



2022

**SCRA Victim
Information
Service
Annual Report**



SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION

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Introduction

As a consequence of the Coronavirus pandemic, this is our first Annual Report since 2019. SCRA has been offering a service to people affected by offending behaviour since February 2006.

There are two Victim Information Co-ordinators.

Fiona Smith covers Central, Highlands and Islands, Lanarkshire, Dumfries & Galloway, and South-East and Yvonne Graham covers Ayrshire, Glasgow, Grampian, North Strathclyde and Tayside & Fife. Since April 2022, Fiona and Yvonne have been supported by Paul Harkness.

The central purpose of the service is to:

- provide people affected by offending behaviour with general information about the Children's Hearings System
- provide some specific information to those affected by offending behaviour about what has happened to the referral to the Reporter
- maintain the referred child's right to confidentiality

The authority of the Principal Reporter to offer information flows from Ss. 179 A to C of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act, 2011.

The Victim Information Co-ordinators scan police reports received by SCRA for identifiable victims and then write to them asking whether they wish to opt-in to receiving further information regarding the key stages of the investigation and final decision. Those people affected by offending behaviour who wish to opt-in, can telephone the Victim Information Co-ordinators or email victiminformation@scra.gov.uk.

The Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act, 2011

The Principal Reporter may comply with a request for information only if the provision of information would not be detrimental to the best interests of the referred child and if it is appropriate in the circumstances of the case.

Those who may request information are those people against whom the offence appears to have been committed or any person harmed by the action or behaviour of a child aged under 12.

Factors to be taken into account when considering whether to provide information are:

- the age of the referred child
- the seriousness of the offence or the behaviour
- the circumstances in which the offence or behaviour took place
- the effect of the offence or behaviour
- such other factors as the Principal Reporter considers appropriate

It is important that the Victim Information Co-ordinators are furnished with any contextual information from Reporters which might have a bearing on this general consideration.

Victim Information Service Figures 2022



SCRA received **6,208**
'offence' referrals



we sent **2,510** initial letters to
people affected by offending
behaviour.

Subsequently, **353** individuals
'opted-in' to receive further
information which means
that **14%** opted in.

Of the **353**, **212** were aged
under-19

Victim Information Service Figures 2019

(for comparison)



SCRA received **6,978**
'offence' referrals



We sent **3,200** initial letters to
people affected by offending
behaviour.

Subsequently, **417** individuals
'opted-in' to receive further
information. **13%** opted in.

We know that, in previous years the percentage of those who receive our initial letter and then choose to opt in, peaked at 20%. Over time, an opt-in rate of 14% seems to be fairly consistent.

We have chosen to highlight that in 2022, 60% of those who opted in were under 19 years of age.

Contact with people affected by offending behaviour

Often, following the actions of the Victim Information Co-ordinators, when speaking with people affected by offending behaviour, people will tell us that they have appreciated our communication and involvement. Sometimes the offer of a listening ear can make a difference. Of course, that isn't always the case.

Both Victim Information Co-ordinators are experienced members of staff and are skilled at striking the right tone when they are in a dialogue with people affected by offending behaviour. The reality though is that SCRA often can't make things better, and, from time to time, our decisions, which have to be made in the best interests of the child who has caused the harm, as well as our communications may actually contribute to varying degrees of re-traumatisation. Our aim must be to cause as little additional harm as possible.

In common with most of SCRA's staff the Victim Information Co-ordinators have been adapting to the realities of 'working from home' as a consequence of the Coronavirus pandemic. They have however, remained accessible to service users. They each will assume responsibility for the other's work, during leave periods, for example, and they will often discuss and share information to ensure that a quality service is maintained.

Example

In June, following routine initial contact with Yvonne Graham, Victim Information Co-ordinator, we felt that we should offer a meeting with a particular family who told us that they might better process information face to face.

They told us that they wanted clarity around the process and how the Reporter made the decision in their case. They also told us that the final decision letter was very vague.

They lived in Glasgow, so after further email communication and a telephone conversation, a room was booked within our office in Bell Street.

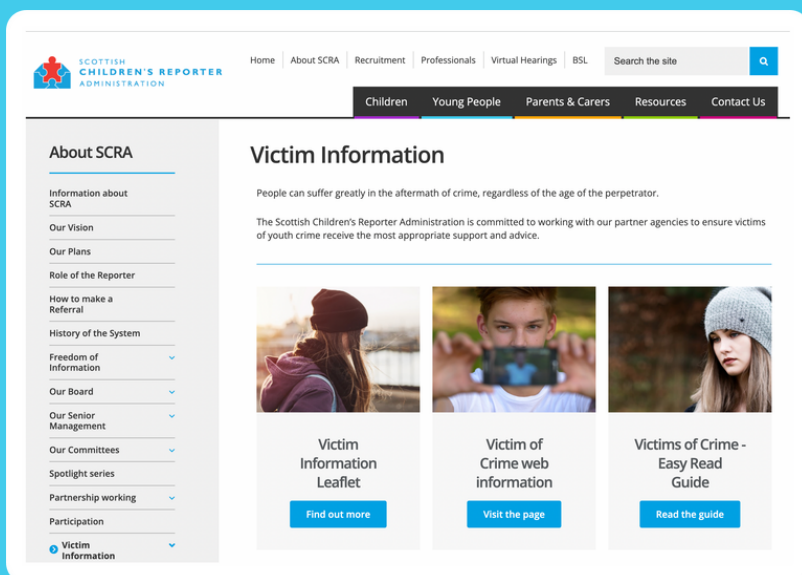
At the meeting we spent some time in a broad discussion about the Children's Hearings System and the Reporter's place within it.

In addition to seeking a better understanding of processes, the family were looking for some practical help in securing the return of their child's clothes and other matters.

We were in a position to contact Police Scotland to engineer the return of the clothes. Actually, contact with the family to help and support them lasted several months. We have received positive feedback from them and an expression of gratitude for our help.

Communications refresh – letters and leaflets

In the summer, along with colleagues within the Practice and Policy team, we carried out an exercise to ‘refresh’ our suite of letters and information leaflets. With valuable input from a handful of staff we reviewed our letters and employed the First Word Readability test. Ultimately all of our letters were deemed to reach the standard of ‘Plain English’ or ‘Easy’. The refreshed letters were then shared with and endorsed by Victim Support Scotland before being put into use. You can view the [leaflets](#) and [letters](#) on our website.



Online
information

Victim information online

Another piece of work that we have carried out is updating the Victim Information page on SCRA’s external website to ensure that the information is more easily accessible.

In addition, with the helpful assistance of SCRA’s Communication’s team, we have refreshed the VIS page within the Practice section on Connect for the benefit of our colleagues within SCRA.

Reporting on Victim Information

VIS data is now held as part of our core management system (CSAS) which was introduced in 2020. Reporting around VIS data and support for the Victim Information Co-ordinators continues to be developed and expanded. This work will continue into 2023 supported by Donald Lamb, SCRA's Data Manager.

It is highly likely that the Victim Information Service will require an update linked to the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill. A discovery piece of work is timetabled to begin in April, 2023 to consider areas of SCRA work that will be impacted by the Care and Justice Bill and potential system development that would be required to meet the needs of staff, service users and partners. The Victim Information Service digital requirements from the Bill would be developed within the following financial year.

Other national activity

In 2021 the Lord Justice Clerk's Review Group reported on Improving the Management of Sexual Offence Cases. SCRA was represented on this group and within the report there are recommendations relating specifically to the Children's Hearings System, including on the provision of information. We are involved as members of the Governance Group tasked with progressing the recommendations contained within the report.

We are also SCRA's representative on Scotland's Victim's Taskforce, the primary role of which is to co-ordinate and drive action to improve the experience of victims and witnesses within the criminal justice system. The Taskforce is co-chaired by the Justice Secretary and the Lord Advocate.

Trauma training

In common with other SCRA staff, the Victim Information Service staff are undertaking training offered by NHS Education for Scotland as part of the National Trauma Training Programme. Prefaced by two e-learning modules, we undertook a day's training in January. Further training will also take place.

The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill

In August, together with Alistair Hogg, SCRA's Head of Practice, we met with the team working to deliver the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill to explore how SCRA's Victim Information Service might need to adapt to any provisions contained within the Bill. If passed, all under-18s can be referred to the Children's Hearings System, where appropriate. Following implementation, SCRA will likely receive more referrals and an inevitable increase in activity for the VIS, though the essential functions should remain largely unchanged.

We have also made contact with Kibble's 'Safe' service which has been set up to provide support to children who have been affected by crime either as victims or as witnesses. We have briefly explored this area of mutual interest with a view to sharing ideas and to perhaps, at some future point, signpost children whom SCRA believes might benefit from particular support to this service in addition to highlighting the support offered by Victim Support Scotland.

Ongoing and future work – including technical developments

Children’s Reporters regularly receive remits from criminal courts in terms of Section 49 (1) of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995. Generally speaking, these remits are not accompanied by sufficient identification information to allow the Victim Information Co-ordinators to seek to provide the usual information to those affected by the offending behaviour of children. We are currently engaging with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal’s Service (COPFS) in an attempt to engineer a solution to this long-standing issue.

As mentioned already, we have worked alongside SCRA’s Data Manager within our Quality and Performance Team to consider whether enhanced reporting can assist with day-to-day tasks and this work to refine processes will continue into 2023 and beyond.

As already highlighted, CSAS discovery work is scheduled to take place this year. This should help refine the processing steps currently required of the Victim Information Co-ordinators. It should also help ensure there is sufficient capacity to respond to the anticipated increase in the volume of referrals received following the implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill.

Towards the end of this year we will develop and deliver a presentation on the work of the Victim Information Service which will be offered to all SCRA staff.

Finally, it seems clear that for some people, ‘Victim’ is a word loaded with negativity. It can make some people feel ‘wrong’ or helpless and although we don’t currently have an obvious alternative term, this year we will explore whether to ‘re-badge’ the service we offer.



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