

ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22



ENSURING POSITIVE FUTURES FOR CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND.



SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION

>> ABOUT OUR REPORT

This report covers the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

It summarises SCRA's achievements and performance during that period and includes an update on progress against our Business Plan 2021/22.

This version of our report is aimed at people with an interest in the Children's Hearings System. We also have a version for children and young people.

You can also view this report's supporting information online, including the full set of our annual audited accounts and detailed performance report, plus our Official Statistics and interactive statistical dashboard at www.scra.gov.uk.

ABOUT OUR REPORT



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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 VALUES

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



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

★ 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

Having worked through a year of unimaginable challenges brought on by lockdown in March 2020, this year saw the beginning of a gradual easing of public health measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

We had to make rapid adjustments to our day-to-day operations over December 2021 and January 2022 in response to the Omicron variant, which further impacted on our services to children, young people and their families.

SCRA staff continued to show huge professionalism and resilience in adapting to new ways of working, innovative technologies and an uncertain working environment, whilst maintaining a focus on delivering for children and young people.

Our overall vision, values and priorities continued to be important touchstones during this extended period of stress, disruption and unpredictability for everyone.

We strengthened our long-term partnerships with Children's Hearings Scotland, local authorities, Police Scotland and other key agencies to ensure the Hearings System operated as well as it could. We also developed new partnerships – such as with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library/Scottish Book Trust to help improve children's access to books.

We continued to focus on minimising delay for children and young people needing support, on forward planning for recovery and on the system-wide changes that we need to deliver if The Promise is to become the reality we all want to see.

In parallel with our support for Keeping The Promise, we pressed forward with our own programme of continuous improvement, including the Hearing rooms refurbishment across the estate.

We maintained our focus on children's rights. As a founder member of Stand up for Siblings, we helped introduce new rights

for brothers and sisters via the Children (Scotland) Act 2020, and we particularly welcomed the renewed emphasis on children's rights more generally across the whole system.

We made further progress on being the best corporate parent we can be – seeking to prioritise improvement in children and young people's experience of Hearings, both physical and virtual. We were – and will continue to be – helped and guided in this work by the views and experiences of children and young people, and we are particularly grateful to all the members of Our Hearings, Our Voice whose help in steering our improvements will be critical to our success.

The wellbeing of our staff has been a major focus of this period – we introduced wellbeing days, increased levels of support and continued to develop programmes of awareness and active help – prioritising mental health and tackling stress and isolation.

In summary, another hugely challenging year for our organisation, our staff – but one where we have retained a sense of continued stability and progress despite all the hurdles and barriers we have encountered.



YEAR AT A GLANCE 2021/22

★ APRIL

We celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Children's Hearings System

Staff with Hearings experience shared their stories to mark Care Experienced Month

The latest batch of revamped Hearing rooms are unveiled

★ MAY

Free books are available in every Hearing centre thanks to Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and the Scottish Book Trust

We marked Mental Health Awareness week with the start of our first 'Big Team' walking challenge

The next set of Hearing rooms ready for a makeover are announced

★ JUNE

Our British Sign Language action plan is published

We welcomed the new Youth Justice Vision

A Virtual Hearings visual information guide was launched

★ JULY

New participation rights for brothers and sisters were implemented

We introduced new sections on our website to make it more accessible

An updated version of our Recruitment and Selection Policy was produced

★ AUGUST

We welcomed the announcement of The Promise Scotland Hearings System Working Group

The first Spotlight On series on our website is launched

More than 70 staff tuned in for the screening of Warriors: Revisiting the boys of Ballinkirrain

★ SEPTEMBER

Our Rights, Inclusion and Corporate Parenting Strategy was unveiled

We produced a new research report 'Developing and piloting of a children's disability toolkit'

Our Official Statistics for the year were published

★ OCTOBER

Work got underway to prepare for COP26

Two new Board Members were appointed

We launched the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme

★ NOVEMBER

We ran a bowel cancer awareness raising session for staff

Colleagues shared their stories to mark International Men's Day

We also marked International Day for the Elimination of Violence against women

★ DECEMBER

SCRA carried out and published Our Hearings, Our Voice evaluation report

We supported both the Erase the Grey and That Guy campaigns

The Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019 was fully implemented

★ JANUARY

Our first culture audit got underway

The new sentencing guidelines came into force

We issued guidance on the safe return to office working

★ FEBRUARY

We published our Keeping The Promise Route Plan

New research on exploring the impact of virtual Hearings on participation, rights and decision making announced

We marked Care Day with some fabulous lighthouse displays

★ MARCH

We welcomed publication of the Hearings System Working Group Issues List

Our first sensory corner was unveiled at our Hearings centre in Glenrothes

During Debt Awareness Week we provided staff with information about available help and supports

OUR STATISTICS 2021/22

You can view our Official Statistics
2021/22 - including our interactive
dashboard - on our website
www.scra.gov.uk

10,494

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
REFERRED

8,691

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
REFERRED - NON OFFENCE

14 AND

15 YEARS
ARE THE MOST COMMON
AGE OF REFERRAL

2,398

CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE
REFERRED - OFFENCE

21,909

CHILDREN HEARINGS HELD

7,265

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
WITH CSOS AT 31 MARCH

24.8% WITH
A CHILD PROTECTION
ORDER WERE AGED
UNDER 20 DAYS OLD

479

CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE ON
CHILD PROTECTION
ORDERS

REPORTING ON OUR BUSINESS PLAN

OUR PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2021/22



With ongoing restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact on the Children's Hearings System, but our focus throughout remained on delivering the strategic aims outlined in our Business Plan 2021/22:

★ **Care**

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

★ **Connect**

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

★ **Protect**

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

Despite the ongoing pandemic, we successfully completed a high proportion of the actions in our Business Plan which are highlighted in this next section of the report. In addition, this year's Annual Report also gives an update on the first year of our Rights, Inclusion and Corporate Parenting Strategy.

More detailed information is available in the Performance Review section of our Annual Accounts 2021/22.

OUR STORIES

OUR PERFORMANCE AND TARGETS

Operational information and the Key Performance Indicators derived from them has again been significantly impacted by the pandemic across 2021/22 in terms of impacts on partners and our ability to deliver services. For the first half of the year we were 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 CPOs;
- ✳ Extending CSOs for an additional 6 months (over and above the standard 12 month limit); and
- ✳ Extending interim orders from 22 to 44 days.

These specific provisions ended on 30th September 2021. More detail can be found here: [Coronavirus legislation – changes to the law.](#)

The percentage of decisions on referrals within 50 working days indicator decreased by 2 percentage points (pp) to 69% from 2020/21. This measure ensures that children and young people are receiving a timely service from SCRA. As would be expected, the continuing pandemic provided particular challenges for Reporters around decision making in terms of capacity due to other demands on their time, including, for example, the time taken to manage Hearings which as well as the traditional face to face

delivery can now be held virtually or by a mixture of face to face and virtual means. Reporters are also reliant on partner agencies to provide reports and information to help them make the right decision for a child and the time taken to receive this information has also been impacted by the pandemic in terms of pressures on other agencies in the same way that SCRA has experienced.

The scheduling of grounds Hearings within 20 working days of a Reporter decision to arrange a Hearing was down 4pp in the year to 50%. 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. This has a significant impact on the ability to schedule grounds Hearings within 20 working days. For the reasons outlined above there has been no target set for 2021/22 for these key performance indicators.

Short term absence at 1.6% was within the 2% target and was 0.6pp higher than the prior year. Agile working (primarily in this context, the ability to work at least partly from home) has in part contributed to the achievement of this target as home working enables staff to maintain attendance on days when, due to illness, they would have been unable to travel to an office. As we have increased office based working, this rate has increased.

Long term absence at 3.4% was down 0.3pp from the prior year but was still well above the 2% target. There were eight long term absences due to Covid-19 compared to six the year before.

Of the finance targets, the revenue spends (within 1% of budget), revenue savings (target of 1.5%) and the efficiency savings (target of 0.6%) were all met. The capital spends target was missed at 16.9% below budget against a target of being within 5% of budget. This was due to a combination of delays on some property projects, digital underspends due to global supply chain issues and refocusing of organisational priorities.

AIM1 – CARE

RIGHTS, INCLUSION AND CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

Our new Rights, Inclusion and Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2023 was launched at the start of National Inclusion Week in September 2021. The strategy runs until 2023 and aims to make sure that everything we do is grounded in respecting rights, is inclusive and provides the supports that children and families expect from SCRA as corporate parents.

We will report annually on this strategy using our new Rights, Inclusion and Corporate Parenting Year Report Card.

RIGHTS

July 2021 saw the introduction of a key piece of rights-based legislation in the Children's Hearings System to help protect the relationships between brothers and sisters. The new rules mean that brothers and sisters now have rights to appropriate participation in Children's Hearings where contact with their siblings is being considered.



To support this, we introduced new information to be very clear about the rights of participation individuals in Hearings. This included web information and a cartoon animation for children and young people. Linked to this, we are members of the Staying Together and Connected Implementation group which is focused on sibling rights.

As one of the founding members, we continue to be an active member of Stand Up For Siblings. We participated in a series of webinars in October 2021 focusing on sibling rights, participation, research and practice.

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. You can read more about this in our research section on page 28.

In a first, SCRA has worked in an advisory and creative way with the BBC – who are developing new 'Bitesize' online content in relation to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We continue to be involved in the Victim's Taskforce and are involved in the ongoing national work to develop standards for the Scottish Bairns' Hoose.¹⁵



As part of this, we undertook a level 2 consultation with care experienced Modern Apprentices in partnership with Health Improvement Scotland to provide advice and feedback on the Barnahus Standards.

SCRA welcomes the general agreement across the sector to allow the referral of 16- and 17-year-olds to the Principal Reporter. We are also pleased that further consultation has explored the complexity and the nuance of extending the jurisdiction of the Hearings System in this way.

Our internal 'Right Direction' group provides invaluable expert opinion and advice as we enhance our approach to rights. The group has been creating a suite of new information on rights which will be available on our website in late 2022.

We believe in advocacy as a key support for children and young people. We continue to be members of the National Advocacy Expert Reference Group and have developed positive national and local working relationships with advocacy providers. We worked with the Scottish Government to design and input to a live advocacy event for practitioners in January 2022. We continue to promote the Hearings advocacy website for children and young people.

INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

In SCRA, we have adopted a rights-based approach to our inclusion and diversity work, which ensures that we treat everyone with respect, dignity, compassion, kindness and fairness.

SCRA introduced a new integrated approach to Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (EHRIA) in March 2020 to ensure that we are fully challenging ourselves to consider the full impact of implementing e.g. a new process, a new system, a different way of working – to make sure that no-one is disadvantaged as a result, that it doesn't impact on our (of anyone else's) rights being met.

In 2021/22, we continued to embed this approach, with our Equality Review Group. Our EHRIA process has attracted attention from many other public bodies in Scotland who are interested in our approach and keen to learn from it, as well as the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion (enei) who are keen to share it as an example of best practice with their members.

Our newly established Race & Ethnicity Group – chaired by our Principal Reporter/CEO – was launched in December 2021. Watch out for our new action plan which will be published in 2022/2023.

We revised our guidance on autism, how to talk about autism and hearing loss. We published our British Sign Language (BSL) Action Plan in BSL and produced visual guides for children with autism and other sensory needs coming to a Children's Hearing.

In January 2022, we rolled-out the Hidden Disabilities sunflower scheme across all our Localities. Wearing the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower lanyard discreetly indicates to people including staff, colleagues and panel members that the person wearing it (or someone with them) has a hidden disability and may need additional support, help or more time.

In September 2021, we also produced new guidance on how to deal with hate crime, how to accommodate religious observance and how to use LGBTQI+ inclusive language.

To mark International Non-Binary Persons Day in July 2021, our Inclusion & Diversity Manager interviewed a non-binary trans young adult about the importance of pronouns and respecting people's right to self-identification; this video was shared on our intranet, with positive feedback from staff.

On International Men's Day in November 2021, six of our male colleagues shared their stories of how they stay physically and psychologically well.

To celebrate LGBT History Month in February 2022, three of our Inclusion Ambassadors spoke very openly and candidly about their experience of growing up and coming out. It is important to us that people feel able to share their experiences, and feel safe to do so, and that is the culture we are nurturing in SCRA. Then on International Women's Day in March 2022, colleagues shared their thoughts on gender bias in a suite of case studies which were published on our staff intranet.

In November and December 2021, SCRA supported the United Nations '16 Days of

Activism against Gender-Based Violence' campaign to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls by promoting amongst our workforce, Police Scotland's 'That Guy' campaign and Glasgow Caledonian University's award-winning 'Erase the Grey' campaign.

In July 2021, SCRA's approach to inclusion and diversity received a Bronze TIDE Award from enei (Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion) from spell out fully - enei in its annual TIDE (Talent, Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation) self-assessment benchmarking survey of members. TIDE enables us to see where we are on enei's 'Equality to Inclusion Roadmap' We are proud that SCRA was assessed as working at 'embed' level – which means we are embedding inclusive culture.

SCRA's inclusion and diversity work was also subject to internal audit in October 2021 which found a 'substantial' level of assurance in the design and operational effectiveness of our approach to inclusion and diversity.

In 2021, SCRA's inclusion and diversity practice in relation to our recording and use of equality data has been used to promote good practice by the enei and Scottish Government. The Scottish Government published a case study on SCRA's recording and use of equality data of children referred to the Reporter – it is available [here](#). The enei case study on our approach to Employee Equality Data Monitoring is available for all members of enei.

CORPORATE PARENTING

Engaging in a meaningful way with Hearings-experienced children and young people is a cornerstone of our Corporate Parenting work.

★ During 2021/22, we worked with Hearings and care-experienced young people to create a new Hearing About Me form. A new Going to a Hearing leaflet was also developed in partnership with the young people from the Proud 2 Care Champions Board in Inverclyde. The form ([which is also available online](#)) and leaflet, were due to be launched in April 2022. A massive thank you to all the young people involved.

★ In 2021 our 13th care-and-Hearings-experienced Modern Apprentice joined our North Strathclyde Locality, and has successfully completed her SVQ in Business in Administration. In February 2022, she became a champion in the organisation, promoting knowledge and understanding of learning disabilities, their impact, and how to support people with learning disabilities. The Modern Apprentice delivered training to the Disabilities Group and the Dumbarton and Paisley office staff, Human Resources and the Participation Group on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Dyslexia, and will be widening this opportunity to additional staff.

★ As part of our commitment to provide employment opportunities for young people, we also arranged a paid for work experience placement for a care experienced young person in our Aberdeen office.

★ In 2021/22 we marked the milestone of more than 35 Hearing rooms now upgraded. This was the seventh year of our Hearing Room Improvement Programme and during the year new look Hearing rooms were unveiled in Kirkwall, Bellshill, Inverness, Glasgow,

Lochgilphead and Edinburgh. The programme is based on feedback from Hearings-experienced young people (including Our Hearings, Our Voice 40 Calls to Action). Young people were also involved in the design process.

★ Following a successful pilot, in June 2021 SCRA received our first national delivery of books for children aged 0-5 in partnership with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL), who gifts books to vulnerable children affected by Social Work intervention and support. Over 2,000 books were distributed to Hearing centres for children attending their Hearings. In partnership with the DPIL another national delivery is being co-ordinated for 2022/23.

★ In March 2022, a large sensory corner was launched in our Glenrothes Hearings Centre with funding received from Skills Development Scotland. The pilot corner is a partnership with Rompa (a UK sensory company) staff in the Glenrothes office and colleagues from our Keeping The Promise team. The response was instantly positive. A formal evaluation is taking place, but initial feedback showed that the space had a positive and calming effect on both children and families. We have had some really fantastic feedback directly from children about the space that speaks louder than some formal methods.

SCRA continues to host and support Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV). SCRA also provides communications support to OHOV, and attends Board Meetings to support the project team and the young people. SCRA also delivers specialised assistance around the website, social

media (including the creation of the OHOV Tik Tok account) and design of new products, platforms and events, including the board member recruitment campaign in January 2022. In October 2021, we produced a [report for OHOV](#) reporting on the progress we have made one year one since publication of the 40 Calls to Action.

KEEPING THE PROMISE

In 2020, SCRA welcomed the findings of the Independent Care Review and committed to Keep The Promise. The Promise is a 10 year plan, and is one of transformation and reform. It is also one of continuous improvement – that looks to improve on the quality of the current service, while we work towards transformation.

SCRA'S KEEPING THE PROMISE PLAN

As part of our commitment to Keep The Promise, we developed a Keeping The Promise Route Plan – improvement projects that we could take on that would improve the experience for children and young people currently experiencing the Hearings System. This plan was informed by evidence from The Promise, Better Hearings, OHOV's 40 Calls to Action and previous research.

Our projects look at how we can better capture children and young persons' needs before they come in to a Hearing – what we can do to make that easier for them, help them to understand the process and what their rights are – who to go to for support, how they would like to participate – would they prefer to come in by video link or be there in person.



We will be working with others to look at the language that we use in the system – how we make that less corporate, less traumatic, more caring – and more understandable, for everyone!

We are focussing on choice – choice in how to attend, choice in when Hearings are – there are some times that are particularly difficult for young people and we want to avoid these, choice in preparation – we can set up visits, have people available for any question.

There are also some things that we have just moved to implement – moving our information into films and cartoons to support understanding and ease anxiety, ensuring sensory toys are always available to support children in their Hearings, providing young people with online options as well as paper to set out what they want us to know.. and we will be working to put these in place over the course of the year – working with groups of young people as we do so.

Our plan went through extensive consultation with our staff, as well as key partners in the Hearings System before being published on Care Day in February 2022.



We have created a dedicated Keeping The Promise section on our website for our plans, information, progress and how to get in touch. We are committed to making our Keeping The Promise information as accessible as possible and have provided information in different formats, including cartoon animations for children, a visual route map and a video in British Sign Language with sub titles and audio.

Work set out in the plan will be tested and implemented in 2022/2023 and 2023/2024.

Also on Care Day in February 2022 we launched our first Voice of Experience Reference Group. This group is specifically for staff with experience of the Hearings System and/or multiple approaches to care, e.g. either having been in care or having been or currently is a carer. The group, which is part of our commitment to Keeping The Promise, meets regularly to examine areas for improvement and provide feedback.

REFORM

We are a member of the Hearings System Working Group (HSWG) which was introduced in August 2021.

This group is made up of representation from:

- ★ The Promise,
- ★ Children's Hearings Scotland,
- ★ SCRA,
- ★ Scottish Government and is chaired by Sheriff David Mackie.

A key deliverable for the group was the Contextual Framework to work within, key to this is the 'Issues List' – a set of categorised questions and prompts to aid exploration and consultation on the redesign of the Hearings System. The Issues List along with appropriate context was published on 11 March 22.

We have been working closely with the Office of the Chief Designer and other partners to begin this exploration with a series of practical workshops. Three multi-agency teams will conduct an intensive piece of work to take this forward, this is due to conclude Autumn 22.

SCRA is committed to this work and a number of staff are represented within the teams.

ENGAGEMENT

We are committed to ensuring our staff are involved in every step of the way and we continue to have virtual and face to face engagement and consultation sessions to gather and feedback views and ideas into the process. We have also been working with Hearings-experienced young people, including Our Hearings, Our Voice, the Celcis VIP group and local Champions Boards to ensure the voice of children and young people is at the centre of everything we do.

AIM 2 – CONNECT OUR PEOPLE

In 2021/22, during the second year of the pandemic, we provided significant support and advice to the workforce through a programme of FAQ updates and support. To support colleagues returning to the office, we worked in partnership with Health Protection Scotland to continuously review our robust risk assessments and in the provision of face-to-face Hearings.

★ During this period, we implemented a new Agile Working Policy following significant consultation with staff and managers. In addition, we delivered Leading Hybrid Teams training for all managers to support the new flexible working arrangements.

★ Wellbeing remained a major focus of our work in 2021/22. We offered wellbeing supports and days to our workforce to recognise the challenging impacts of working within COVID-19 restrictions and the recovery. We updated and published our Wellbeing Brochure for all staff which contains a range of information and supports.

★ We also developed further suites of wellbeing information including financial wellbeing supports recognising the cost of living pressures.

★ We provided refresher training to our 1st cohort of Mental Health First Aiders.

★ We embedded local wellbeing groups into Localities and launched a Head Office wellbeing group – with clear Terms of Reference and Plans

★ We actively supported national mental health wellbeing events including Time to Talk and Mental Health Awareness Week – with a suite of awareness raising and fun activities. We organised two Big Walk Challenges – one around Scotland and one across Australia – which brought about circa 25 teams together in each challenge to encourage staff to get outside, get active, supporting connection with colleagues, combatting loneliness, and supporting health and wellbeing.

★ We created a learning network and developed a new learning and development strategy for 2022/24 with an associated learning plan. To support this, a new section was created on our staff intranet.

★ We reviewed the annual staff survey to ensure that we retained consistency across the reporting years, but brought it up to date and improved its flow. This was issued in November 2021.

★ We commenced the first review of our roles, starting with Support Administrators and Support Assistant (Reception) staff. We engaged with a specialist recruitment agent that extends the reach of our recruitment adverts into broadly under-represented communities.

There is more to derive from this relationship in 2022/23. We also delivered recruitment and selection e-learning training for all recruiting managers, without which they cannot be a member of any recruitment panel.

There was lots of other activity, including the development of an Inclusive Behaviours Framework which will be consulted on during 2022/23. We also assessed SCRA's Partnership Approach against the Scottish Government's Fair Work in Public Bodies principles, noting that we are performing well in these areas. We held partnership meetings outwith the normal National Partnership Forum to focus on issues arising from The Promise and other elements of change.

In terms of policies, we reviewed our Whistleblowing, Discipline, Grievance and Investigation Policies. While we improved the length of service requirements to receive full annual leave entitlement

In 2021/22, we saw one of our long service Board Members Cathy Robertson leave, and we welcomed two new Board Members – Lorraine Moore and Kay Barton.

DIGITAL

The period 2021/22 continued to be another technically challenging year for digital to provide a robust Hearings service in the middle of the pandemic. There was an ongoing high dependency on new services and ways of supporting delivery of the service to meet the needs of children, families and everyone attending Hearings.

We were able to strengthen our offering around a virtual Hearings service - developing discreet service models, moving from fully virtual to a more planned digital participation through choice for children, young people and families.

A dedicated team was put in place to ensure the experience was the best it could be – liaising with children, young people and families, doing virtual 'pre-Hearings visits', providing mobile data top-ups to encourage attendance and participation.

We introduced 'RAHVI the Robot' to support children, young people and families coming to Hearings with understanding what would happen and how it would take place – supporting them through the process.

During this period, we also developed, designed and implemented a cost effective guest wi-fi provision across the core 32 locations using the existing building connectivity to provide the service to families, panel members and service stakeholders. This solution has now settled in terms of use and is regarded as a highly valuable addition to the further digitisation of the service and creation of more flexible ways of working.

A standard approach and technical solution for video conferencing was designed and deployed to 50 of the 52 Hearing rooms that we have across the country, offering improved facilities for people to link in to our centres – all part of our commitment to giving children, young people and families more choice when coming to Hearings.

As well as the external service to be provided to support Hearings, internally during the year, we looked to consolidate and optimise our new case management system - Core Systems and Applications Services (CSAS). Introducing and embedding a new IT system during a pandemic was undoubtedly a challenge, but good progress was made in 2021/2022.

During the year we launched electronic papers or Hearing Information Packs (HIPs) – this is an electronic set of panel papers that panel members receive to prepare for, conduct and support decision making within, the Hearing. There was some teething troubles with the introduction of the packs, but we have been working to rectify these with our partners and some new developments are due to be introduced in early 2022/23.

As with many other public bodies, we had to deal with ongoing global supply constraints which impacted on our technology refresh in 2021/2022. Despite this, around 400 new model laptops were procured, built and issued to staff within the year as part of the laptop replacement programme. Peripherals and accessories were also included in the replacement programme.

In order to support the significant increase in digital activity across SCRA and to recognise the need for specialisms across digital service delivery and development as well as cyber security and digital planning and engagement a digital department restructure took place in the period and is now completed. The restructure has provided renewed focus and the team is now going into the period 2022/2023 well prepared to address the digital challenges of the organisation.

As we plan for 2022/2023 much focus has gone into maximising the new digital team structure, developing solid digital planning and objectives for the new period and management of operational risks. The new digital teams are engaging with staff to introduce new



developments to support the corporate goals of SCRA.

We will continue to ensure there is a robust technology replacement programme in place to maintain a high quality of end user devices for staff to support them in their work. We will continue to engage with our stakeholders, as well as look at every aspect of the digital financial model to ensure ongoing value for money and focused investments.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Partnership at local and national level is a cornerstone to our work. In 2021/2022 we continued to strengthen our key partnerships within the Children's Hearings System considering broader aspects of safeguarding, inclusion, rights and policy.

We are involved with Child Protection Committees across Scotland and provide them with data to support their work. In addition, we sit on the Police Scotland Child Protection Strategic Group. We are involved in the National Contextual Safeguarding Group, the Child Trafficking Strategy group and the multi-agency Transitions from Children's to Adult Services Working Group.



We continued to work with the national Child Protection Guidance Implementation Group;

- ★ The Family Group Decision Making Steering Group; the Expert Reference Group on Advocacy and the Advocacy Service Providers Network; the Youth Justice Strategic Leads, the Youth Justice Improvement Board and the Justice Board. We are also members of the GIRFEC Stakeholders Group (Getting It Right for Every Child) and of the Ukraine Safeguarding Group.

- ★ We are part of the Secure Care Group and part of the ongoing discussions on Secure Care Transport.

SCRA is grateful to our partners in the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) for the support they have given us in training staff in relation to the Secure Care Pathways and Standards and in developing training for us in relation to the Youth Justice Standards.

We worked with Education Scotland to develop multi-agency training around restorative approaches. We also worked with the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) Learning and Development Advisor,

Education Scotland and Disclosure Scotland to update the Education Scotland National Improvement Hub.

We are grateful to our Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) partners in Article 12 who continue to support us in training development and to colleagues in Scottish Women's Aid who are expert critical friends for us in training and policy development. Our online modular training programme for social work staff, which has the potential for creative and innovative development, has continued to grow and adapt in different areas of the country.

SCRA continues to work with other organisations in the promotion of equality, equity, diversity and inclusion. We remain active members of enei (Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion) and the Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) Equalities Forum to share areas of good practice. We are members of the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls; which exists to provide advice to Scotland's First Minister on what is needed to tackle gender inequality in Scotland.

We are members of the Cross Justice Working Group on Race Data and Evidence and its Research Sub-Group; which exists to understand race and ethnicity data, how it is categorised and gathered and what exists across all the organisations working in the justice sector in Scotland with a view to filling in gaps and standardising to promote data quality in race and ethnicity recording.

AIM 3 – PROTECT

OUR PRACTICE

In 2021/2022, the Practice Team provided the full range of Practice activities to support Reporters in their day to day work. This included giving advice to Localities throughout the year 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 a national level.

Particularly significant areas of work included:

- ★ The implementation of new legislation on participation rights and other matters, arising from the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 and related amendments to the rules for children's hearings;
- ★ The extension of some provisions of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020; and
- ★ The implementation of the main sections of the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019.

Two practice directions were published (these ensure Reporters comply with the legislation and are consistent).

- ★ One about the new legislation represented the most significant legislative changes since the implementation of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011. Its main impact was to enable some siblings of children referred to Children's

Hearings (and some in a similar type of relationship) to have rights to participate in the Hearing. However, it also made important reforms to the operation of Children's Hearings, including:

- ★ A new duty on a Children's Hearing to consider the need for a direction about contact with the child's brothers and sisters, amongst others;
- ★ Additional powers for a Children's Hearing to exclude someone and to order that a person can only attend a Hearing by electronic means; and
- ★ A new duty on a Children's Hearing to consider the need for a direction about contact with the child's brothers and sisters, amongst others;
- ★ We developed and delivered mandatory training on the new legislation for all reporters and assistant reporters. Due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the tight timescales involved, this training was delivered remotely online – the first time we have delivered such mandatory training in this way.
- ★ In addition to the two new practice directions, we reviewed the practice direction on the statement of grounds to take account of the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019. A practice note on the act was published to assist reporters in its implementation. We also revised practice direction on non-disclosure.

Further practice materials produced during the year included practice notes on child sexual exploitation, signed witness statements and missing

children, and notes in relation to changes to managing attendance in Children's Hearings and virtual Hearings.

For the first time since before the pandemic, we delivered the full schedule of core practice training and more specialised training through the year. Some of this training continued to be delivered remotely online. However, we were able to reintroduce in-person training, having recognised that some courses require to be delivered that way. In total during the year, we delivered 45 half days of online remote practice training and 38 full days of in-person training to reporters and assistant reporters. The Practice Team also supported locality-led training and practice sessions on request.

The team also was heavily involved in various internal groups within SCRA, with a particular focus on The Promise, the Standard Operating Model and non-disclosure.

Sixteen cases in the higher courts concluded during the year. Significant issues raised in these cases included whether a sheriff should have named a perpetrator of a schedule 1 offence, the use of signed witness statements in proofs and a decision by a children's hearing not to make a non-disclosure measure.

Of those that concluded, only two were initiated by us – we did not proceed with the appeals in either of them. Of the other 14, 6 appeals were refused after full consideration. There were two judicial reviews. One was granted after we did not oppose it, and the other was refused.

There was one petition to the nobile officium of the Court of Session – this was refused.

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.

We continued to be engaged in improvement work at a national level with partner agencies, including Police Scotland, the Scottish Government, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Children's Hearings Scotland and social work services. This work involved a wide range of subject matter, including the development of standards for Scotland's Bairn's Hoose, jointly reported cases, joint investigative interviewing, the new participation rights, restorative justice and the age of criminal responsibility. We regularly delivered national external training to the police and joint investigative interviewers.

In October 2021, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) came to Scotland. It was envisaged that this would potentially have a significant impact on Hearings in Glasgow in particular, as well as other parts of the country including Aberdeen and Edinburgh. We worked with local and national partners to support our operational response, producing practice guidance particularly on issues of jurisdiction.

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.

This year, much of our work focus was on the provision of Coronavirus-safe work spaces and Hearing centres. The year provided constant challenges with the arrangements for maintenance and cleaning of our buildings with staff shortages at our contractors an ever present issue.

Again, social distancing requirements meant that many of our Hearing rooms could not safely accommodate enough people to allow Hearings to go ahead, and as a consequence virtual and hybrid Hearings were held by using the available space in our buildings or through participation from a remote location. To create permanent capacity for face to face Hearings works were carried out to enlarge existing rooms or convert alternative rooms in our buildings in Falkirk and Stirling. In other locations, existing open plan offices or vacant space continued to be used 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.

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.

This can be driven by lease expiries, and we look to improve the use of our buildings in these situations. As a result of forthcoming expiries at our Hamilton and Elgin offices, we have started design work for smaller office accommodation.

This work builds on the successful introduction of "smart working" project for our Kilmarnock office previously, and the gradual implementation of the new "agile" working style around the country requiring 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.

Continuous investment in our properties is needed to improve service delivery and support new ways of working in our buildings. Projects were undertaken in our Dumbarton and Aberdeen offices to improve the office environment, and to reflect how we are now working, with improved open plan space, additional quiet space and room for Virtual Hearings to take place. Improvements were undertaken to the office accommodation in Glasgow, providing improved kitchen and breakout facilities for staff on locality floors and more touch down space for visiting staff.



The fabric of our buildings also requires constant attention. Condition surveys are undertaken periodically, and this can result in significant external works being necessary. Most recently works have been carried out to our buildings in Edinburgh and Dalkeith.

OUR RESEARCH

We delivered another extensive research programme in 2021/2022 with a number of reports published and several new and exciting pieces of research underway.

Age of Criminal Responsibility

In April 2020, we began 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. Statistical data was extracted from the casefiles of 400 children who had been referred to the Reporter on offence grounds. This included 100 children who had committed more serious offences and had been jointly reported by the police to the Reporter and Procurator Fiscal (PF). Analyses took place which explored 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. This report was due to be published in early 2022/23.

Born into Care

In 2021/22, a study was conducted by researchers from the Universities of Lancaster and Stirling, and SCRA. The Born into Care research investigated: 1) trends in the proportion of newborns and infants being looked after away

from home, how these varied by area and deprivation, and compared with the use of these measures in England and Wales; 2) the familial and health circumstances of infants looked after away from home, including whether older siblings had previously been removed and whether siblings were placed together; 3) the pre-birth and care planning histories of the infants, including their pathways into and out of the Children's Hearings System. The research was due to be published in April 2022.

Children and Young People on Home CSOs

In May 2021 we published the seventh report in a series of reports on the effectiveness of home Compulsory Supervision Orders. The research, which was undertaken in collaboration with Robert Gordon University, examined data from 172 children aged 12-16 who had been subject to a home supervision order between the 1 April 2013 and the 31 March 2017. The sample was comprised of three groups of children, those referred on the grounds of not attending school, those referred on offence grounds, and those who had only ever been referred due to lack of parental care.

Our results indicate that home CSOs resulted in a significant increase in school attendance for children where non-attendance was a concern but that this was likely to have been supported by the fact that all of the children who were placed onto CSOs due to educational attendance were also offered or provided with additional support for attendance and attainment.

The use of home CSOs did not affect the gravity or volume of offending by children referred on offence grounds. Given the complex needs of children in conflict of law, highlighted above in our summary of the evidence relating to our work around the Age of Criminal Responsibility, it is likely that the use of legal measures alone are insufficient to address the impact of multiple adversity and structural inequalities on adolescent offence behaviours.

Children Under the Age of 12 in Residential Care

In 2020 we began a piece of research focussed upon understanding the experiences of children under the age of 12 living in residential care. The purpose of the research was to: 1) explore the background characteristics and care trajectories of children who enter residential care at a young age; 2) explore how residential care placements are associated with socioemotional wellbeing, as well as a range of behavioural, health and educational outcomes. To do this we undertook a detailed examination of the care histories of 135 children and young people who first became subject to CSOs with residential care conditions between the 1 April 2015 and the 31 March 2017. We also conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 60 social workers, residential care workers, foster

carers and children's panel members. There have been two main outputs from the study to date. In September 2021 an evidence submission from the study contributed to the United Nations Day of General Discussion on the use of Alternative Care for children and young people.

In March 2022 a paper entitled ["How is the provision of residential care to children under the age of 12 associated with changes in children's behaviour and mental wellbeing"](#) was published in the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care. The main conclusions of these documents are that children who enter residential care prior to age 12 are often male, have complex trauma histories and come from families with significant levels of additional health and social care needs related to deprivation, mental health difficulties, substance misuse and interpersonal violence.

Many of the children had parents who themselves had either been in care or had been maltreated as children. It was common for the children to have had long histories of service involvement, with 50% known to services by six months of age, and 75% known to services within the first three years of life.

The next stage of this work is to explore the mechanisms that may underscore these improvements, including how residential care practices work to improve outcomes for younger children with complex trauma histories. In undertaking this work we will also explore how earlier intervention and supports to children and families, including their alternative caregivers, could be used to maintain children's

place within their homes as per the recommendations of The Promise.

Our Hearings, Our Voice Evaluation

The Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) asked SCRA to carry out an evaluation of Our Hearings Our Voice (OHOV). This aimed to answer:

- ★ What do OHOV Board Members and staff, and CHIP partner organisations see as the future strategic direction of OHOV?
- ★ What value has been added by OHOV and how has this been utilised by agencies involved in the Hearings System; and how does the work of OHOV fit in and influence the strategic direction of CHIP partner organisations (e.g. on participation, equalities, children's rights)?
- ★ What has enabled or hindered the operation of OHOV?
- ★ Is the current operating model of OHOV effective and resource efficient?

The evaluation was carried out between May and October 2021. It involved interviews and focus groups with the young people involved in OHOV, senior SCRA and Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) staff and Board Chairs, OHOV staff, and a survey of CHIP members.

It was discussed at the CHIP meeting in November 2021 and the [full report](#) as well as a version for [children and young people](#) was published in December 2021. It is a powerful piece of work which sets out an exciting next phase for the group in bringing young people's experiences of Hearings into the centre of the transformation of the system.

Piloting of a Disability Toolkit

In September 2021 we published a report outlining the development of a toolkit that could be used to identify whether children may have additional support needs. This work was based upon a request from the Disabled Children Child Protection Network (DCCPN) to develop and pilot a toolkit that would:

- ★ Allow for the identification of additional needs that could have substantial and long term impacts upon a child's ability to carry out normal day to day activities;
- ★ Provide an indicator of wider vulnerability and contextual factors that were pertinent to understanding child protection risk.

The toolkit was piloted using data from 40 children aged 5-12 who were on CSOs with residential care conditions. We found that the toolkit was capable of identifying children who had previously been identified as a disability, but also highlighted children with no formal disability diagnoses who had additional support needs relating to their learning, communication, socioemotional, mental health or physical wellbeing. Discussions about how to facilitate improvement work in the area of identifying and addressing the additional support needs of children in Scotland are ongoing with the DCCPN.

Staying Connected

Care-experienced children and young people with a sibling in custody In November 2021 we were successful with a funding application from The Promise Partnership for a project in partnership with Families Outside (Scotland's

only national charity that works solely on behalf of families affected by imprisonment). This is a two year project with a full-time Research Officer from SCRA working alongside Families Outside staff.

The overall aims of the project are to address the gap in knowledge around care-experienced children and young people's experiences of sibling imprisonment; to ensure that the previously unheard voices of those with this experience are heard; and to influence how to address restoration and maintenance of contact with an imprisoned sibling for care-experienced children. To do so it will explore the following:

- ★ What are the levels of sibling imprisonment for care-experienced children and young people?
- ★ Are care-experienced children and young people supported to maintain relationships with siblings who are on remand or serving a sentence in a prison or secure unit?
- ★ What are the barriers and facilitators for care-experienced children and young people maintaining relationships with siblings who are on remand or serving a sentence in a prison or secure unit?

The project will involve the analysis of 200 case files on CSAS (SCRA's case management system) and interviews and young people (up to age 25) who have experience of a sibling serving a period of remand or custodial sentence in a prison or secure accommodation, or who themselves have served a period of remand or custodial sentence and have a care-experienced sibling.



The project will also employ a care-experienced Project Officer to work alongside the Research Officer and Families Outside staff. This project will end in October 2023 at which time a final report will be published, along with an accessible version for children and young people and related resources. At this time a number of events will also be held to disseminate the findings.

Virtual Hearings Study

In February 2022 we launched a study that aims to explore how virtual hearings are viewed by children, young people and their caregivers. The research, which is being co-produced with the young people who sit on the OHOV Board involves a number of strands:

- ★ A survey conducted with 242 foster and kinship carers in March 2022 is currently being analysed to explore the perceived impacts of virtual Hearings on children and young people. The analysis will also explore barriers and facilitators of participation, taking into consideration the changes that have been made to virtual Hearings over the course of the pandemic.
- ★ Interviews and focus groups will be conducted with parents, foster carers, kinship carers, residential carers and secure care staff about their views of participating in virtual Hearings.



requests for early reviews of decisions. Face-to-face Hearings will be compared with virtual Hearings conducted with and without RAVHI.

The findings of the virtual Hearings study will contribute to SCRA's 'Keeping The Promise 2021-2024' strategy by trying to understand how the use of virtual Hearings impacts upon the participation and rights of children and families, and whether there is a desire for virtual Hearings to remain part of the offering made to children and families around participation as we continue to learn to live with Covid-19.

These interviews will aim to understand how attending Hearings virtually differs from the experience of face-to-face participation. They will also explore perceptions about the impact of virtual Hearings on decision making, rights and participation.

★ Participatory research will be undertaken with children and young people to explore their views on Virtual Hearings. This research will explore the same issues that will be explored with parents and carers, but will adopt a child-centred and child-led approach to data collection. This element of the study is being coproduced with OHOV Board Members and one of the first planned outputs for this aspect of the work is the development of a participatory research toolkit that can be used in wider SCRA research and consultation activities with children and young people.

★ Case File Analysis using data routinely collected by SCRA in relation to Children's Hearings will be undertaken to explore the inclusion of the child's voice within Hearings held during the pandemic. Data on the decision making process will also be recorded, including the effect of Hearing type on rates of continuations, deferrals, appeals and



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.

CHAIR

Michelle Miller (appointed 2018)

BOARD MEMBERS

Catherine Robertson (retired 2021)
Anela Anwar (re-appointed 2018)
Martin Teye (re-appointed 2020)
Suzanne Vestri (re-appointed 2020)
James Edgar (re-appointed 2021)
Tam Baillie (appointed 2018)
Kay Barton (appointed 2021)
Lorraine Moore (appointed 2021)



LOOKING AHEAD BY NEIL HUNTER, SCRA'S PRINCIPAL REPORTER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE REFLECTING ON 2022/2023 SO FAR...

In this coming year (2022/23) SCRA faces both challenge and opportunity in equal measure. We will make further progress in and contribution to organisational and Hearings System recovery, will reduce delay which has accumulated during this acute, unprecedented time and will gradually, but fully reopen our Hearing centres to children, young people and their families following a further stop-start year.

We will keep the best of what we have achieved during the last two years – in particular I am thinking here about more diverse forms of participation in Hearings, many of which we were forced to implement, but some of which has shown great potential to be part of our improved toolkit in the future.

We will embed and mainstream virtual Hearings across our service, whilst retaining a small national support team. Children and young

people have told us they want increased choice in how they can participate in their Hearings and we must deliver this in sustained and consistent way.

That means changes to the way we organise ourselves in SCRA, changes to our roles and how we perform them and further modernisation of our working arrangements.

SCRA staff are highly skilled, knowledgeable and committed and we will meet these challenges with a real enthusiasm and focus to keep improving the experiences for children and young people coming to and fully participating in their Hearings.

We have a massive opportunity ahead in 2022/2023 as we prepare internally to Keep The Promise. We will enthusiastically engage with the Hearings System Working Group, we will bring the experience

and knowledge of our workforce to bear in the planned redesign work and we will push ourselves every day to stay true to the vision of The Promise.

This will mean children, young people and their families can be supported much earlier than they are now. In addition, children and young people who need help and protection can have rapid access to it via the Children's Reporter and the Hearings System – who will do their work with a renewed sense of care and passion and commitment to rights of children, the dignity of their families and a real focus on delivering the best outcomes we possibly can in a safe, supportive and responsive environment.

I want to thank all our partner agencies for their help and support over 2021/2022 – another really difficult time for all. I want to recognise and respect all of the young people of Our Hearings,

Our Voice who have guided us, challenged us and held us to account to do ever better. I also want to pay huge tribute to SCRA staff who have yet again gone above and beyond every day to help keep Scotland's Children's Hearings System moving forward.

My best wishes to everyone for the year ahead.





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