



# Children's Hearings Scotland Impact Report 2019 - 20



children's  
hearings  
scotland

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# Introduction

Once again, this year has been one of significant change and development for Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) and the sector in which we operate.

Perhaps most significantly, the findings of the Independent Care Review, a genuine root and branch review with the voice of care experienced children and young people rightly at its heart, were published in February.

Within CHS, we have undergone a number of staffing changes. In October, Elliot took over the role of National Convener of the Children's Panel and Chief Executive of CHS following the retirement of his predecessor. We also introduced our new Area Support and Improvement team. These 11 new colleagues, based across Scotland, will enable us to implement improvements in the children's hearings system and progress local relationships like never before.

The support we provide to Panel Members to deliver high-quality hearings underwent a major development this year with the launch of our digital Practice & Procedure Manual. This guidance, which involved engagement with specialist partner organisations, goes far beyond what has previously been provided to Panel Members and represents a major step forward in how we think about hearings and their impact.

Our digital programme continued to progress at pace, and the start of 2020 saw the launch of our new volunteer email platform and the roll out of Microsoft Teams. With 3,000 volunteers in our CHS community, this was a considerable undertaking and we are grateful to the staff and volunteer Digital Champions who enabled this to happen.

At the very end of the year, we, like all public functions, had to reimagine how we operated in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Almost overnight, hearings became virtual for the first time and CHS became a remote-working organisation. Our volunteers and staff rose to the challenge of these circumstances and the training and support necessary to allow us to continue to care for and protect infants, children and young people quickly began to be put in place.

This report highlights just a selection of the many things that have been achieved by the CHS volunteer and staff community this year and we are grateful for the passion, commitment and hard work they have all demonstrated. It is by working together that we move ever closer to seeing our vision – of a forward-looking and evolving children's hearing system that ensures infants, children and young people are cared for, protected and their views are heard, respected and valued – realised for Scotland.

- **Elliot Jackson**, National Convener and CEO

- **Garry Coutts**, Chair, CHS Board

# Who We Are

Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) is one of a number of organisations that work within the children's hearings system, Scotland's unique care and justice system that exists to ensure the safety and wellbeing of infants, children and young people in Scotland.

Our activities focus on recruiting, training and supporting volunteer Panel Members who make decisions in children's hearings (sometimes known as the 'Children's Panel'), and volunteer Area Support Teams (ASTs) who provide support and direction at a local level.

We have 3,000 volunteers in our community, across six different volunteer roles:

- **Area Convener** – leads ASTs and work with partners at a local level.
- **Depute Area Convener** – supports the Area Convener and manages complaints and concerns.
- **Learning and Development Coordinator** – organises Panel Member learning at a local level.
- **Panel Member** – takes part in children's hearings and makes legal decisions about the care and protection of infants, children and young people.
- **Panel Practice Advisor** – maintains the high quality of our Panel Member practice through observation and feedback.
- **Panel Representative** – a local point of contact for Panel Members, representing their interests with the ASTs. Panel Representatives also allocate Panel Members to children's hearings.

This volunteer community, and the staff who work at CHS (called the National Team), are led by the National Convener and Chief Executive. The National Convener is responsible for the recruitment, training, retention and support of Panel Members.

Our vision is of a forward looking and evolving children's hearings system, working as a community to ensure infants, children and young people are cared for, protected and their views are heard, respected and valued.



# Our Values



**Challenging** : Not being complacent, but questioning ourselves and others to help us improve.

**Child Centered** : Making sure everything we do is in the best interests of children and young people.

**Creative** : Considering innovative and imaginative ways of approaching the issues we face in the work we do.

**Respectful** : Treating children, young people, their families, partners and each other with care and consideration

**Open** : Listening, responding to and learning from feedback; acting honestly; ensuring processes are transparent; sharing information and being accountable for our actions and decisions.

**Fair** : Making sure that everyone is treated with dignity and according to their individual needs; that our information and services are accessible to all; that we provide a consistent level of service to all.

# 2019-20 In Numbers

Our volunteer community  
made decisions in

**30,363**

children's hearings

Over

**900**

Panel Members we  
reappointed in 2019  
for a further three  
years

**740**

requests for Panel Member  
continuity were authorised,  
making sure children and young  
people's requests for consistency  
in support their needs and rights  
were taken into account

**80**

requests for  
written advice were  
received from  
hearings and  
responded to by  
the National  
Convener

**1,549**

volunteers accessed online  
training courses through the CHS  
Learning Academy online

**13,316**

infants, children and  
young people had hearings.

# Section 1:

## Supporting Our Volunteer Community

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### Training: Launching the Knowledge Hub

We were excited to launch a new online Knowledge Hub this year. Available through the CHS Learning Academy, the Hub hosts flexible learning opportunities and resources that complement other formal volunteer training.

The launch of the Knowledge Hub mean that all CHS volunteers now have access to short courses on topics such as:

Communicating Effectively

Managing Stress

Conflict Management

Coaching Skills

Data Security and Cyber Awareness

Developing Resilience

Negotiating and Influencing

Emotional Intelligence

Being Assertive in the Right Way



# Why I Volunteer: Stephen's Story

30 year old "rock kid at heart" Stephen, has been a volunteer Panel Member since 2018. When he's not supporting children and young people in his local area, Stephen is looking after his 5 year old daughter, is an engineer, enjoys playing football and rugby, attending gigs and festivals and finishing his sleeve tattoos !

Stephen was inspired to volunteer on The Children's Panel after his own care experience in his youth.

*"Having been through the complete process that the hearing system can provide from a young age (7) - including social work, a home, foster care, adoption etc. - I have managed to make the most of life so far and have benefited from the work of Children's Hearings Scotland."*

*"I am a living example of a story which Children's Hearings Scotland changed for the better and I wanted to do the same for other children & young people within the hearings system. I wanted to show children and young people that they can do anything if they believe in themselves!"*

*"It is critical that the panel is more representative given that we are all different and can bring our different skills and experiences to our role. It is so important that people from all different backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, and stories, who all consider views differently, are on the panel. This ensures the best-balanced decisions for each child or young person who attends a hearing."*

Being on the panel not only allows Stephen to improve the lives of children and young people in his community, he has also found it has enriched and improved his own life.

*"The panel has many positive impacts on me as a Panel Member, such as the rewarding feeling for every child and young person that I have helped, the continuous training and development, a desired SQA qualification (Personal Development Award), networking and positive impacts with employment."*

*"Being a Panel Member can be tough but the rewarding emotions you gain from making a difference far outweighs anything that comes your way. Being a Panel Member makes you unique!"*





# Digital Volunteering

During 2019-20, CHS and SCRA continued to work together to create new digital systems that will improve children's hearings and allow more volunteer activities to be carried out online.

In February, we began the process replacing our current online volunteering systems with the new ones. Our 3,000 volunteers received new email addresses and Microsoft Teams was launched across the community. This has connected volunteers and staff in new ways and allowed groups to form, meet and collaborate regardless of location.

In preparation for the next phase of digital developments, a series of training modules have been developed, housed within the CHS Learning Academy online:

Children's Hearings Scotland  
**Digital Handling of Concerns and Complaints**  
[Begin course >](#)

Children's Hearings Scotland  
**Rota for Rota Managers**  
[Begin course >](#)

Children's Hearings Scotland  
**Digital for Volunteer Managers**  
[Begin course >](#)

Children's Hearings Scotland  
**Learning and Events for Event Managers**  
[Begin course >](#)

# Collaboration in Our Community

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Every year, we bring together different groups from within our volunteer community to share ideas, discuss developments, strengthen networks, and give access to support.

## **Area Convener Liaison Group**

This group, which gives our local volunteer leaders the opportunity to discuss issues relevant to ASTs and discuss ideas amongst themselves and with CHS staff, met five times during the year.

## **Learning & Development Coordinator Forum**

This forum focuses on how best to deliver local learning and development and met three times during 2019/20.

## **Retention and Recruitment Reference Group**

This advisory group met four times in 2019/20 and brings together people from across our volunteer community to steer, support and monitor the quality of procedures for recruitment and reappointment, and our strategies for volunteer retention. Sub-groups also met through the year looking at recruitment and selection training and AST appointment processes.

## **Clerks Network Group**

Clerks are local authority employees who provide a range of administrative and support functions to our Area Conveners and volunteers locally. The Clerks Network Group met four times in 2019/20, including the first two-day Clerks Conference.

## **PPA Forum**


This forum brings together PPAs from across the country to share ideas and improvements for quality assurance. It met twice during the year.

# Volunteers Week 2019

In June, we once again took to social media to recognise the valuable work that all CHS volunteers do and take the opportunity to thank them.

As part of this, we went out to our volunteers to hear their stories – why they volunteer, what they get from being involved with CHS, and why others should consider volunteering.

1  **Volunteers' Week 2019 - Meet Danielle**  
Children's Hearings Scotland  
2:35

2  **Volunteers' Week 2019 - Meet Scott**  
Children's Hearings Scotland  
2:06

3  **Volunteers' Week 2019 - Meet Liam**  
Children's Hearings Scotland

On the final day of Volunteer's Week, Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Children and Young People, thanked our volunteers in a special video.



*“Children’s Hearings Scotland volunteers give an incredible 360,000 hours to the children’s hearings system every year. They make important decisions with and for children and young people, keeping their needs absolutely at the heart of everything they do... I want to say an absolutely huge ‘thank you’. Thank you for all that you do.”*

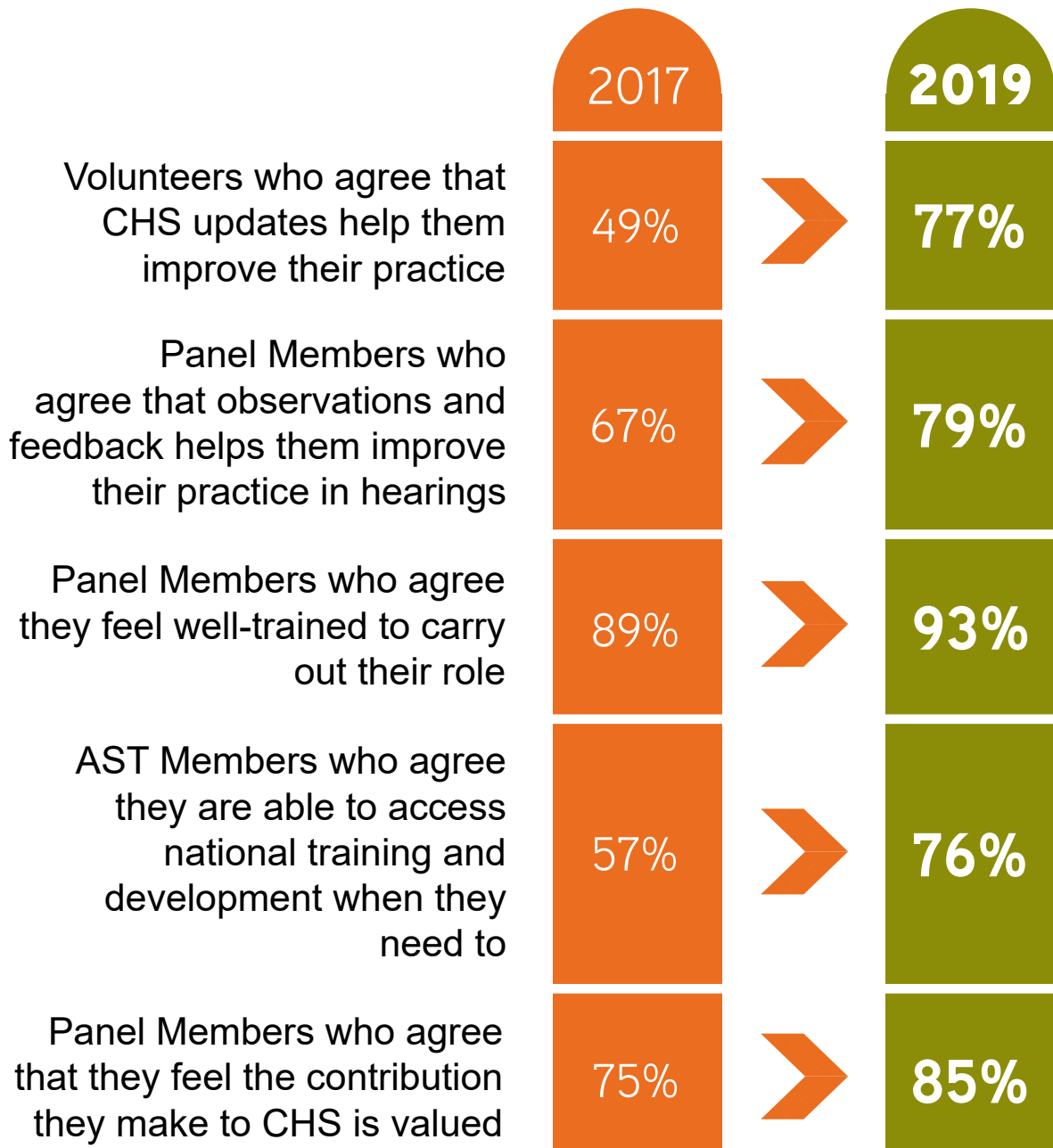
**– Maree Todd MSP**

Minister for Children and Young People

# Community Survey

In Summer 2019, we ran our Community Survey to understand what our volunteers think of their experiences, whether work is making a difference, and where improvements could be made.

Some of the areas of success over the last two years it highlighted were:



# Section 2:

## Corporate Parenting

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‘Corporate parenting’ is the term used for the duty of certain organisations to make sure their attention and resources are focused on upholding the rights, safeguarding, and promoting the wellbeing of Scotland’s looked after children and care leavers.

In carrying their functions, corporate parents are required to:

- **Be alert** to matters which might adversely affect the wellbeing of looked after children and young people.
- **Assess** the needs of looked after children and young people for the services and support we provide.
- **Promote** the interests of looked after children and young people.
- **Provide opportunities** for looked after children and young people to participate in activities designed to promote their wellbeing.
- Take appropriate action to ensure looked after children and young people **access** these opportunities and make use of our services and support.
- Take any other action appropriate to **improve** our functions to meet the needs of looked after children and young people.

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

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 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.

# 2019-20 Corporate Parenting Overview

Each year, we plan activities to make sure that we are carrying out our role as a Corporate Parent. Below is a summary of our main Corporate Parenting activities from the year:

To...	We...
Improve how children's hearings are conducted	Prepared new practice guidance for Panel Members
Enhance the voices of children and young people in our work	Built stronger relationships with Our Hearings Our Voice, began the process of preparing a Rights and Inclusion strategy, and ensured that a young person was a key part of our strategic group to develop our next Corporate Plan.
Deliver increasingly consistent hearings experiences for children and young people nationally, and ensure those experiences are continually improving	Worked with the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) to further implement the Better Hearings standards across our ASTs
Attract volunteers who can relate to children and young people who attend hearings	Worked with young people with lived hearings and/or care experience to update our recruitment campaign
Provide a consistent presence at hearings for children and young people	Rolled out our new Panel Member continuity policy
Make sure we are aware of the major issues affecting the wellbeing of children and young people	Worked collaboratively with the Independent Care Review to understand and implement its emerging recommendations
Make the hearing experience more child-friendly	Continued to roll out Panel Member Profiles (is photo or image of a Panel Member with a brief description of who they are, which is available to children and young people before a hearing) across Scotland

Some of this work is highlighted in more detail on the next pages.

# Independent Care Review

To make sure we have been staying aware of the key issues and improvements raised by people with experience of care, we engaged actively in the Independent Care Review process.

This included:

- A joint workshop between the Independent Care Review and CHS, exploring the hearings system in depth.
- CHS Staff membership of Justice and Care Group
- Volunteer and staff attendance at Independent Care Review 'Roadshows'
- CHS Staff membership of subgroup on promoting sibling relationships
- Meeting between the National Convener/CEO, the Chair of CHS, and the Chair of the Independent Care Review to discuss how CHS can work with and support the ICR findings

When the Care Review reports were published, Elliot Jackson, National Convener and CEO of CHS welcomed the findings:

*"The [Independent Care Review](#) has been the most incredible journey. A genuine root and branch review with the voice of care experienced children and young people at its heart.*

*"I'm so grateful to everyone who has shared their experiences and helped to shape these recommendations.*

*"Panel Members are committed to improving outcome every day for infants, children, young people and their families. They are always listening, always learning and dedicated to improving their practice.*

*"I welcome the commitment to retain the Kilbrandon principles. We will now look in depth at each of the areas highlighted by The Promise which relate to the children's hearing system. We recognise the opportunity for change and will work with our volunteers, children and young people to build solutions and deliver The Plan.*

*"We're committed to delivering The Promise."*



*#keepthepromise*



# Working in Partnership

Throughout the year, we've had lots of opportunities to work with other organisations and be part of groups to make improvement to the hearings system. A selection include:

Our Area Support Improvement Partners have formed new relationships with local Champions Board, Child Protection Committees and Corporate Parenting groups

Working with Who Cares? Scotland to include young people in Panel Member pre-service training

Contributing to the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) and the Youth Justice Improvement Board (YJIB)

Our Tayside Area Convener and AST established a new relationship with the Carolina Trust to enable young people to be involved in the Panel Member selection

Partnering with the Scottish Legal Aid Board to provide Panel Member training about working with legal representatives in hearings

Working with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration to begin a pilot focussed on managing the number of people in a hearing

Started a new strategic relationship with CELCIS centred on improvement and implementation methods



# Including Young People in Our Work

This year, we've worked harder than ever to include young people in our work. Panel Member, AST and staff selection, redesigning our recruitment campaign, developing our Rights & Inclusion strategy and producing our new Corporate Plan are just some of the areas in which we did this.

**Dylan** is one of the young people we have worked with. Here he tells us about his experiences of being involved in recruitment:

*"Being involved in CHS isn't just another opportunity, for me it's been an absolutely amazing chance to see and understand how CHS runs as an organisation and to be so involved and influential at a time like this is something I'll take on years after now."*

*Being involved within the interview panels have further developed my people, listening and communication skills which are essential to any job.*

*We are in a changing landscape for care and it's incredible to be on the journey with CHS to better involve infants, children and young people in all aspects of their work!"*

We'd like to say a big

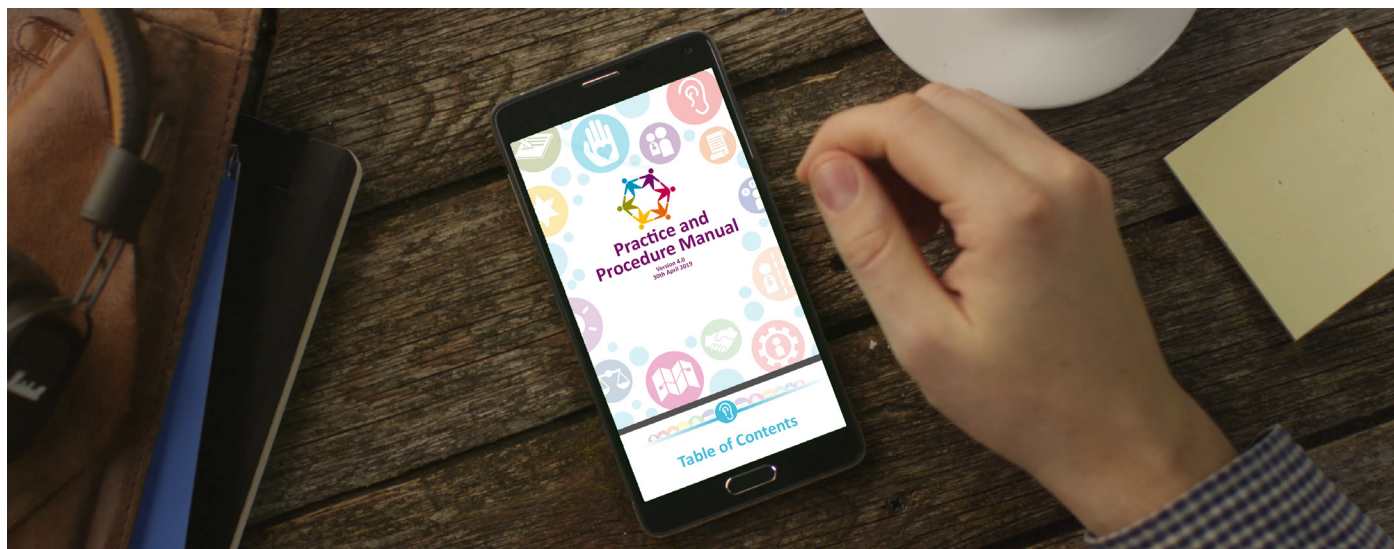
**THANK YOU**

to all the young people who have helped shaped and inform our work this year!



# Practice & Procedure Manual

Supporting our Corporate Parenting commitments to understanding the lives of children and young people who are in care better and improving how children's hearings are conducted, we launched a new, digital version of our Practice and Procedure Manual (PPM) in Summer 2019.



The PPM is the main source of guidance for Panel Members when preparing for, and participating in, children's hearings. In updating the PPM, the CHS Practice team worked in collaboration with members of the CHS community, as well as other expert organisations such as the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, the CHS Learning Academy, CELCIS, CYCJ, and CEDAR. The work with these organisations allowed us to develop a new advice section called 'Informing Decision: Improving Outcomes'. This section includes advice and information on topics such as:

- Permanence
- Working with Interpreters
- Inclusive Language
- Domestic Abuse
- Gender Identity and Sexuality
- Transitions from the children's hearing system for Older Children

**In the first three months after its launch, the PPM was viewed over...**

**10,000**  
times

The new PPM is available to view here: [CHS Digital PPM](#)

**Thank You!**

**3,000**

volunteers give their time to support infants, children and young people in local communities across Scotland



**THANK YOU FOR  
EVERYTHING YOU DO!**



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