



children's
hearings
scotland

Impact Report 2024-25



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Foreword

I am delighted to share this year's Children's Hearings Scotland Impact Report for 2024-25. This report aims to highlight the impact that Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) has had on children's hearings, our staff and volunteer community and most importantly the lives of children and young people. It sets out to capture not only the outcomes of our work but also the experiences of those involved.

Over the past year, CHS has continued to shape and inform what we expect to be some of the most transformational changes since Children's Hearings Scotland was set up in 2013.



Elliot Jackson
National Convener & Chief Executive

One of the highlights this year has been the creation of our Experts by Experience, a group of young people aged 14 to 25, from across Scotland, with lived experience of hearings. The creation of this group is a significant step forward in how we listen to and learn from children and young people.

We have also played a leading role in shaping national reform. From our work on hearings redesign, to the Care and Justice Act and the incorporation of the UNCRC, CHS has worked with the Scottish Government and partners in the children's hearings space to ensure that those with lived experience of the hearings system and the voices of children and young people are at the centre of all decisions.

Our progress has been possible because of the strong collaborations and partnerships we have developed. Across Scotland, we are working with social work, advocacy, education and health partners to respond to local challenges and improve the hearings experience for children and families.

In 2024/25 21,313 hearings took place to support and protect 9,385 infants, children and young people. This could not have been achieved without the extraordinary commitment of our volunteer community and staff. I would like to thank them and our Experts by Experience for everything they have done this year to improve the hearings system and keep the Promise to Scotland's infants, children and young people.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

Elliot Jackson
National Convener and Chief Executive



1. FOCUS ON: Children & young people



1. FOCUS ON

Children and young people

1.1 Upholding children's rights

The **Children's Participation and Rights Strategy** was launched in November 2024. Co-designed with young people, the strategy makes commitments on how CHS involves infants, children and young people with lived experience of the Children's Hearings System. The strategy reinforces our purpose to ensure our hearings make child-centred decisions that respect and protect children's rights and support them to thrive.



Work on the strategy is ongoing and the implementation plan is updated annually with input from young people.

'The young people were very pleased that they have been taken seriously and that their views are being heard and acted on.'

– The Good Shepherd Centre

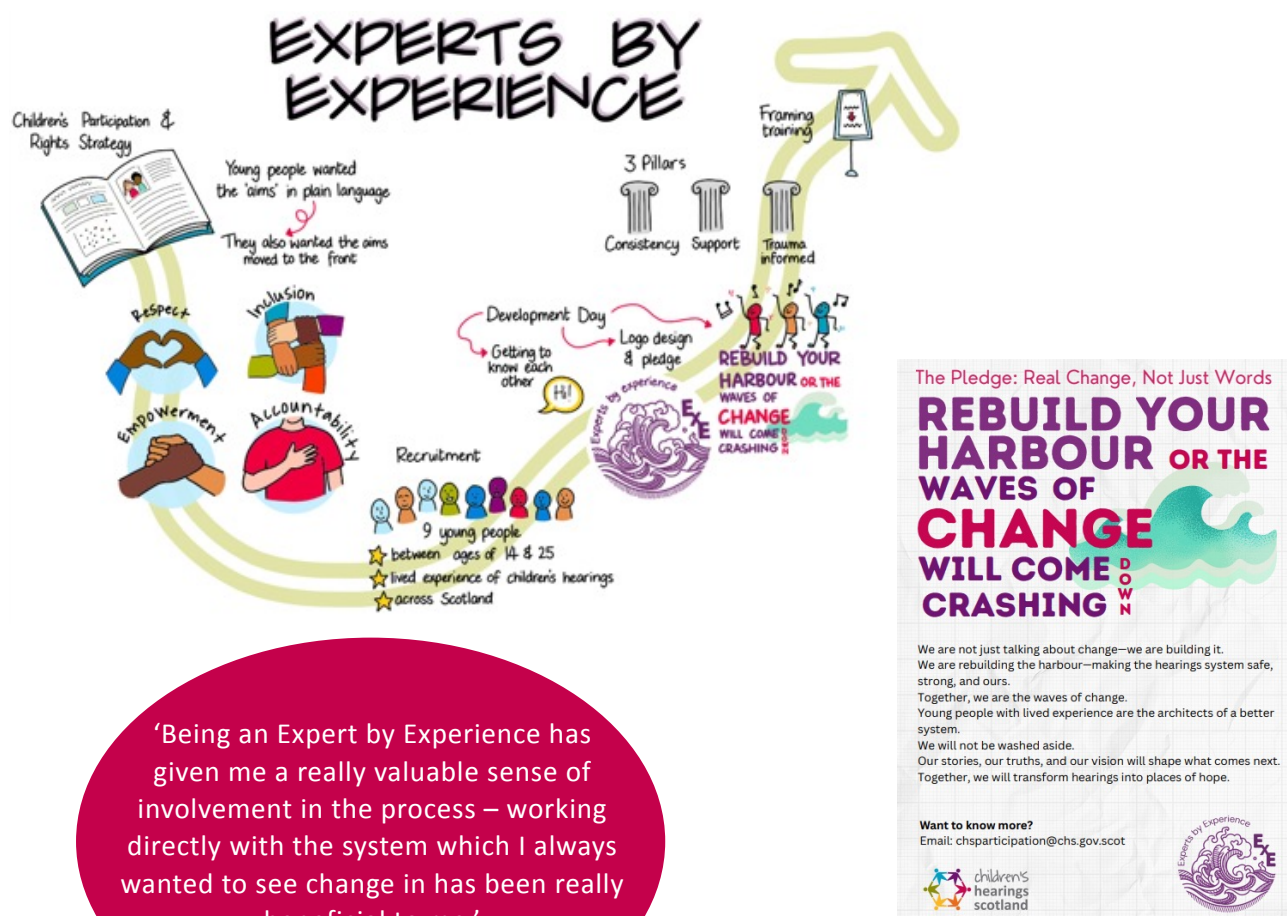
'I love how the quotes from different young people are clearly informing the strategy.'

– OHOV

1.2 Young people at the heart of CHS strategy

CHS is committed to providing opportunities for children and young people with lived experience of the hearings system to have their voice heard and make a difference, and to influence the work of CHS to improve outcomes for children and young people.

In 2024-25, CHS developed and launched Experts by Experience. This is a structured, supported and remunerated CHS national participation group, for children and young people, between the ages of 14 and 25, with lived experience of the hearings system. The group met for the first time in March 25 and their voices are now fully embedded into the work of CHS.



'Being an Expert by Experience has given me a really valuable sense of involvement in the process – working directly with the system which I always wanted to see change in has been really beneficial to me.'

– RM, Expert

'I'm very happy and proud to be part of the Experts by Experience group. With the commitment given it will be an integral part of the organisation with the full backing of the Board and the staff team.'

– LS, Expert

'Being able to help on the update of the recruitment guide was a great privilege.'

– GM, Expert

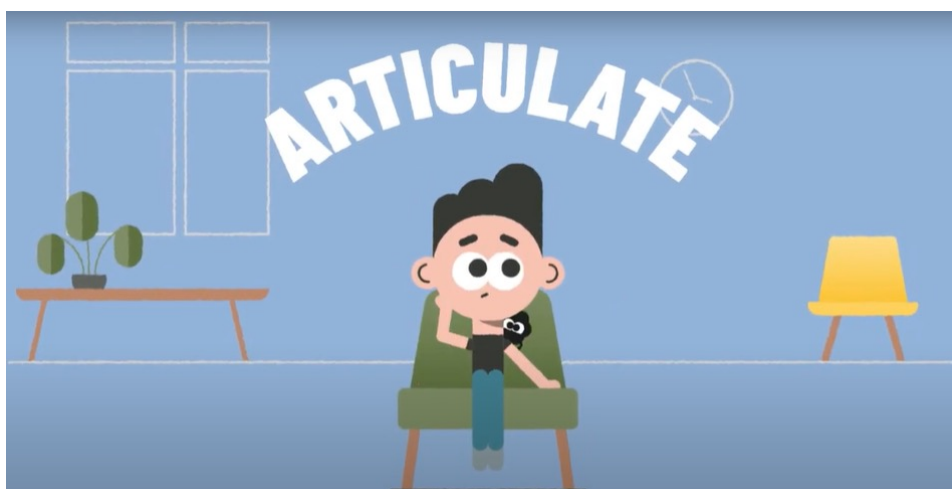
'My experience with CHS has been absolutely amazing. CHS is like one big family.'

– GM, Expert

1.3 Award winning work on Language in the Hearing Room

In April 2024, as part of its commitment to ensuring the language used in a hearing is child centred and trauma informed, CHS worked with Language Leaders to create Language in the Hearing Room, a guide to help Panel Members ensure their practice aligns with the Language Leaders' four key principles: personalised, balanced, involved, non-stigmatising.

To bring this guide to life CHS partnered with Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV) on the development and creation of the Articulate Animation, which was co-designed and co-produced with OHOV Board members. The Articulate animation won top prize in the Design for Good Category at the 2025 Scottish Design Awards.



'As someone who was 12 and articulate I really hope the animation helps to empower everyone to make transformative change in hearings.'
– Ciara, OHOV Board Member

'It reinforces that we all need to think before we speak.'
– Dorothy Combe, Panel Member

1.4 Listening and encouraging feedback



Tell us what you think!

At CHS we are always looking at new ways to improve and the best way for us to do this, is for you to tell us!

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU →

We created a Participation Group, bringing together key staff at CHS who work directly with children and young people, to ensure that children and young people are at the heart of how CHS learns and improves. This group builds on the Experts by Experience framework, strengthening our culture of listening and responding to the voices of children and young people. The feedback and insight will give us scope to challenge the way we do things and develop creative ideas based on what children and young people tell us they want.

‘Panel Members should tell us during hearings that we can give feedback. They also need to tell us how.’

1.5 Digital advances to improve the hearings experience

Over the last year we have made over 150 improvements to our digital systems, including changes to improve the hearings experience for young people.

Children and young people have told us that they value seeing the same Panel Members across different hearings. Working with SCRA, we updated our digital systems to make it easier for volunteers to make this happen, creating a more trauma-informed experience.

‘I was on a hearing last week and the continuity request I had asked for was achieved. This is such an improvement because quite often they weren’t followed up in the past.’

– Highland, Moray and Eilean Siar
Panel Engagement Lead

We have also improved our digital systems to make it easier for children and young people to choose whether they attend a hearing face-to-face or virtually. Over the last year we have supplied our community with 800 new laptops and we have received positive feedback from Panel Members on the improvements this has made to the virtual hearings experience.

Our rota systems have been upgraded too, allowing Panel Members to match their availability more easily to hearings and helping ensure statutory duties are met.

1.6 Involving young people in CHS recruitment

CHS wanted to meaningfully involve young people with lived experience of the hearings system in the recruitment of the CHS National Team, Board members and Panel Members.

Panel Members

CHS co-produced a recruitment guide on how to involve young people with lived experience in the full Panel Member recruitment process, from the advertising campaign all the way through to interview.

Central to the selection process was the voice of people with lived experience of the hearings system. Working closely with our Participation Team and OHOV we developed and filmed a scenario where candidates were asked to research and prepare their response to the below statement as part of the interview.

“Children and young people sometimes feel that Panel Members are going to judge us based on what they have read about us.”



National Team

CHS's People Operations Team also worked closely with the Participation Team and young people with care experience to review our staff recruitment process, identifying gaps and challenges and developing updated processes and guidance.

Most recently we involved a young person with lived experience in the hiring of the Quality Manager, which included a video clip to encourage applications. The majority of applicants watched the video and 92% of those that watched it said that it positively or very positively impacted their decision to apply for the post. Most significantly, the video helped CHS attract candidates who were passionate about ensuring that children and young people are at the heart of all that we do.

‘It was refreshing to hear from people with experience of the service and what they were looking for. A creative refreshing angle for recruitment!’

‘When I was sitting on interview boards, deciding who got the job, my views were taken equally as everyone else’s. When I was asking questions, some people, (candidates) instead of looking at me, were looking at older people in the room – this wasn’t a good sign and wasn’t respectful, particularly where a big part of the job is to listen to children and young people.’
– RM, Expert

2. FOCUS ON: Volunteers



2. FOCUS ON

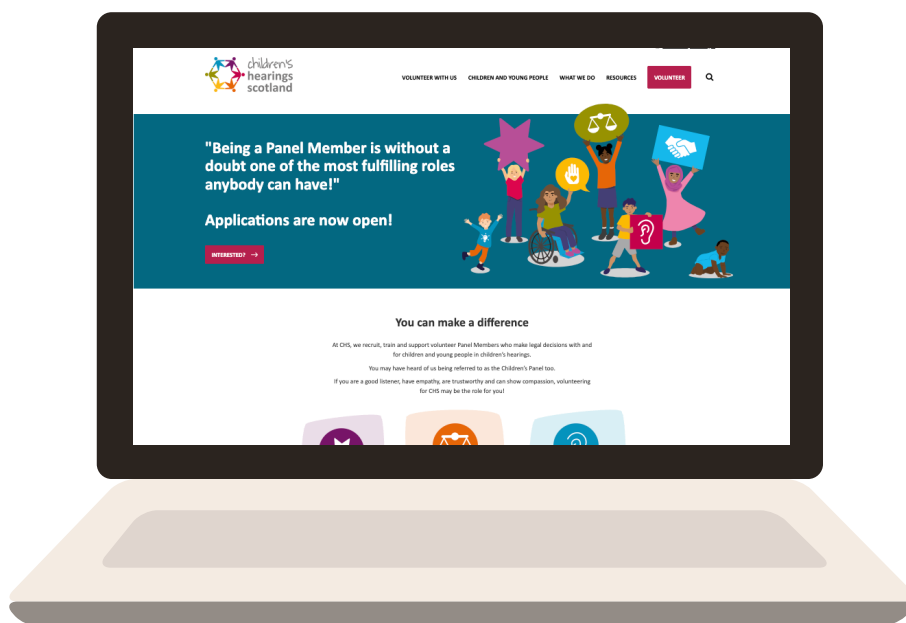
Volunteers

2.1 Recruiting Panel Members that put children first

To ensure we continue to meet demand, CHS delivered two national recruitment campaigns in 2024–25. This is the first time we have run two consecutive campaigns within a single year. Together, these campaigns attracted over 1,500 applications, generated significant engagement with our website and our information sessions, and led to the appointment of 550 new Panel Members between March and August 2025.



The advertising campaign used genuine and inspirational testimonials from our current panel community. The website was also refreshed to make the application process easier and to provide a clearer explanation of the role and its requirements, helping us to attract the right candidates. We also enhanced our employer and partner engagement to expand our reach and encourage a supportive environment that would reduce the barriers people face in volunteering.



Going forward we have now committed to two campaigns a year to ensure we have the capacity for the upcoming enactment of the Children (Care and Justice) Act 2024, which will expand the hearings system to include all 16- and 17-year-olds in 2026.

2.2 Driving consistency and quality across hearings

The **CHS Quality Strategy**, launched in October 2024, outlines CHS's ambition to ensure hearings deliver a consistent and reliable standard, regardless of location. We know that quality is everyone's responsibility, and that together we can strive to do the best job we can for infants, children and young people.

Placing infants, children and young people at the centre, the strategy focuses on quality planning, quality control and quality assurance. All our activities are embedded in our values, national standards, effective leadership and a learning culture that sets the direction of our work.

While data, evidence and processes are important considerations, it is people, relationships and connections that drive lasting change. Our strategy is about stepping up and stepping forward as an organisation. Our experience, just in a few months since its publication, is that people across our National Team and our Community are enthusiastically stepping into collaborative relationships in our development space.

Key achievements in 2024–25 include:

- **Quality Conversations:** three series of structured dialogue sessions with volunteers and the National Team, gathering insights to help shape strategy design, implementation and use of evidence.
- **Panel Practice Advisor (PPA) observations:** undertook 2,487 quality assurance observations. This gave us a direct view into hearings practice and helped us to identify where we can improve.
- **National Lead PPA Group:** established the National Lead PPA group to share learning, promote consistency, and co-produce improvements.
- **Data and evidence mapping:** mapped existing quality assurance evidence across CHS, bringing together insights from staff across different teams to create a more joined-up picture that will support continuous learning and improvement.

Together, these developments show how the **Quality Strategy** is embedding a culture of shared responsibility and collaboration, ensuring better experiences and outcomes for infants, children and young people.



2.3 Preparing Panel Members for changes to the Children's Hearings System

The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 extends the Children's Hearings System to all under-18s, including 16- and 17-year-olds for the first time.

CHS has been working to support and up-skill Panel Members, so they feel confident and prepared for the changes. Collaboration with OHOV ensured that the voices of young people were included when producing new learning resources. Their insight informed the 'Responding to the Needs of Older Children' module, launched in May. This learning module will help Panel Members to understand older children's decision-making and what influences it; identify the rights and needs of older children referred to the hearings system; identify common issues; and understand how to effectively communicate with and support older children in hearings.

A Town Hall webinar focusing on the Care and Justice Act and a workshop on the needs of 16- and 17-year-olds in the hearings system, hosted by Children and Young People's Centre for Justice, all helped to prepare our volunteers to support older children referred to the hearings system.

In all this work, CHS has played an important role in influencing the narrative around child-friendly justice and children's rights, emphasising the 'needs not deeds' principle of the hearings system.

So far 824 Panel Members have completed the new learning course and of these:

- 88% agree that they have an improved understanding of older children's decision making and what influences this
- 88% agree that they can Identify the rights and needs of older children who are referred to the hearings system better
- 86% agree that they can Identify common issues that may affect older children within the hearings system
- 86% agree that they understand how to effectively communicate with and support older children in the hearing space

'A really good interactive module that has given me some knowledge ready for the implementation and also allowed some reflection on how I will approach 16- and 17-year-olds in their hearings.'

2.4 Supporting Panel Member decision making

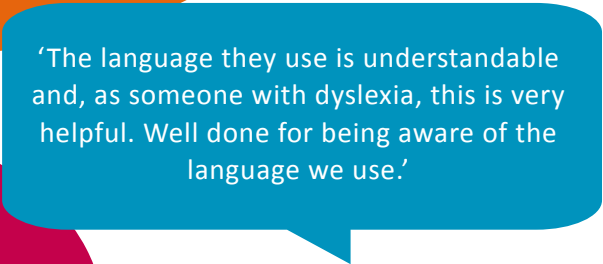
CHS has a statutory duty to ensure our Panel Members have the professional skills, knowledge and expertise they need to make some of the most difficult decisions for the children of Scotland. The Practice and Policy team works closely with the CHS Area Support Teams to ensure:

- Panel Members understand and feel confident about the range of options available to them at a hearing
- Panel Members are supported to understand complex legal or procedural information
- Panel Members are provided with information to help them make the best decisions for infants, children and young people
- improved experiences for children at hearings and a reduction in drift and delay in the decision-making processes

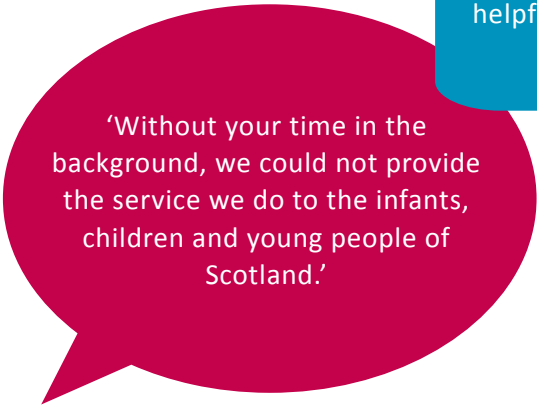
As well as responding to hundreds of Panel Member enquiries throughout the year we also commissioned 26 Independent Reports in response to requests from Panel Members, who wanted further information to help them come to a decision. These reports are written by Independent Report Writers with significant knowledge and expertise in the fields of social work, psychiatry, educational psychology, clinical psychology and forensic psychology. We also undertook a pilot project to assess the impact of the Independent Report function, which demonstrated the positive impact Independent Reports had in supporting Panel Members to make decisions.



'As a Panel Member, I wanted to reach out and personally thank your team for the continued support and advice they provide Panel Members. I have reached out a number of times over the last few months for advice, your team has always come back quickly and provided me with the answer to my questions the first time.'



'The language they use is understandable and, as someone with dyslexia, this is very helpful. Well done for being aware of the language we use.'



'Without your time in the background, we could not provide the service we do to the infants, children and young people of Scotland.'

2.5 Volunteer voices shaping the redesign of children's hearings

Community Views launched in 2024 to ensure the voices of CHS volunteers informed the Scottish Government's consultation on Children's Hearings Redesign.



Community Views began with a survey of the whole CHS community, followed by a two-day event in September where Panel Members came together from across Scotland to share their views on the highest priority issues in the hearings system. Views were collated and submitted to the Government to help shape and influence the development of the proposed Promise legislation.

2.6 Training our community

All CHS Panel Members are supported by a rigorous training programme that equips them with the knowledge and skills they need to make the best decisions for infants, children and young people. In addition to our pre-service training, we also run a range of training events and development days throughout the year:

Pre-Service training

In 2024-25, we restructured our Pre-Service learning programme, extending it from five to seven days to incorporate Management of Hearings, helping trainees build the leadership skills needed to chair a hearing from day one.

In this first cohort, 32% of Panel Members appointed were fully chair-trained and qualified as chairing Panel Members and are being supported to put their skills into practice. The other Panel Members appointed will continue to be supported to gain experience before fully transitioning into the Chair role.

Pre-Service training was updated in response to feedback from our Learning Survey, giving trainees more opportunities to practise through role play and receive feedback from trainers and volunteer facilitators. This improvement was delivered collaboratively across CHS teams and with the support of Learning Champions.

Trauma informed hearings

As part of our ongoing work to build a trauma responsive CHS, early in 2025, we launched the next phase of the NHS National Trauma Transformation Programme, with NHS Education Scotland. All active Panel Members and most of the National Team have now completed phase one training and local Wellbeing Coordinators are also having one-to-one conversations with volunteers to help them take a trauma-informed approach.

‘As a result of completing the trauma training, I put these skills into practice by reframing my language to make the young person feel safe and build trust. At the end of the hearing the Social Worker commented that this was the most this young person had participated in any of their hearings.’

– South East Panel Member

Regional Training Events and Resources

We held a number of development days and regional training events during 2024-25. Highlights included:

- The Central Area Support Team Development Day for Panel Members, supported by SCRA, the Court Service, OHOV and Clinical Director, Dr Lorraine Johnstone. The event provided Panel Members with knowledge on a range of subjects including the ‘Chair greeting the child’ initiative, the pressures facing young people and a trauma-informed approach.
- The Ayrshire Development Day on infant mental health, supported by Mini Minds Matter. The event helped CHS Panel Members to build their knowledge and understanding of infant mental health and how to listen to the voice of under-fives in the hearing room.
- Dumfries and Galloway refresher sessions from the National Team and Learning Academy and a series of learning events to cover key themes that Panel Members may encounter in the hearing room, such as domestic violence, the accessibility of education for nomadic communities and gender diversity.
- The Learning Academy collaborated with Ayrshire Area Support Team to deliver face-to-face mandatory training on Trauma and Child Protection for non-digital Panel Members.
- A video featuring local parents in Ayrshire with lived experience of hearings was created for Panel Member information sessions. The video shared honest reflections on their experiences of the hearings system and highlighted how small gestures, like being welcomed with a smile can ease stress and set a positive tone for families.

‘Extremely detailed impact on a tiny person with clarity on indicators displayed. I now feel much more empowered to ensure a tiny person’s feelings and voice is listened to via their ‘non-voice’.’

‘The infant session was incredible, so informative and will change how I approach similar cases at hearings.’

‘Outstanding presentation, should be held more often 2 or 3 times annually.’

2.7 Recognising the work of the CHS community

Our Panel Members hold one of the most significant and skilled volunteer roles in Scotland and every year we hold a range of events across Scotland to celebrate the work they do. This year we also nominated members of the community to attend the Royal Garden Party and more than 30 former and current members of the Panel Community attended the event at Holyroodhouse. The event was a great success and some of our community even got to meet the King and Queen.



2.8 Wellbeing support

Supporting the wellbeing of volunteers is central to helping our Panel Community feel valued and able to carry out their role with confidence. This year our team of Wellbeing Co-ordinators have put in place national and local initiatives across Scotland to help volunteers feel part of the CHS Community, provide practical support and embed a culture of kindness and care.

In Glasgow, a new Social and Wellbeing Committee has created opportunities for Panel Members to connect outside the hearing room, with events receiving positive feedback.



'...really good to get an opportunity to talk and socialise with other panel members ...'

PM that attended a community event in the summer.

In North Strathclyde, a community cafe, run in partnership with SCRA, gave volunteers a chance to raise local issues and shape improvements to tribunal delivery.

A refreshed leave of absence process and a step-by-step guide for Panel Members have ensured volunteers receive the right support when they need time away and are supported to be able to return to volunteering when they are able. Wellbeing Co-ordinators are also creating and encouraging space for reflection after hearings to help Panel Members continually improve the hearings experience for children and young people.

3. **FOCUS ON:** **Collaboration and partnership**



3. FOCUS ON

Collaboration and Partnership

CHS operates as a partnership within the care system, collaborating with a range of organisations and agencies to deliver the best outcomes for children and young people. This partnership working is a core element of CHS's work at every level of the organisation.

Nationally, our National Convener leads and shapes reform through membership of the Hearings Redesign Board, ensuring that the future hearings system meets the needs of tomorrow's children and young people. We are a key stakeholder in the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership, bringing together the leaders of over a dozen organisations who all seek to improve and develop children's hearings and are members of the Youth Justice Improvement Board and Advocacy Expert Reference Group.

Our new regional Tribunal Support Model has allowed CHS to replicate existing national improvement structures at a local level. Following well established models, such as Glasgow, the teams have worked alongside partners to set up Children's Hearings Improvement Partnerships or similar forums in areas where they were not in place.

3.1 Working in collaboration with social work

Tribunal Delivery Managers and Partnership Coordinators work alongside SCRA and social work colleagues week in, week out, to ensure hearings experiences for children and families are the best they can be in each local area. This includes joint training sessions to understand each other's roles better, de-briefs and lessons learned after difficult hearings and reviewing local data to ensure any trends are identified and addressed as soon as possible.

This partnership is working particularly well in Glasgow where we have now built relationships across all 12 Service Managers in Social Work and meet quarterly to plan future partnership work.

'In my discussions with social work staff they have fed back how beneficial the knowledge exchange sessions with Panel Members have been – not just in developing working relationships but enhancing a better understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities which can only be a good thing in supporting clear, rational and timeous decision making for children and young people.'

– Aileen Barker, Service Manager, South Ayrshire

'I gained a lot of knowledge about the processes social work go through to help, support and assess families. It has given me things to think about around decisions about family.'

– South Ayrshire Panel Member

4. FOCUS ON: Feedback



4. FOCUS ON

Feedback

CHS aims to handle complaints and feedback consistently and transparently, using them as an opportunity to learn and improve practice. Over the last year our Feedback and Complaints Team undertook training with our new Regional Teams to help improve our approach to complaints. The training has helped Regional Teams to support and encourage feedback and keep accurate records so that we can improve the experience for everyone in the hearing room. As a result of this work, volunteers have received more consistent support, which has strengthened how we manage feedback and complaints.

CHS is also involved with the SCRA Learning Leads group, and we have taken the themes and trends identified from complaints and feedback and fed them into the review and analysis. This has ensured that the complaint themes are fed into training resources and delivered to those who would benefit from it the most. The training packages will be made available centrally to support improvement across Scotland.



5. **FOCUS ON:** Improvement and reform



5. FOCUS ON

Improvement and reform

The hearings system is changing, from the extension of rights under the Care and Justice Act, to the ongoing sector-wide work to redesign hearings and the incorporation of the UNCRC into law. CHS is playing a key role in making sure the needs of infants, children and young people are at the heart of these changes and that any reforms are consistent with Keeping The Promise.

CHS contributed to the Scottish Government's Children's Hearings Redesign consultation, providing views on a range of policy proposals to strengthen and improve the system, ensure its sustainability and improve outcomes for infants, children and young people.

As part of this work, CHS engaged the views of Panel Members and young people through meetings, focus groups and a residential weekend to explore the implications of the Government's proposals and develop their response to the consultation. We were keen to ensure the experiences of both Panel Members and care experienced young people were contributing to policy development discussions and influencing decision making.

New legislation was subsequently introduced to the Scottish Parliament in July 2025 to help meet the aspirations of the Promise. Alongside this, CHS is continuing to progress non-legislative improvements to the hearings system. This includes initiatives such as Chair Greeting the Child and developing bespoke practice resources.

Read CHS's response to the consultation



CONCLUSION



Children and young people at the heart of all we do

The past year has reinforced CHS's commitment to placing children and young people at the heart of all that we do. From the launch of the **Children's Participation and Rights Strategy**, to the establishment of our Experts by Experience group, their voices have not only been heard but meaningfully embedded in decision-making and system change. Initiatives such as the award-winning Articulate animation and the co-production of recruitment processes underline how lived experience continues to shape our work and our culture.

A strong and supported volunteer community

Our Panel Members remain the foundation of the hearings system. Recruitment campaigns, high-quality training, and wellbeing initiatives have ensured that we recruit the right volunteers and equip them with the skills, knowledge and support they need to make complex and compassionate decisions for Scotland's children and young people.

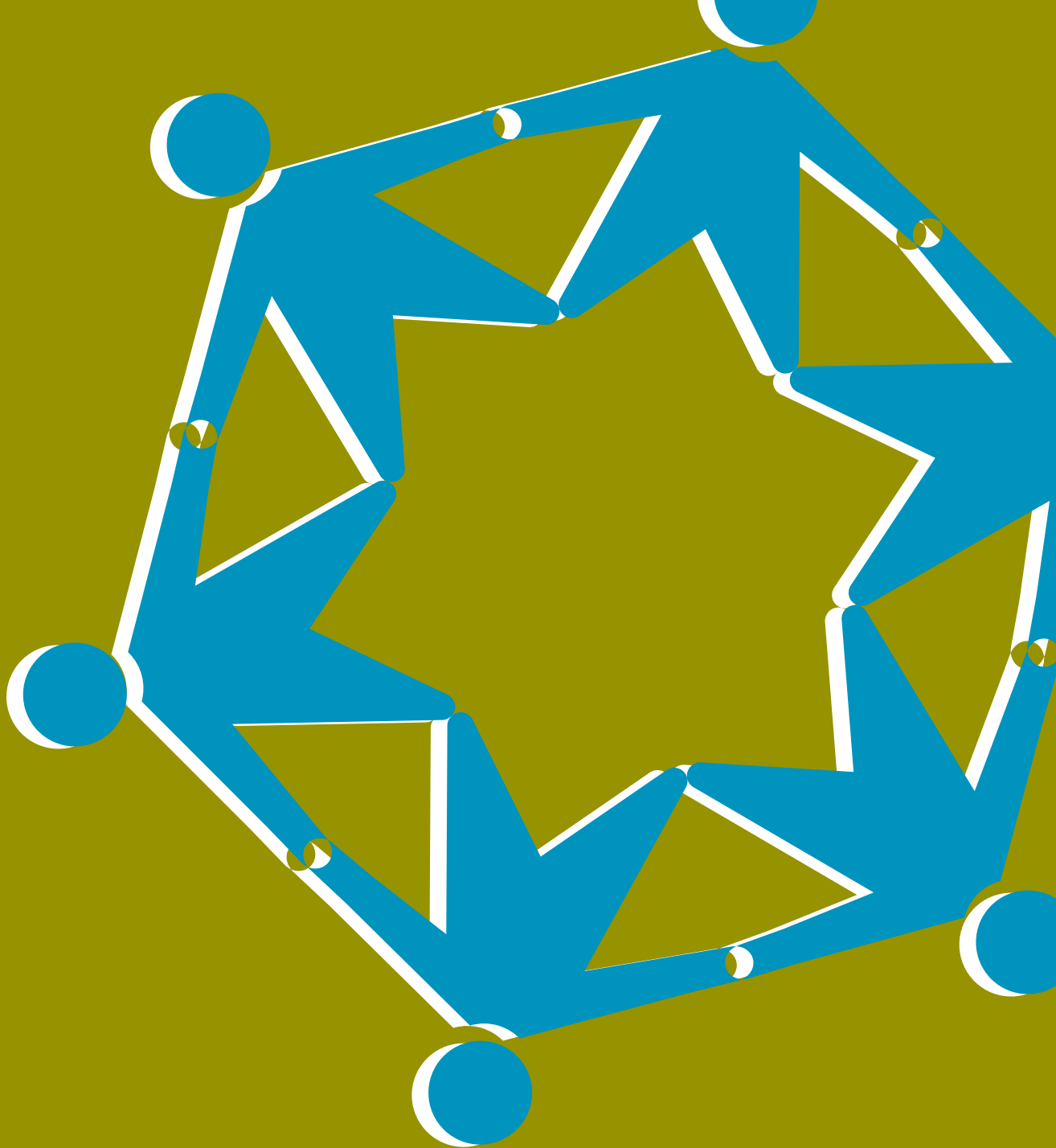
Partnership as a driver of change

Partnership has been another defining feature of the year. Through effective collaboration we have strengthened the way the hearings system works for children and young people. The introduction of the regional Tribunal Support Model, closer working with social work, and new forums with advocacy, education and health partners are helping us to address local challenges more directly and deliver better outcomes for children and young people.

Shaping reform with volunteers and young people

The hearings system is evolving. From the expansion of rights under the Care and Justice Act to the hearings redesign process and incorporation of the UNCRC, CHS has played a central role in shaping reform. By involving both volunteers and young people in consultation and policy development, CHS is ensuring that change is rooted in real experience and aligned with Keeping The Promise.





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