRIA and ERG process with a number of partners and will continue to share as an example of good practice.

### Policies

In the reporting period, we have revised a number of our policies/processes: revised Supervision Framework; revised Recruitment and Selection Policy and associated

procedures; revised Organisational Change Policy; revised Discipline, Grievance and Investigation Guidelines; and the introduction of a new Probationary Policy. Our revised Supervision Framework increases the frequency of supervision and places a significant focus on staff wellbeing to ensure supportive and meaningful dialogue between staff and their line managers. Our revised Recruitment and Selection Policy will support the organisational aim to increase the diversity of the workforce, including placing an emphasis on taking positive action to encourage people from under-represented groups to apply for vacancies.

In 2020, we also implemented a previously revised Dignity at Work Policy and mandatory e-learning on bullying and harassment was introduced for all staff. To mark International Week of the Deaf in September 2020, we launched 'Hearing Loss: Briefing Sheet for SCRA Managers' and to mark British Sign Language Week in March 2021, we launched SCRA's British Sign Language Action Plan to



support the commitments of the British Sign Language National Plan.

### **Lived experience and inclusion**

SCRA has always placed significant weight on listening to and learning from lived experience – this goes for our people as well as the children and families we work with. Understanding lived experience to continue our learning about how we can do better on our inclusion and diversity journey is powerful and encourages open and honest dialogue about our equality, diversity and inclusion journey.

To raise awareness of mental health during Mental Health Awareness Week (May 2020) some of our people very candidly shared their experiences of mental ill-health which were very well received. In addition, two were promoted in external publicity campaigns by the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion (enei).

Similarly, to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March 2021, we published a number of inspiring case studies of female employees in SCRA detailing their career journeys and tips for progression and leadership, with some shared externally on our website and social media platforms.

## **AIM 2 – CONNECT OUR PEOPLE**

Providing the necessary supports and advice to all our colleagues was a key part of our People Strategy in 2020/21. We provided regular support and advice to the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic through a series of frequently asked questions and other supports.

In preparation for phase one of the Scottish Government's route map, we worked in partnership with Public Health Scotland to develop and regularly assess robust risk

assessments to support our staff returning to the office and in the provision of face to face Hearings.

As part of the organisation's pandemic recovery plan, we successfully submitted a business case to the Scottish Government for funding for additional resources. We then managed a significant recruitment campaign to the newly established Recovery Team which included Reporters and Assistant Reporters.

To establish how well we had dealt with the pandemic, we developed and undertook a special staff survey which not only captured SCRA's management of COVID-19, but the wellbeing of our staff and implementation of our new case management system CSAS.

### **Staff wellbeing**

The health and wellbeing of our workforce was even more important during 2020/21 than any other year. We introduced working from home risk assessments and provided appropriate kit to staff to support ongoing working from home.

We held virtual Time to Talk and other mental health events to encourage staff to discuss mental health and promote new wellbeing offerings. In addition, we offered staff a wellbeing day away from work and a £50 voucher to focus on their health and wellbeing. We also extended our leave carry over scheme to recognise that staff had not used their annual leave allowance as they would normally due to the pandemic and restrictions.

Later in the year we implemented Wellness Plans which provide an opportunity for individual reflection and discussion and support from line managers.

### **Business as usual activity**

Although a major focus of the year was on pandemic related activity, there was also lots of business as usual activity which managed to continue.

We implemented the revised Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedures, plus we designed and implemented accompanying manager and employee recruitment e-learning modules to support the updated policy.

We also relaunched our existing Supervision Framework to include specific focus on casework and staff wellbeing and implemented bespoke vicarious trauma counselling for staff who require support as a result of the nature of the casework they access.

A number of other policies were either launched or revised to ensure they continued to meet the needs of staff and the organisation, including a new Internal Transfer Scheme and a Probationary Policy, our Organisational Change Policy and our Grievance, Disciplinary and Investigation Policies. We also reviewed our learning and development policy and developed an annual training plan for staff.

Recruitment also continued during the year, including the new Recovery Team posts, we advertised 76 vacancies and welcomed 52 new employees to SCRA.

In other good news, we retained our bronze health working lives award.

### **Pay and workload**

In other areas, we undertook a pay and benchmarking exercise to inform our 2020/21 pay offer. We implemented a new grade within our pay and grading structure for Senior Practitioners. During the year, we reviewed our workload data and made some clear decisions on allocation of roles to meet our workload equalisation objectives. In addition, we implemented the outcomes of the Assistant Reporter review.

## **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**

SCRA's work with our partners has never been more important. We managed to

maintain a Children's Hearings System through the COVID-19 pandemic because of the strength of our partnerships and the way the partners in the Children's Hearings System worked together at the most challenging time. We hope to recover stronger as a result of our renewed understanding of our collective responsibilities. Weekly meetings of the Children's Hearings COVID Recovery Group maintained essential sharing of information in a rapidly changing environment, and allowed collaborative work in a dynamic way for the benefit of children and families.

We are recovering from the global pandemic at a time of renewed focus on how we care for our children in Scotland. The Promise to Scotland's children requires change. The 2020 consultation on raising the age of referral to the Principal Reporter to include 16 and 17 year olds saw widespread agreement with the fundamental principles of the approach. Making this a reality will require further consideration of how the intersection between child and adult services can be meaningfully bridged and will require real investment in supports designed and delivered for this age group. The Promise also calls on professionals to work together. To make these changes happen, this concerted effort will be essential and The Promise Oversight Board will work directly with SCRA and CHS at the highest level.

Any Children's Hearing requires all the team around the child to engage with the statutory service providers – SCRA for Children's Reporters and Children's Hearings Scotland for Panel Members. After March 23rd 2020 this engagement largely happened between staff who were working from home, often for the first time, engaging with technology in





an unprecedented way. Technology allowed us to manage work but also to manage Children's Hearings in a way which would have been inconceivable even the year before.

All the partners in the Children's Hearing – social work, education, health, the 3rd sector, Police Scotland, and others pulled together to ensure we could continue to provide the protections of the Children's Hearing to vulnerable children across Scotland.

That professional collaboration continues – the CHCRG continues to meet and is made up of partners across children's services with the task of ensuring that children's hearings recover from the pandemic, and that we retain the positive developments that have emerged over the last year for the future. SCRA's research team has developed a new plan to look at the impacts of COVID-19 on the Children's Hearings System – this learning will give us a strong evidence base for further developments.

SCRA staff have strengthened collective working at a local level and at a national level continue to work with the national Family Group Decision Making Steering Group; the Expert Reference Group on Advocacy and the Advocacy Service Providers Network; Monitoring and Evaluating Rights, Respect

and Recovery; Early Intervention and Prevention for children at risk as a result of substance or alcohol misuse; the Youth Justice Improvement Board and the Justice Board. We continue to be involved in the Victims Taskforce and are engaging in the national work to develop standards for the Scottish Barnahus or Bairns House.

SCRA were involved in the development of the Youth Justice Standards and the Secure Care Pathway and Standards. SCRA will be working with partners, including young people with lived experience, to develop training for staff on these standards.

SCRA and the CHIP Learning and Development Advisor worked with colleagues in Education Scotland and Disclosure Scotland to draft new materials for the Education Scotland National Improvement Hub. These materials will be continuously reviewed and updated so that they stay relevant. Teaching and learning materials are also being developed.

SCRA continued to sit on the steering group for the new Child Protection Guidance 2020 and we were involved in facilitating sessions of the practical consultation exercise which took place online. We also responded to the consultation on the Guidance.

SCRA is working with a wide range of partners in the Understanding Child Exploitation in Scotland (UCES) group to develop shared language, understanding and resources. SCRA is working with partners to develop shared thinking and materials in relation to Restorative Approaches and have specifically commissioned young adults to design and develop materials for children in both primary and secondary schools. This co-production work we hope will be a model for work we can do in the future.

SCRA continues to sit on the implementation group for the Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Act 2019 and on implementation and review groups in relation to the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019. Planning for change in relation to the way in which we work with children as this new legislation comes into force benefits hugely from the expertise and understanding of partners, particularly in relation to the complex legislative landscape of offences and rehabilitation. SCRA continues to work on research which is intended to provide a strong evidence base for any further consideration of changes to the age of criminal responsibility.

SCRA has developed briefing materials for partners and we will continue to do this. Our briefing materials allow our local managers to share our approach with others and to be clear about where we stand. SCRA, the CHIP Learning and Development Advisor and training and operational staff in North Lanarkshire have developed an online modular training programme for social work staff, which has the potential for creative and innovative development.

SCRA has shared our innovative and creative approach to impact assessment, and the quality assurance of that through review, with a number of interested public bodies in Scotland.

With our eye to the future, SCRA has asked some key partners to set our course in

relation to our rights respecting work. For us to realise children's rights we are going to have to work collectively. We have worked closely with partners in relation to the new participation rights in the Children's Hearing, coming from the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 and associated rules. This work means that the approach across the sector in relation to participation rights will be clear and consistent.

Our 'Right Direction' group will meet for the first time in September and will be the cornerstone of our work for the first three years. Across children's services there is a growing recognition that to meet the aspirations of The Promise we will require to work differently and 'corporate parenting' for children may require some collective consideration. SCRA is actively involved in these discussions.

## OUR TECHNOLOGY

The year 2020/21 was a challenging one for SCRA's Digital Team. Trying to support the need to move staff to online homeworking, providing both the tools and supporting capability was a challenge which our Digital Team responded rapidly too. In addition to the staff remote working element, we moved at a rapid pace to holding Virtual Hearings. This meant SCRA having to develop new processes, new capabilities and the tools to provide a high quality Virtual Hearings service.

As well as supporting all of this change in the early stages of the planning year given the impact of the pandemic, our Digital Team had a significant digital development portfolio of activity underway and a clear imperative to replace the ageing and fast becoming unsupportable SCRA case management system (CMS). Transitioning it to live with the





new Core Systems and Application Services (CSAS) becoming the new business as usual case management capability in this period had to be achieved.

The year, digital activity was split into three high level themes:

- Delivery of our new case management system CSAS.
- Transitioning CSAS into live use.
- Supporting SCRA's digital response to the pandemic.

### **Delivery of our new case management system CSAS**

Two years of detailed development had already gone into our new case management system CSAS. The system was delivered as planned to SCRA in early September 2020. A second deployment approach was used to implement the system in a bid to reduce operational impact and risk. Data migration was also a major challenge, as we had more than 120,000 cases to safely migrate into CSAS from the legacy case management system.

### **Transitioning CSAS into live use**

Due to the pandemic, remote working was the norm and we had to build additional support around staff to help them move from the old legacy system to CSAS in these challenging circumstances. Plus, we had to ensure we had a robust transition strategy to ensure organisational readiness. The move to CSAS is now complete and the legacy system is currently being decommissioned, which is a significant undertaking in its own right.

### **Supporting SCRA's digital response to the pandemic**

During this incredibly busy period, our Digital Team designed, procured and deployed an array of digital hardware to support staff remote working and to provide a Virtual Hearings environment, including:

#### **Laptops for all**

Laptops were in high demand this year and our Digital Team worked hard to provide

laptops for all. One hundred and thirty three laptops were issued to members of staff who did not already have access to one, ensuring that all staff had the flexibility to work from home. This was carried out across two projects – the redeployment of 69 devices initially earmarked for Hearing rooms and a separate supply of 62 additional laptops were then purchased in June 2020.

Early in lockdown it was not possible to use video streaming on a SCOTS device which are used by all staff. Staff initially used personal devices to connect to Virtual Hearings via the secure platform Vscene. Therefore, for Reporters to facilitate Virtual Hearings from home, we purchased and deployed 96 Chromebooks.

During this period, we also removed 134 work stations from desks for recycling and replaced them with docking stations. To replenish the stock used for staff in early lockdown a further project purchased 70 devices for deployment to Hearing rooms. Plus later in the year, a further supply of laptops were purchased for new staff recruited to support our COVID-19 recovery plan.

### **Virtual Hearings**

With the first Virtual Hearings taking place just as we went into lockdown in March 2020, we made a significant investment in additional technology to support Virtual Hearings, including display screens, conference cameras and speakers.

We also had to ensure we had a secure platform to host Virtual Hearings and we initially introduced Vscene. Following a detailed evaluation, we later introduced a pilot using Microsoft Teams technology. To make the Virtual Hearings process as smooth as possible, we introduced a team of Virtual Receptionists who are there to facilitate tests for participants prior to the actual Hearing.

We created a dedicated Virtual Hearings section on our website which includes

information about supports, questions and answers and top tips. We also worked with colleagues from Our Hearings, Our Voice to develop Virtual Hearings information and guidance for children and families.

## **AIM 3 – PROTECT**

### **OUR PRACTICE**

2020/21 was an unusual year because of the Coronavirus pandemic, but nonetheless it involved providing the full range of Practice activities: giving support and advice to Localities throughout the year, developing Practice materials, delivering Practice training, managing cases in the higher courts, and working with partner agencies at national level.

In the early part of the year, significant support was provided to Localities by providing Practice Direction and materials on the adjustments to practice in the context of the pandemic.

A summary and explanation of the relevant parts of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 was published. Practice Directions were developed on Practice Issues in Hearings,

Practice Issues at Court, and Arranging and Notifying Hearings. These were regularly updated to take account of developing circumstances and operational capacity. Practice Direction on Selecting Hearing Mode was developed to support appropriate and consistent arrangements for the setting up of Children's Hearings whether face-to-face, virtual or any of the various forms of hybrid Hearing.

Guidance on the impact of Coronavirus rules and restrictions on the implementation of contact arrangements and contact directions was provided, again regularly updated as the legislative provisions changed and as case law developed. Specific materials were developed to assist Reporters with adapting to changes in court practice, particularly Virtual Court Hearings and increased use of written submissions and witness statements. The materials included Practice Notes on: Remote Advocacy; Witness Statements; Style Written Submissions for Appeals; and Style Written Submissions for Procedural Callings.





Particular support was provided for appeals against the decisions of Children's Hearings made in the early months of the year when the arrangements for notification of Hearings, provision of papers to participants and opportunity to attend were very different from normal and were subject to challenge.

Other Practice materials published during the year included Practice Notes on Decision-making in Domestic Abuse Cases, the introduction of Children's Hearing Advocacy Services, and the implementation of the Equal Protection from Assault (Scotland) Act 2019.

The year was also significant for the final stages of CSAS development (our new case management system) and its implementation. The Practice Team linked closely with the development of CSAS and related materials to help ensure it would operate in a way supportive of legislative and Practice Direction requirements on reporters. Various Practice Directions were amended to reflect CSAS processes. These included Receipt and Registration of Referrals, Decision Making on Referrals and Drafting Statements of Grounds.

Delivery of Practice Training was cancelled until November 2020, when the highest priority modules started to be delivered remotely. The training schedule was developed to meet demand from Localities, and in the period from January to the end of March, 56 half-day remote training sessions were delivered covering 9 core modules with multiple deliveries of the Children's Hearings module in particular.

The Practice Team also supported Locality-led training and Practice sessions on request. National external training was significantly reduced compared to usual, but some inputs were delivered to the police.

Eight appeals to the higher courts concluded during the year. Two were initiated by us – one achieved the desired outcome and the other was abandoned. Of the others, four

were abandoned by the appellant and two we did not oppose. There were a number of judicial reviews against the Principal Reporter that concluded during the year. Significant amongst these was one that confirmed that the Children's Hearings System has jurisdiction for a 16 or 17 year-old moved into secure accommodation by a local authority even where there is no other basis for the Hearings System to have jurisdiction. Another was raised by a child against our decision to treat his father, who he had only recently become aware was his father, as a relevant person. The court found the action was time-barred but also took account of the very poor prospects of success.

We received intimation of several judicial reviews raised by families against local authorities for non-implementation of decisions made by Children's Hearings. We did not become party to these proceedings, though communicated where appropriate with the local authorities and parties.

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.

National level partnership work was reduced during the year but there was ongoing input to work on some areas, in particular preparation for implementation of the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019, and implementation and evaluation of the new Joint Investigative Interview training for interviewers. There was strong liaison with Children's Hearings Scotland throughout the year in relation to the impact of Coronavirus legislation and developing best practice.

## OUR PROPERTY

To accommodate Children's Hearings, SCRA needs to provide premises that are both safe and suitable. Hearing facilities are central to the delivery of our services and property is one of our largest areas of expenditure.

The initial expectation that the COVID-19 pandemic would bring a relatively short period of service interruption has since led to more fundamental questions around how our services can be developed and how our properties will support these changes. Our work during 2020/21 was focused on our response to the pandemic and ensuring that our premises could be safely brought back into operation following closure for several months during the first lockdown. This involved preparing COVID-19 safe work spaces and altering the arrangements for maintenance and cleaning of our buildings.

We constantly review how we are using our property assets and look for ways to reduce costs wherever possible, but at the same time prioritising the delivery of services from our estate. Continuous investment in our properties is needed to improve service delivery and support new ways of working in our buildings. We must provide a safe, suitable and appropriate environment for everyone who works in, or uses our properties. Often this will require internal reconfiguration of our buildings as our operational needs adapt and change.

Social distancing requirements meant that many of our Hearing rooms could not safely accommodate enough people to allow face to face Hearings to go ahead. Virtual and hybrid Hearings were achieved by using the available space in our buildings differently or through participation from a remote location.

To create capacity for face to face Hearings, works were carried out to enlarge existing rooms or convert alternative rooms in our buildings in Irvine, Dumbarton, Kilmarnock and Paisley. In other locations, existing open plan offices or vacant space was repurposed to provide larger spaces for Children's Hearings.

The design of our Hearing rooms has always reflected the needs of the Hearings System and, in particular, to create safe, well located

and confidential spaces. In our core Hearing centres (those that are either owned or leased) we have much more control over the configuration and design of space.

To support Better Hearings and promote participation, three contemporary designs were developed with the involvement of young people in 2017/18. This built upon the ideas of the original model Hearing room created in Glasgow which introduced the use of less formal furniture and the removal of the "big table". Since the Hearing room improvement programme commenced, 30 Hearing rooms have now been refurbished of which 18 are to one of the new design routes.

Following the successful introduction of a smart working project for our Kilmarnock office, further projects are planned in our larger office buildings including our Stirling Head Office. Feasibility work is progressing well and the new agile working style reflects the requirement for more flexible workspaces that are suitable for both office and remote workers as we adapt to different ways of working coming out of the pandemic.

## OUR RESEARCH

SCRA was involved in a range of research activities in 2020/21. In October 2020 we published the report '[Sexual exploitation of children involved in the Children's Hearings System](#)'. This research was a collaboration with Barnardo's Scotland, which published an accompanying policy paper based on the research findings. This research is the first national study in Scotland on child sexual exploitation (CSE) and the first to consider boys. We found that CSE is happening in every part of the country – in the islands, in rural communities and in urban areas. We also found that both boys and girls are victims of sexual exploitation but boys are not being



seen as victims and their abuse is too often invisible to child protection services.

The publication of the research and policy paper led to the creation of the partnership Understanding Child Exploitation in Scotland (UCES) which aims to raise awareness and influence policy and practice on all forms of child exploitation (including CSE, child criminal exploitation and trafficking). UCES includes members from SCRA, Barnardo's Scotland, Police Scotland, Scottish Government, CELCIS, CYCJ, Glasgow City Council, University of Stirling and Glasgow Caledonian University. On Child Sexual Exploitation Awareness Day on 18th March 2021, UCES carried out a social media campaign based around six case studies from the research. UCES is now developing practice briefing materials on child exploitation and planning an event for late 2021.

In 2020, SCRA started research exploring the use of residential childcare for younger children. Statistical data was extracted from the casefiles of 101 children who had Compulsory Supervision Orders (CSOs) with residential care conditions. These casefile data was used to provide an insight into children's trauma histories, service involvement and care trajectories. We also explored the impact of residential care by comparing children's socioemotional wellbeing, mental health, and education at entry into care with the same information collected two years later. Qualitative interviews were used to better understand the lived experiences of younger children in residential care. Sixty semi-structured interviews were conducted with social workers, residential care workers, foster carers and Children's Panel Members. Quantitative analyses from this study are due to be published in September 2021 while qualitative analyses are due to be published in February 2022.

Since April 2020, SCRA has been conducting research on offending by children aged 12 to



15 years old. This research was commissioned by the Scottish Government's Advisory Group on the Age of Criminal Responsibility. The research aims to answer the following:

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?
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?

Statistical data on 400 children, who have been referred to the Reporter on offence grounds, have been extracted from their casefiles. This includes 100 children who had committed more serious offences and had been jointly reported by the police to the Reporter and Procurator Fiscal. Analyses are underway to explore these children's backgrounds, histories of offending, the circumstances that influenced their behaviour, and any changes in offending or their behaviour in the 12 months following the referral. The research has been extended to more fully investigate serious and persistent offending, and gender differences in offending and services responses. It will be completed in early 2022.

In December 2020, the SCRA research team was approached by the Chair of the Disabled Children Child Protection Network (DCCPN) about how to better collect data on safeguarding concerns for disabled

children. To do this SCRA developed a disability toolkit that combines vulnerability, contextual and functioning factors, and piloted it on 40 children's cases. We found the toolkit can successfully: 1. accurately identify those children who have been previously identified within case files as having a known disability; and 2. identify children who have not been identified as disabled but who have evidence of additional needs that could result in their meeting the criteria for having a disability, or being considered differently abled from other children.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first toolkit developed and piloted that assesses functioning in the wider context of vulnerabilities and contextual factors, and as such it has the potential to provide practitioners with a valuable and robust tool for quickly assessing children's safeguarding and support needs. A report was submitted to the DCCPN in May 2021, and we hope to continue working with the DCCPN to further test and develop the toolkit.

Born into Care Scotland is a study on infants entering care and is a collaboration between the Universities of Lancaster and Stirling and SCRA that was commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2020. Born into Care Scotland examines how many infants enter the care system in Scotland, how many of their mothers have had previous children removed from their care, and how many infants in care go onto to be reunited with their parents. It will report later in 2021.





# OUR STATISTICS 2020/21



You can view our Official Statistics  
2020/21 - including our interactive  
dashboard - on our website  
[www.scra.gov.uk](http://www.scra.gov.uk)



9,665

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
REFERRED

8,013

CHILDREN REFERRED ON  
CARE AND PROTECTION  
GROUNDS

14 AND

15 YEARS  
ARE THE MOST COMMON  
AGE OF REFERRAL

7,959

CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
ON COMPULSORY  
SUPERVISION  
ORDERS

17.4% WITH  
A CHILD PROTECTION  
ORDER WERE AGED UNDER  
20 DAYS OLD

LACK OF PARENTAL  
CARE IS THE MOST  
COMMON GROUND

570

CHILDREN AND  
YOUNG PEOPLE ON  
CHILD PROTECTION ORDERS



# 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.

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).

## CHAIR

Michelle Miller (appointed 2018)

## BOARD MEMBERS

Catherine Robertson (re-appointed 2017)

Anela Anwar (re-appointed 2018)

Sam Anderson (appointed 2016, left in 2020)

Martin Toye (re-appointed 2020)

Suzanne Vestri (re-appointed 2020)

James Edgar (re-appointed 2021)

Tam Baillie (appointed 2018)





# LOOKING AHEAD



## Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter Chief Executive

As this Annual Report is being written and compiled, we are looking forward to the continued expansion of Scotland's COVID-19 vaccination programme. Like everyone, we hope that this will allow the gradual easing of public health restrictions which will enable SCRA and other public services to return to as normal a set of operational arrangements as possible. Our recovery programme is making steady progress and our incredibly professional and conscientious SCRA staff are working hard to catch up with work which has had to be deferred or delayed over the course of the pandemic period.

Looking ahead, we hope to be able to re-establish more regularised approaches to our work in the course of 2021/22. We also hope to capitalise on the things we have learned over this very difficult period. In particular, the flexibility and adaptability that SCRA and other Hearings System partners have shown in responding to the crisis, the open dialogue and pragmatism everyone has shown – all centring around the things that are most important to us all – the rights of children and young people, their safety and protection and trying to create the conditions for positive outcomes in their lives.

We have also had to innovate extensively over this year and we must continue to do so in 2021/22. Our use of digital tools to enable options and choices to be offered to how people participate in Hearings must continue and the offering and the support we provide to be people. The flexibility we have shown in our work will continue too – not only in how we organise ourselves in the future – but also flexibility in the offering we make to children, young people and their families and our ability to work towards quality, personalised, bespoke approaches to each Hearing experience.

All this is only possible if we continue to look after our incredibly talented and committed SCRA staff group, who have shown just tremendous resilience in the last 12 months. Our internal programmes for promoting staff wellbeing will be key to our continued development as an organisation and the quality of services and support we deliver in fulfilling our legal duties to children and young people. Making sure we can give our staff the right tools – technological, organisational and logistical – will also be one of our key priorities this year as our new digital systems bed down, stabilise and incrementally improve.

In 2021/22 it is with huge excitement that we await the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Scottish domestic law. SCRA will be undertaking an extensive audit exercise in the course of the coming year to ensure we, in our work, are not just fully compliant with UNCRC, but actively and dynamically promote children's rights in our work. Where we find gaps in our approach, we will actively work to improve and rectify this. Where we need to work together with others, we will enthusiastically do so to make Scotland the rights respecting country we all aspire to.

We look forward to the publication early in 2021/22 of the plans to Keep The Promise. We know that a significant part of this work will include a review and subsequent redesign of the Children's Hearings System in order that we can play our full role in delivering the best outcomes for children and young people who, for whatever reason need care, love, stability, security and support with the full force of legal protections.

We will work with The Promise Scotland team and others to deliver this vision and will be enthusiastic supporters of moves to invest in better support to families to prevent difficulties becoming crises that need legal intervention. That must be the way forward for Scotland and will help us further define the critical role of the Children's Reporter in protecting those children and young people who need the most urgent and extensive forms of help.

SCRA has made considerable progress in ensuring that the voice and experience of young people shapes and influences how and what we do in our work. We have established a positive relationship with Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV) and with many local Champions Boards. We will work with OHOV and others in this coming year to develop and strengthen our work together and find ways that they can continue to influence SCRA in increasingly meaningful ways.

2021/22 is shaping up to be an exciting and challenging year, one where we hope to put the difficulties and the strain of the pandemic behind us, stabilising our work but taking the best parts of what we have experienced and achieved with us. I look forward to supporting all SCRA staff, our partner agencies and the children and young people we serve in doing so.





PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2021

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