



Children's Hearings Scotland Impact Report 2020 - 21



children's
hearings
scotland

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This report mentions a few different people and groups, the most common ones are:

Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) is the organisation that is responsible for recruiting, training and providing support to the Panel Members who sit on children's hearings in Scotland and Area Support Team members who support to Panel Members locally.

The National Convener leads and oversees the Children's Panel, at the moment this is Elliot Jackson. He is responsible for recruiting people to serve as Panel Members across Scotland, and making sure they have the right training and support to make sound decisions in the best interests of infants, children and young people.

Panel Members take part in children's hearings and make legal decisions about the care and protection of infants, children and young people. There are around 2,500 Panel Members in Scotland. Three Panel Members sit on each hearing.

Area Support Teams (ASTs) are volunteers who provide support and guidance to Panel Members at the local level. There are 22 of these across Scotland, with around 400 volunteer members.

CHS Learning Academy provides training to ensure our volunteer community's learning is current and relevant for the role.

From the National Convener

It has been a year quite unlike any other. At the start of the year, the children's hearing system had to undergo some fundamental changes extremely quickly, as the scale and significance of the coronavirus pandemic started to truly emerge.

This has not been easy. It has presented challenges that have pushed our technology, systems and people in entirely new ways. But overcoming those challenges as best we could, and managing the difficulties of working in a context that has tested everyone, were always absolutely necessary things to do. The children's hearings system is here to make sure that decisions are made to support the children and young people who need them. This need has not gone away during the pandemic.

The commitment demonstrated by our volunteers has been overwhelming to witness. They have- in their thousands- adopted the use of new digital platforms, learnt how to use new devices, changed how local rotas are planned, carried out recruitment activities virtually for the first time, run hearings according to new legislation, and made countless other changes, big and small. I have been so proud to be the National Convener and they undoubtedly deserve my heartfelt thanks.

In this Impact Report, we highlight a selection of the work that has been carried out by Children's Hearings Scotland (also known as CHS) over the last year to support our volunteer community and progress our overall vision of a forward-looking children's hearings system that works as a community to ensure infants, children and young people are cared for, protected and their views are heard, respected and valued.

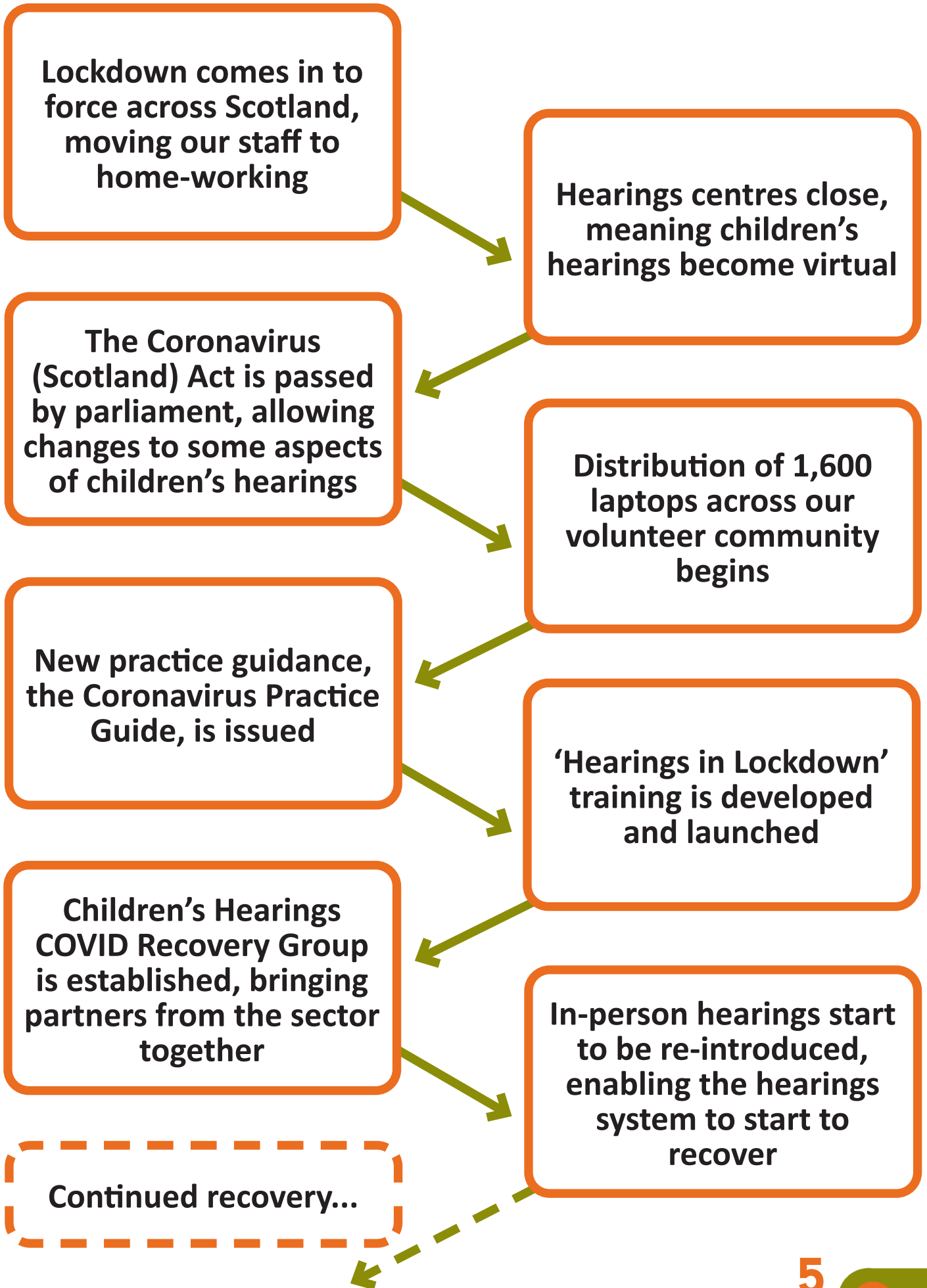
This vision will remain our guiding priority in 2021-22 too, as we look to further recover the hearings system and prepare for a range of legislation to come in to force that will progress children's rights in Scotland. We will continue to deliver our functions collaboratively and with children and young people at the centre of what we do.

I want to thank everyone who has a role within, and made a contribution to, the work of Children's Hearings Scotland over the last year. It has required monumental effort, patience, compassion, coordination and partnership. Thank you.



- Elliot Jackson, National Convener and Chief Executive, CHS

Our coronavirus journey



Focus on: Volunteering

Celebrating our volunteers: Volunteers Week 2020

During the pandemic, the awareness of how volunteers deliver essential services across Scotland has never been higher – they are truly incredible.

This year, we used Volunteers Week 2020 to not only say a heartfelt thanks to our incredible volunteer community, but to also highlight some of the reasons that our volunteers undertake the roles they do.



I volunteer because I am passionate about children being given a voice and having it heard in the hearing room. I worked with children who were often in the children's hearing system and it gave me an insight into how difficult life could be for some children. It is good to give something back and use the knowledge I have gained over the years for the good of children and young people.



Catherine, Panel Member, Dumfries and Galloway

#volunteersweek

"Thank you to each and every one of you for being there for Scotland's young people. You offer so many children hope and that's incredible... Every single volunteer that I have met has blown me away with their dedication, positive attitude, and true passion for the role. Thank you!"

- Nathalie Helene, National Team

We also had a special thanks from Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Children and Young People:



"I know how committed you are to making a difference to the lives of Scotland's children and this has become even more clear during this time of social isolation.

You give your time and you are committed because you want all children and young people attending a hearing to have the very best possible experience, and to ensure their safety and wellbeing is looked after.

You make a great difference within your local communities and truly keep children and young people at the heart of every decision made.

So to you, I'd like to say, from the bottom of my heart, a massive thank you!"

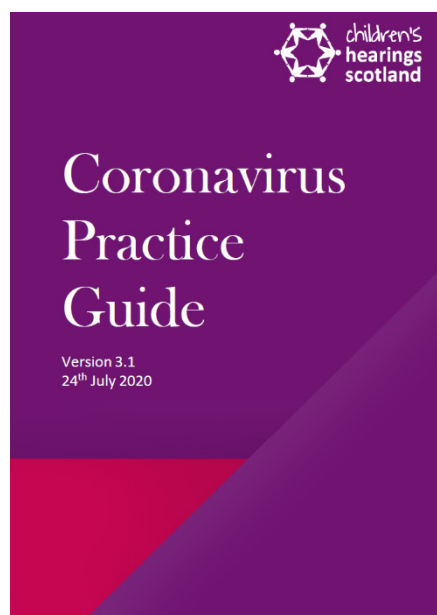


Supporting decision-making: Our practice guidance

How children's hearings take place changed extremely quickly with the introduction of the lockdown. We, along with the other organisations who work in the children's hearings system, had to find ways for children's hearings to continue when they could not be held in person, or as they usually would.

This involved new technology for virtual hearings and for managing hearings papers, and new legislation that changed some aspects of how hearings take place, including who needs to be in attendance at a children's hearing to allow it to take place. Throughout 2020-21, we also learnt more and more about how virtual hearings worked and what makes them good experiences or not.

We also ensured that our Panel Members were kept up-to-date with what we learnt, and the new legislation, through a publication called the Coronavirus Practice Guide, which was updated through the year:



The Practice Guide covered topics such as:

- Key changes in legislation;
- How to use virtual hearings software;
- How to prepare for a virtual hearing;
- Tips for managing virtual discussions;
- Best practice in decision making, including guidance on contact directions;

To support these new ways of working, we also introduced an online course on 'Hearings in Lockdown'.

In addition, our main Practice and Procedure Manual (PPM) was updated to include new or amended sections on:

**Advocacy in children's
hearings**

**Requesting
Independent Reports**

**The 'Getting It Right
For Every Child'
(GIRFEC) approach**

Deferral of hearings

**Grounds hearings and
Proof**

Want to know more? The PPM can be accessed here:
[Practice and Procedure Manual \(chscotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.chscotland.gov.uk/practice-and-procedure-manual)

Training our volunteers

Our CHS Learning Academy offers learning and development that ensures Panel Members are fully equipped to make the best decisions possible in hearings and Area Support Teams have the knowledge they need to carry out their role.

In normal years, most of the training delivered by the CHS Learning Academy is in-person, but during 2020-21, it moved to fully online.

We also launched some new courses on topics that are important for decision-making and volunteering within the children's hearings system. These included:

Child Development

Focus: how children develop, what impacts their development, how Panel Members should prepare for and communicate with young people in their children's hearing, and key considerations to be taken into account during the decision-making process.

Permanence

Focus: understanding the routes to permanence and why it is important, understanding research and the law to enable Panel Members to understand how they can reduce drift and delay, and making decisions and giving advice to keep the safeguarding and promotion of a child's welfare through their childhood the paramount consideration.

Throughout 2020-21, our CHS Learning Academy also ran courses aimed at supporting volunteers in becoming familiar with the new technology and digital services they needed to ensure that children's hearings could continue to take place and to enable them to carry out their roles.

A special thank you too, to those organisations and people in the sector who helped us develop training this year:

- Adoption and Fostering Alliance Scotland;
- CELCIS;
- James McTaggart, Educational Psychologist;
- Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (also known as SCRA).

**YOU ARE
INCREDIBLE!**

Recruiting our Panel Members

This year, the whole recruitment process took place entirely virtually for the first time. A huge thank you to everyone involved- the whole team pulled together, working at a local and national level to roll out our biggest recruitment campaign to date. This included using our new digital application form, which launched this year.

As well as social media and online advertising, this year's campaign featured our very first TV advert:



People with lived experience of children's hearings went above and beyond to support us with our recruitment process in 2021. All Area Support Teams who were recruiting Panel Members included people with lived experience of hearings in their recruitment processes.

Young person Candice was fully involved in the selection process for new Panel Members in Renfrewshire as a member of the interview panel. A CHS volunteer worked alongside Candice to ensure support was available through the process.

"Being involved in the recruitment of panel members was a really good experience, it was great having a buddy who made me feel part of the team and put a good support system in place for me"
- Candice

Thank you! Your input in this year's campaign has helped us to ensure we take on board the best possible Panel Members for children and young people across Scotland.

**THANK
YOU!**

Volunteer Wellbeing

The need for everyone to have access to ways to support their wellbeing was particularly highlighted this year. To make sure this was in place across our volunteer community, we invested in a new wellbeing support service, run by Health Assured.

The service offers a 24-hour confidential helpline, counselling sessions and an online health portal to provide support through life's issues or problems, including:

- Stress and anxiety
- Financial Wellbeing
- Family Issues
- Relationship Advice
- Consumer Issues
- Medical Information

Launching the new service, National Convener Elliot Jackson said:

"We know, probably now more than ever, that life is not always easy. We all face challenges large and small, and without support those challenges can be far harder to overcome.

CHS takes its responsibilities for Panel Member wellbeing seriously and we have a number of support mechanisms here at Children's Hearings Scotland, such as our buddy system for new volunteers, and of course your local area will also offer personalised support.

However, we are really keen to boost that provision and so we have invested in a new wellbeing support service, run by Health Assured, who will, from today, provide a package of support including a 24 hour advice line, counselling sessions and an online health portal where you'll find lots more tools to enhance your physical and emotional wellbeing."

Focus on: Children, young people and corporate parenting

Corporate Parenting

As one of Scotland's corporate parents we are focused on upholding the rights, safeguarding, and promoting the wellbeing of Scotland's looked after children and care leavers.

Both Children's Hearings Scotland and the National Convener are corporate parents in their own right, but plan and report corporate parenting activities jointly.

You can find out more about our corporate parenting here:

[Corporate parenting \(chscotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.chscotland.gov.uk)

In addition, we share, with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA), a set of corporate parenting aims for children and young people. These are:

- You are at the centre of the children's hearings system and are treated as an individual;
- The decisions that affect you are based on sound knowledge, clear evidence and with consideration of your views;
- Your corporate parents will work together to make the system work better for you;
- We will keep asking ourselves if the way we do things is the best it can be.

But, what does this look like in practice? Find out over the next few pages.

We are committed to progressing Children's Rights

In preparation for the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in Scotland, we spent 2020-21 thinking about our work, and the role of our volunteers, in promoting and protecting children's rights, and importantly, what more we can do.

This resulted in:



A look back over 2017-2020 at the work that has taken place so far.



And a look forward- our Children's Rights and Inclusion Strategy, was co-designed with volunteers from the CHS Community and young people with lived experience of the hearings system. It sets out our vision of what we can do to embed the views of children and young people in our work, and looks at how we can promote and protect their rights.

The strategy focuses on our 'Pillars of Inclusion' that were identified by people with lived experience as essential things to focus on in reaching the main outcomes of the strategy:



Thank you to the members of our Children's Rights and Inclusion Working Group for all your hard work, knowledge and insights!

Introducing advocacy

In 2020, an important change to the law took place putting a duty on the Chair of a children's hearings (this person is also a Panel Member) to let the child or young person know that advocacy services are available to help them during a children's hearing.

This is a hugely important and positive change that impacts children's rights, helping to ensure that the views of children and young people are expressed and represented fully.

To prepare the CHS Panel Members for this change, we introduced a new Advocacy training and practice guidance:

Children's Hearings Advocacy

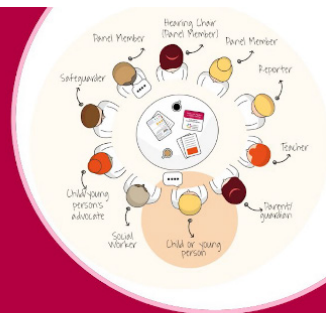
The new Children's Hearings Advocacy Service will be live on 21st November 2020, providing a consistent independent advocacy service for children across Scotland.

- A brand new service, available for all children's hearings and related court proceedings
- Managed and overseen by the Scottish Government
- Mandatory training on the children's hearings system
- Different local providers
- National Practice Standards



During the hearing

- An advocate may speak on a child's behalf or may support them to speak for themselves.
- An advocate may attend without the child being present – remember, a child's views are distinct from a child's attendance
- An advocate may submit the child's views to the Panel in advance



Want to know more about advocacy in children's hearings?

Take a look here: [Hearings Advocacy \(hearings-advocacy.com\)](https://hearings-advocacy.com)

Want to know more about Panel Member training on advocacy?

Take a look at our training video here: [Advocacy in Children's Hearings - YouTube](#)

Want to know more about Panel Member guidance on advocacy?

Take a look at page 88 of the CHS Practice & Procedure Manual:
[Practice and Procedure Manual \(chscotland.gov.uk\)](https://chscotland.gov.uk)

We are committed to #KeepingThePromise

In 2020-2021, we began to plan for how we would keep the promise to Scotland's children to ensure children's hearings are compassionate and driven by children's rights. We have been creating the CHS Promise Programme which will put child and family friendly care and justice at the heart of what we do, and which will meet our commitments to The Promise Scotland's Plan 21-24 and the calls to action of Our Hearings, Our Voice's (also known as OHOV).

CHS Promise Programme

The CHS Promise Programme will be the place where we organise ourselves to deliver the changes we need to make, in a structured way. We have already begun some of this work. The programme will:

- set out our vision for change to the children's hearing system to #KeepThePromise
- collate, define and track all of our activity against agreed objectives and milestones
- host and create collaborative spaces for everyone one within CHS to contribute to our activity to #KeepThePromise
- host the communication strategy by which we engage with people with lived experience, the CHS volunteer community, National Team, CHS Learning Academy and stakeholders
- collect together and share data and evidence on our progress towards keeping #ThePromise

Over the next three years, we will be working closely with our partners to ensure that we have a children's hearing systems that is fit for the 21st Century and puts children's rights at its centre.

OHOV

We're proud to support the work of OHOV, an independent board of children and young people who have experience of children's hearings. In October, everyone in the CHS community received a copy of 'The Zine', which includes the experiences of children and young people who have attended children's hearings and 40 Calls to Action, which describe changes and improvements for the hearings system.

"We have spent this year understanding how we can improve the hearings experience for children, young people and their families. To support this work we submitted a response to the consultation on the development of The Promise plans, have attended webinars to understand the direction of travel for The Promise Scotland, and have been working with the team there, to start our planning process. We will also continue to listen to Our Hearings, Our Voice and look at how we can incorporate their 40 Call to Action into our plans."

- Carol Wassell, Head of Area Support and Community Improvement

Raising Awareness

This year, we are proud to have supported and celebrated some important campaigns which raise awareness of care experience, and the rights of care experienced children and young people.

Care Experienced Week 2020

For Care Experienced Week, an international celebration of the care experienced community, we highlighted some of the contributions that people with care experience make to our work.

A massive thank you to Liam and Dylan who talked about their involvement in the Children's Rights and Inclusion Strategy.

"First of all, I want to say happy Care Experienced Week everyone. This is our week to sparkle and shine. So, own it!" – Beth-Anne Logan, CHS Board Member



Happy Care Day from everyone at Children's Hearings Scotland 🎉 Today we will share some thoughts from [@laur_beveridge](#), Children's Rights & Inclusion Co-ordinator, on what Care Day means to her! Until then explore here for more on [#CareDay21](#) ow.ly/FvFG50DerZy [@whocaresscot](#)

#CareDay2021

Care Day is the world's largest celebration of the rights of children and young people with care experience.

Laura, our Children's Rights & Inclusion Coordinator shared her thoughts on what Care Day means to her.

You can watch her video [here](#).



Thank You!

One final giant thank you to every single person who has helped the work of Children's Hearings Scotland and the children's hearing system to happen during this difficult year!





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