



children's
hearings
scotland

Impact Report 2023-2024



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FOREWORD

By Elliot Jackson, National Convener and Chief Executive

It has been a year of substantial change for Children's Hearings Scotland: 2023-24 brought significant advances towards system reform and improvement as well as changes to our own internal structures. In May 2023 the Hearings System Working Group (HSWG) published the 'Hearings for Children: Hearings System Working Group's Redesign Report' detailing what a transformed hearings system could look like for children and their families. In December the Scottish Government published its response, accepting the vast majority of recommendations from the Hearings for Children report.



While we pored over the Hearings for Children report, eager to get started on its recommended improvements to hearings, we attended Parliament to provide our counsel and support for the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill. We welcomed the inclusion of all 16- and 17-year-olds into the children's hearing system, as well as the opportunities and challenges that will bring.

Both the Care and Justice Bill, which has since become an Act, and the accepted recommendations from the Hearings for Children report offer us a unique opportunity to shape and improve a redesigned Children's Hearings System in a way that would make Lord Kilbrandon proud. In order to achieve this, we knew we required internal changes to our organisational structure and the way we deliver tribunal support to ensure we have the resources and framework required to better fulfil our duties as a Corporate Parent.

In this report we set out how we have adapted and grown to meet the needs of our changing landscape. Among all this change, and change can be unsettling, I have been inspired by the depth of our Panel Community's commitment to keeping children's and young people's needs the overriding priority.

Throughout this annual Impact Report we highlight our achievements in 2023-24 and how we have fulfilled our duty as a Corporate Parent. But as always, the biggest direct impact we had was on the infants, children and young people who come before hearings, and their families. In 2023-24 we worked with our partner organisations to ensure that 21,613 hearings took place to support and protect 10,197 children.

My sincere thanks go to our volunteers and staff for their work in achieving all of the impacts described in this report.

1. FOCUS ON: Children & young people



FOCUS ON:

Children and young people



Progressing children's rights and our duties as a Corporate Parent

As a Corporate Parent under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, it is the duty of CHS and the National Convener to make sure our attention and resources are focused on safeguarding and upholding the rights of, and promoting the wellbeing of, Scotland's looked-after children and care leavers. CHS and the National Convener deliver and monitor these duties together.

As part of our organisational change programme, we reaffirmed our commitment as a Corporate Parent to deliver the best outcomes for, and meet the needs of, looked-after children in Scotland by creating a new Directorate of Positive Outcomes. This Directorate

incorporates our Practice and Policy, Participation, Feedback, Learning, and Quality teams to give us a joined-up approach to supporting Panel Members to make informed rights based decisions.

In October 2023 we published our second Progressing Rights report covering our work to imbed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in all that we do.

'Progressing Rights at Children's Hearings Scotland 2020-2023' details how CHS has embedded children's rights in all aspects of its work, from recruiting and training volunteer Panel Members to influencing government policy. It is structured around the Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, mapping CHS's progress on children's rights against the convention.

Throughout the following section of this report you will read how we have fulfilled our duties as corporate parents to consult, involve, co-produce with and listen to the voices of children, young people and those with lived experience to improve our work and to uphold and promote children's rights in all we do.

"Our core purpose is upholding children's rights. Through collaboration and continued focus on this goal, the hearings system will provide a nurturing, inclusive space for Scotland's children."

Elliot Jackson, National Convener/CEO Children's Hearings Scotland

1.1 Celebrating with the care-experienced community

1.1.1 The Love Rally and Care Experienced Week



Care Experienced Week is a big week for CHS. We celebrate this by taking part in events, and sharing posts and information across our digital and social media, demonstrating why CHS matters to infants, children and young people. Care Experienced Week launches with the Love Rally and in 2023 this was hosted by Who Cares? Scotland, taking place in Glasgow on Sunday 29 October. CHS Board member Beth-Anne Mcdowall, a lifelong campaigner for care experienced people, took to the stage to deliver a powerful message and a poem.

Joining Beth-Anne from CHS were National Team colleagues Catherine Goodfellow and Michael Stewart. More than 300 people came together to march through the streets and to demand love and lifelong rights for care experienced people.

CHS and SCRA marked Care Experienced Week 2023 by launching our postcard pilot in hearing centres across Moray and Central and West Lothian. You can read more about the pilot further on in this report.



“ Honoured and privileged to have spoken again at today’s @whocaresscot #LoveRally as part of #CEW23. Standing on that stage today looking out to so many people whom I love and adore beyond measure was so special.” @ Beth_A_Mcdowall on X (formerly Twitter)



1.2 Consultation and co-design with children and young people

1.2.1 Children's Rights and Inclusion Strategy refresh

Following the publication of the Hearings for Children report, CHS's Children's Rights and Inclusion Coordinator convened a one-off 'Review and Refresh' session with the CHS Participation Group in May 2023 to refine our Children's Rights and Inclusion Strategy for updated publication in June 2023. The group developed ways to refresh the strategy and improve the tone and layout of the document.

Their recommendations included removing acronyms and simplifying language to make the document more child-friendly; adding child-friendly feedback and complaints into appropriate areas of the strategy; and highlighting the approach of including children's views about who should be in the hearing room.

IMPACT: Strategic consultation

The Participation Group recognised the evolving landscape within the sector and the development of participation activities within CHS, which fed into the Strategic Review of Participation (noted below). By using the suggestions from the Participation Group's 'Review and Refresh' session, the recommended approaches helped to streamline overall planning and delivery cycles and improve the accessibility of our strategy.

1.2.2 Strategic review of participation – consultation and influence

In advance of the publication of our revised Children’s Rights Strategy in 2024-25, our Practice and Standards team carried out an extensive review of our approach to participation. The review focused both on children and young people’s participation in CHS and their effective participation in children’s hearings. The Hearings for Children report stated that the ‘most crucial aspect’ of a redesigned hearings system is the participation of children.

Our review of participation, informed by the views of children and young people, provided CHS the opportunity to be innovative, bold and at the forefront of realising children’s rights to participate in the work of CHS. The strategic review has provided the foundations for meaningful collaboration, co-production and consultation with children and young people with lived experience of the hearings system.

IMPACT: Building a participation team and framework

The review and its approach were enthusiastically approved by the CHS Board. It established new routes for participation at and with CHS including recruitment of Experts by Experience, the creation of a Partners Participation Network, and strengthening of relationships with Champs Boards, the Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV) Board, and other local and national groups of young people. As part of the participation review CHS now has a fully resourced participation team and has successfully recruited a Participation Coordinator and a Lived Experience Advisor to lead and deliver all participation and engagement work.

1.2.3 Language Leaders

The Language Leaders group is an initiative backed by the Children’s Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) which has seen CHS working alongside young people from Our Hearings, Our Voice, the CELCIS VIP project and a local Champions Board, as well as professionals within the hearings system. As a member since November 2022, CHS has supported the group’s aims to influence everyone involved in a children’s hearing to recognise the power of their language and to use it in a way that supports and de-stigmatises children and young people in their hearing.

Throughout 2023-24 we continued our membership in the group, which culminated in the producing a new Language in the Hearing Room Guide designed to help Panel Members change their approach to language.

To draft this guidance a series of workshops were carried out with children and young people giving the Language Leaders insight into the impact of words and phrases written in reports and spoken in meetings that a looked-after child attends, including their hearings. From

these inputs, the Language Leaders developed four principles to be applied to language used in the hearings system:

- be personalised
- be balanced
- be non-stigmatising
- make the child feel involved

“The language I hear, positive or negative, affects me at the time but some of it stays with me for life.”
- Our Hearings, Our Voice Board Member

IMPACT: Better guidance informed by the people language matters to the most

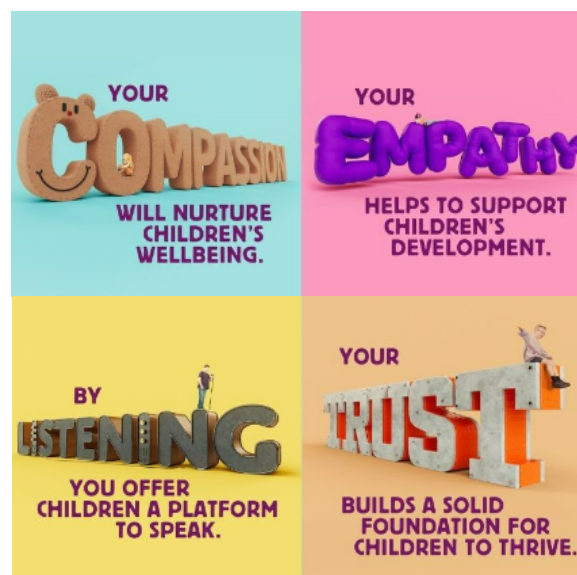
By working with children and young people with hearings experience to draft the guidance, we are confident we have the right principles and approach based on their needs, and not our impression of them.

1.2.4 Refreshed Recruitment Campaign

For our Autumn 2023 Panel Member recruitment campaign, we refreshed our campaign materials to enhance the qualities that young people said were essential to make a good Panel Member.

As part of the creative process, we consulted with our Participation Group throughout to review the messaging and visuals. Alongside this process, we worked with Each and Every Child, an initiative set up to shift public views of the care system and put those with lived experience at the heart of the conversation. They provided guidance and supported us to review the language being used to promote the role of the Panel Member to prospective volunteers.

The results were a refreshed recruitment campaign which was driven by the feedback from young people:



IMPACT: Getting our messaging right

The impact of having young people advise on projects like this is that it takes away the assumption that ‘this is what they want’. Including them in the creative process provides a meaningful way of ‘asking them’ and for them to tell us and challenge us.

1.2.5 The Better Meetings Project

The Better Meetings Project is a long-term collaboration between the Better Meetings group of care-experienced young people in Moray, Who Cares? Scotland, CHS, Moray Council, Highland Council and SCRA. It was initiated to increase the voice, choice and participation of children and young people in their meetings and hearings in the Moray and Highland Council areas.

As a group, the Better Meetings Project developed Practitioner Guides for Panel Members, social workers, reviewing officers and reporters that included a checklist of things they can do before, during and after a hearing or meeting to increase the voice, choice and participation of young people. The guides aim to foster a trauma-informed approach, giving the child or young person choice about how their meeting or hearing is conducted and how they give their views.



The group launched the guides in 2023 to practitioners across Highland and Moray and they are now being implemented.

IMPACT: changing behaviours in meetings

Feedback from those involved in the project has been that the guides are working well to change behaviours and put the young person at the centre of their meeting or hearing. They are helping to empower practitioners to make the hearings and meetings less formal and more child-centred. Below are quotes from an Advocacy Worker and Panel Members involved, showing just how beneficial this project has been.

'As a PPA I've seen some excellent use of the Practitioner guide in shaping the hearing and in making sure the child understood the decisions.'

-Highland and Moray PPA

"The most significant change for Moray's children and young people is having the opportunity to meet with the Chair of the panel along with the reporter in the waiting room immediately before the hearing. This is where they can agree how they would like to participate and the various choices open to them. On numerous occasions young people have taken up the offer to go into the hearing room first with myself alongside [advocacy] to

share their views, thoughts, feelings and aspirations. Panel Members have been incredibly welcoming, asking the young person where they would like to sit and engaging in age appropriate conversation to help them relax and ensure they feel comfortable speaking and sharing their views naturally. The main advantages are children and young people can be themselves, they are heard and not interrupted and gain a better sense of connection with panel members. Thereafter children and young people can decide whether or not they wish to stay in the hearing or not.” - Moray Advocacy Worker, Who Cares? Scotland.

1.3 Involving children and young people

1.3.1 Lived experience recruiters for Panel Members and staff

Having people with lived experience as part of our recruitment and selection team is integral to the work we do to select compassionate, empathetic and dedicated Panel Members.

As in previous years, CHS supported our Area Support Teams (ASTs) to recruit local people with lived experience, supporting and training them to interview and select the people they feel would become the future Panel Members they would like to see at hearings.



Before going on to participate in the recruitment and selection of new Panel Members, all our lived experience participants received training and support from the CHS Learning Academy and the Children’s Rights and Inclusion Coordinator, alongside their local AST members.

Here is what some of our lived experience recruiters have said about the role:

“I enjoyed it. It was challenging because I was out my comfort zone but there was good support so I’m really happy I did it.”

“It was empowering. I felt I had an important responsibility to make the right choices.”

“I got promoted at work after being a lived experienced recruiter because I was able to show that I had experience interviewing people and that I was reliable and a good decision maker.”

IMPACT: Lived experience recruiters
In the autumn 2023 campaign, more than half of our Area Support Teams had people with lived experience of attending hearings fully involved in selecting new trainee Panel Members.

1.4 Listening to children and young people

1.4.1 Child Friendly Feedback and Complaints Portal



[I am a young person and I want to give feedback.](#)



[I am a family member and I want to give feedback.](#)

As part of our programme of work to continue embedding the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in all that we do, CHS has made it easier for children and young people to give feedback on their hearings experiences – good or bad.

Through talking to and consulting with young people who have lived experience of hearings it became clear that they sometimes left hearings feeling they were unable to express their views. They told the Practice and Standards team that the problem was less about being able to complain, more about being able to tell organisations and people involved in the hearings system how they felt at all. It was also clear that young people sometimes did not know who to give feedback to – which organisation was responsible for the different parts of their care and support.

With the help of young people, we developed and launched a new feedback and complaints portal on our website, which was tested and refined in collaboration with children and young people. In addition to a dedicated space for young people to share their views, we worked closely with SCRA to develop a single point of entry for children and families wishing to provide feedback, as recommended in the Hearings for Children report.

“If we are going to improve hearings for children, it is vital that they are encouraged and supported to provide feedback. We need to make it a routine part of their hearing journey, not just when things go wrong but also when things go well. We need to remove barriers to providing feedback and also show that children’s feedback does make a real difference.”

– Stephen Bermingham, Practice and Standards Team, CHS

IMPACT:

From July 2023 when the portal launched through to March 2024 CHS has received:

- 12 feedback submissions made through the portal
- 2,483 visits to our main feedback and complaints web page
- 178 visits to our child friendly complaints web page
- 309 visits to our child friendly feedback web page

1.4.2 Complaint follow-up - visit to residential school



As a Corporate Parent, we have a duty to actively collect, listen and act on feedback received from children and young people. Following feedback received from a young person through our child friendly complaints portal about their hearing, two CHS colleagues visited a residential school to hear more from the young person and others about how hearings could be improved.

Meeting with residents of the school in their own space, and in the company of their trusted adults, allowed these young people to feel safe and supported, enabling open and honest conversations about the parts of hearings they don't like. After the visit, the CHS team made a short video summarising what they learned to share with all the residents and close the feedback loop.

“It is crucial that we learn from children’s feedback and to do this effectively we need to remove barriers. This can mean getting feedback at a time and a place that works for the child and in an environment where they feel comfortable and have the support of trusted adults.”
- Mel MacDonald, Complaints Management Officer, CHS

IMPACT: Gaining insight to improve experiences

We received valuable insight from the young people including the importance of advocacy, hearings taking place where young people feel safe, being with people they trust and being more creative about hearings. We have taken this feedback and are using it to ensure that all Panel Members understand the importance of Advocacy and that it is offered at every hearing. We are pursuing, as part of collaborative work on hearing improvements, ways in which we can meet children’s needs and wants in hearings, including looking at where they take place and who attends.

1.4.3 Postcards for feedback trial

In order to help young people provide feedback easily and quickly after their hearings, CHS worked with SCRA to pilot the use of a QR-coded postcard at hearing centres in Stirling, Elgin, Alloa, Falkirk and Livingston. It was launched in October 2023 and ran until March 2024.

At the end of each hearing, Panel Members offered children a feedback postcard. If the child was not present,



the card was given to a relative or caregiver to pass on. The postcards contained a QR code that linked to our child friendly feedback page where children are able to directly give views about their hearings to CHS and SCRA. Children were encouraged to share feedback on what went well or what needed improvement. Their input provided CHS and SCRA with vital feedback to enhance the hearings process from the viewpoint of those it most impacts.

IMPACT: Making it easier for young people to share their views

During the trial, the QR code was scanned more than 150 times with more than 10 pieces of feedback received. This includes reports of really positive experiences and useful feedback on how hearings can be improved.

“I felt that for once in my life I was actually listened to and my views were truly respected and taken into consideration. Having panel continuity throughout my hearings also played a big part ... these specific Panel Members really cared about me.”

- Young person in pilot

‘This is all invaluable feedback that I believe we would not have received without the postcards in the hearing room. We always want to hear more about the hearings experience directly from the children and young people involved, and getting it can prove difficult. So this additional feedback is really significant.’ – Mel McDonald, Complaints Management Officer at CHS

CHS and SCRA colleagues involved in delivering the trial have received positive anecdotal evidence from Panel Members and professionals involved in hearings.

2. FOCUS ON: Volunteers



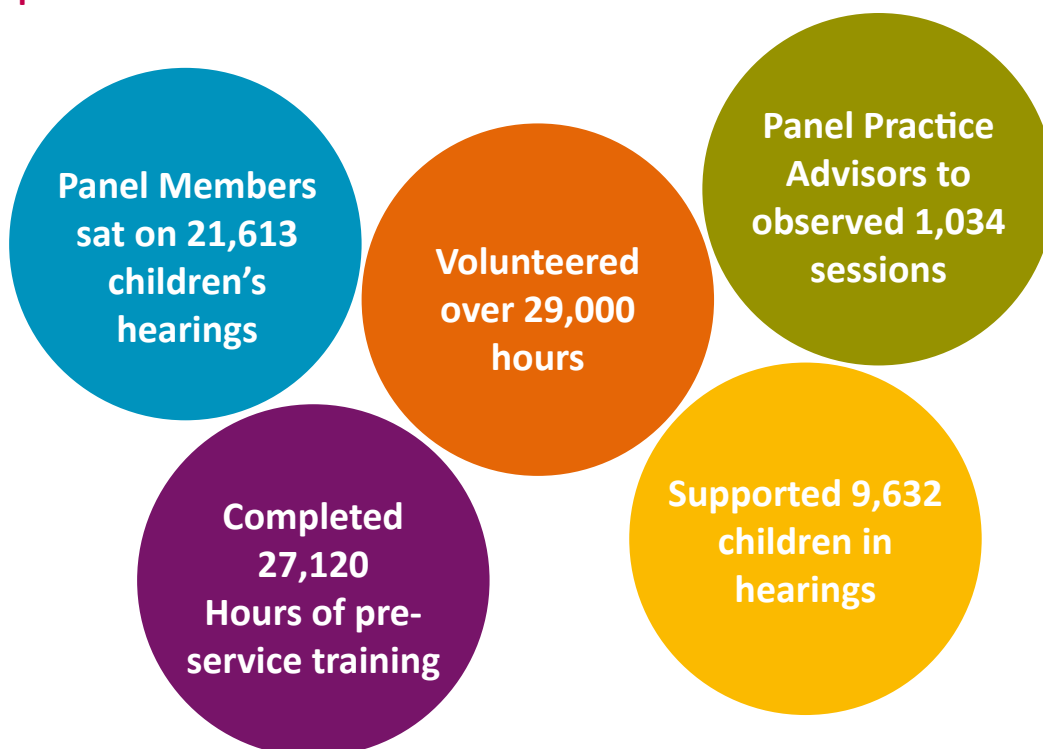
FOCUS ON:

Volunteers

Our volunteers make sure that all Scotland’s infants, children and young people feel safe, loved, valued and respected. They can be Area Support Team members, Panel Practice Advisors, or Tribunal Panel Members.

In every children’s hearing, Panel Members serve with professionalism and compassion to make the best decision for the wellbeing of the child. This important contribution to public life has a positive impact on our wider society, helping Scotland to be the best place to grow up and helping its children and young people to thrive. We remain grateful to our volunteers for the work that they do and their steadfast commitment to improve outcomes for Scotland’s infants, children and young people.

The Impact of our volunteers



“Panel Members continue to give so much to the children that the hearings system exists to help. Your care and concern for Scotland’s children, and the desire to help them when it is most needed, is an inspiration.”
Ian Donaldson, Deputy Director of Children’s Rights, Protection and Justice at the Scottish Government

2.1 Recognition

Our volunteers make life-changing decisions, and it is essential that their value to society is duly recognised by CHS and more widely. Members of our Board and Senior Leadership Team regularly visit our volunteers across the country for recognition events, and we proactively seek to highlight the work of Panel Members in the public and political arenas.

2.1.1 Panel Members celebrated in Scottish Parliament

On the evening of 27 June 2023, volunteers from across Scotland joined 'A celebration of the Children's Panel', a Parliamentary Reception at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. More than 100 Panel Members, Area Conveners and Clerks mingled with MSPs, National Team staff and friends and partners from across the children's sector. Sponsoring the event was Rona Mackay MSP, herself a former Panel Member.



"Panel Members make some of the most difficult and important decisions of any public servant. They come from all walks of life and do an incredible job."
-Rona Mackay MSP

Joining us on the evening were the CHS Participation Group, young people with lived experience of the hearings system. They took to the stage to share their experiences, good and bad, of hearings. Their stories made a big impact on everyone.

We presented 12 special recognition awards to Panel Members, from all over Scotland, to honour their exceptional hard work. The life-changing values of the Children's Hearings System were on show and everyone enjoyed the evening.

2.1.2 Glasgow Recognition event

One of the biggest recognition events in the calendar took place at Glasgow's City Chambers on 16 November, with a large number of volunteers, staff and Board members in attendance. The event was generously hosted by Glasgow City Council, and Bailie Patricia Ferguson offered the council's thanks to those receiving awards.

The Civic Reception celebrated significant milestones reached by volunteers in their service to the children and young people of Glasgow. Robert McLean received the standout award,

for 35 years' service as a Glasgow Panel Member.

2.1.3 North Lanarkshire Recognition Event

In February, Tribunal Delivery Manager Iain MacDonald joined North Lanarkshire volunteers in celebrating 160 years' combined service. Volunteers raised more than £540 on the evening for Monkland's Women's Aid.

Later that month, North Lanarkshire Council honoured retiring Area Convener Eddie McDowell with a civic reception. The civic reception was attended by Elliot Jackson, National Convener, and CHS colleagues Lynne Harrison and Catherine Goodfellow, as well as our North Lanarkshire Area Support Team.



“Eddie has been an outstanding representative for the Children’s Panel here in North Lanarkshire. He is so highly thought of by everyone who has worked with him.

“Eddie has been instrumental in fostering a supportive environment for Children’s Panel Members in North Lanarkshire, and his dedication and professionalism to helping children and young people has been inspirational.”

– North Lanarkshire Provost Kenneth Duffy

2.1.4 Ayrshire Recognition Event



Across 2023-24, our Senior Leadership Team travelled across Scotland to meet Panel Members. We celebrated many years of service to the Children’s Hearings System.

National Convener Elliot Jackson joined our Ayrshire Area Support Team in June. 23 volunteers celebrated 237 combined years' service. During 2023-24, volunteers in Ayrshire attended 2,160 hearings.



2.1.5 Volunteers' Week

We celebrate Volunteers' Week each year during the first week of June.

Across Volunteers' Week 2023, we

explored the difference volunteers make to the lives of infants, children and young people within the hearings system by talking to and showcasing volunteer Panel Members across Scotland.

Volunteers' Week celebrates the positive impact of volunteering on individuals. The contributions volunteers make go far beyond the hearing room.

CHS estimates that every year, volunteers put 500,000 hours into volunteering within the hearings system. This is the collective contribution of more than 2,200 volunteers supporting more than 10,000 infants, children and young people.

"It gives me a great sense of value and worth that I can directly be a part of such powerful change for families."

-Panel Member, Fife

"The Children's Panel allows for the child's views to be right at the centre, and for three independent people to make decisions on their behalf, to ensure a positive outcome which could literally change their life for the better."

Andrew Jones
Panel Member, Aberdeenshire



The Children's Hearings System is one of Scotland's most essential volunteering roles. It can be demanding, time-consuming and challenging. But our volunteers make a vital contribution to the lives of children, young people and families every day.

"It's a privilege to be trusted with the details of people's lives, and the feeling you get of doing something useful for people is very rewarding."
Stephen, Panel Member in West Dunbartonshire

"Forever grateful for the thousands of volunteers across Scotland supporting our country's children and their families. You matter. You make a difference. You help keep the promise."
Beth-Anne McDowall, Board Member

2.2 Supporting Panel Member decision making

Our key statutory duty, alongside recruiting Panel Members and Area Support Teams, is to train, support, and prepare them, ensuring they have the professional skills, knowledge and expertise required to make some of the most difficult and transformative decisions with and for the children of Scotland. Every year, not only do we evolve and adapt in response to changes in the policy and practice context in which we operate, but we drive improvement and lead change ourselves with our Panel Community.

2.2.1 Independent Report Writers

When Panel Members do not have enough information to make a substantive decision one of the options available to them is to request a report from an expert with relevant knowledge. This is referred to as an Independent Report. CHS works with a bank of Independent Report Writers with significant knowledge and expertise in the fields of social work, psychiatry, educational psychology, clinical psychology and forensic psychology.

In April 2023, a three-week recruitment campaign was initiated to increase the number of skilled Independent Writers within the CHS bank of professionals to meet the steady increase in requests for independent reports by Panel Members to support decision making in hearings.

Independent Report Writers are considered experts in their field and are based across the whole of Scotland, able to cover the full geographical span of children's hearings, which take place close to where a child or young person is based.

IMPACT: Expert independent reports

The Independent Report Writers Bank now has 36 writers in total. At present the bank is made up of 22 Social Workers, one Medical General Practitioner with a background in Psychiatry, five Educational Psychologists, seven Clinical Psychologists, one Forensic Psychologist and one Psychiatrist. Each member of the bank is an expert in their specialist field.

"We received an overwhelming number of applications to join the bank, and we've managed to select 17 professionals with diverse expertise and backgrounds. We are really pleased – this will help us prevent the drift and delay which can happen with complex situations and deliver the right outcomes for children and young people within the hearings system."

– Edward McKim, Practice and Policy Advisor

2.3 Equipping our community



CHS's Panel Members undergo a rigorous and continuous training programme to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to make positive decisions that will affect the lives and futures of not only infants, children and young people, but also their families, communities and wider society in years to come. In 2023-24 we continued to improve our pre-service training approach and the ongoing training Panel Members receive.

2.3.1 Pre-service training

For our 2024 trainee cohort, the CHS Learning Academy once again collaborated with our Area Support Teams to embrace our pre-service trainees through local welcome events. These events provided an opportunity for trainees to meet local teams and area buddies, as well as find answers to any questions.

2.3.2 Trauma-informed training and learning

“What is special about hearings is that the reason for being there is not held against the child or young person. We look at needs, not deeds, and treat every child or young person the same.”

Barbara, Panel Member in South Lanarkshire

All CHS Learning Academy staff have undergone trauma training to support trainees as they are often ‘first responders’ in times of crisis. Maintaining this training and knowledge helps Learning Academy staff to support all of our trainees and promote trauma informed practice methods.

In addition to providing front line support during pre-service training, the Learning Academy team promoted the use of the Wisdom App from Health Assured, referring to helpful sections of the app when discussing triggering subjects during training.

2.3.3 Instilling a rights-based approach

Each of the five pre-service days involved embedding the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into the training modules. Each session promoted the rights of young people in the hearing room in the first instance, as well as understanding the rights of others in respect to that child. Sessions were enhanced through the introduction of destigmatising language and behaviour and how to promote this within the hearing room.

IMPACT: Pre-service training

The CHS Learning Academy successfully delivered pre-service training for the latest Panel Member cohort, with 98% of candidates once again stating their outcomes for the course were met. The improvements and new measures put in place improved retention and supported more trainees to complete their pre-service training and be appointed as Panel Members.

2.4 Ongoing training in 2023-24

2.4.1 Trauma Informed Practice – Phase 1

We began our journey to become a trauma responsive organisation in 2021 and are now well on our way to becoming trauma informed in all that we do. Building a trauma-responsive CHS is an ambitious aim, and is a short-, medium- and long-term commitment. As part of this commitment, we worked with NHS Education for Scotland (NES) to develop and deliver Trauma Informed Practice workshops, training modules and videos to our CHS colleagues and Panel Community. We have embedded levels 1 & 2 of the NES Trauma Informed learning modules into our pre-service training and have rolled out level 1 to all our staff and community.

IMPACT: Trauma Training Phase 1

98% of our volunteer Panel Members have completed level 1 of the NES training. We are now working to ensure all CHS colleagues have completed this first part of the learning journey and increasing our community completion rates to 100% ahead of launching part two of the training in 2024-25.

2.5 Engaging with our Panel Member community

2.5.1 Local engagement

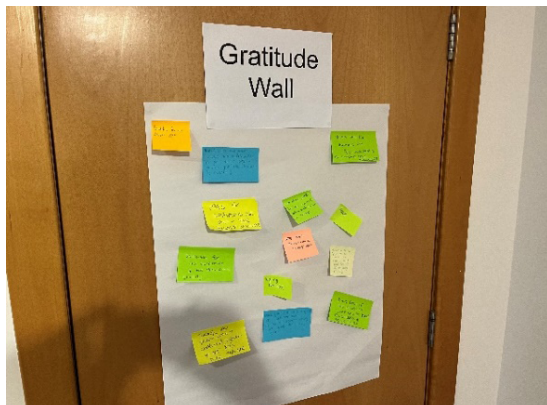
Across Scotland, Area Support Teams (ASTs) support Panel Members. They work with local partners to celebrate and improve the work of the Children's Hearings System.

Area Support Teams were preparing our Panel Community for upcoming changes to how the hearings system will run. These include the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act, which will bring more young people aged 16 and 17 into hearings, and the implementation of the Tribunal Support Model.



We met volunteers across Scotland, from Argyll and Bute to Scottish Borders, Eilean Siar and Shetland. Our trip to Shetland included Rota Allocation Manager Judy Wilson joining remotely to explore the new rota system. The National Convener joined Laura Mearns, Frank Ross and Louise Robertson in Shetland. They met newly qualified Panel Members making a difference in their island community.

2.5.2 100 days for Ayrshire



During March, Ayrshire marked 100 days since transitioning to their new team model. Tribunal Delivery Manager Michael Stewart, and colleagues Melanie McLean and Laura McDonald, took time to meet volunteers. This included undertaking pre-service training alongside trainee Panel Members. On Thursday 21 March, Ayrshire hosted a development session. Joining in were Michael, Melanie and Laura alongside our Panel Engagement Leads, Panel Practice Advisers, our Learning Champion, and Clerking support service.

We asked volunteers to fill a gratitude wall to thank everyone for their hard work. Thanks included:

'Thanks to PPAs for supporting our PMs and your delivery of observations.'

'I'm grateful to be part of a team who care so much about Ayrshire's infants, children and young people.'

2.5.3 Town Hall Webinars

In August 2023 CHS held the first in a series of Town Hall webinars for the Panel Community. These were designed as large-scale online meetings where volunteers could put questions to key figures in the hearings system about policy and practice developments.

The first featured Sheriff David Mackie, chair of the Hearings System Working Group, whose 'Hearings for Children' report, published in May 2023, proposed the biggest changes to the hearings system since its inception. The second featured Fraser McKinlay, Chief Executive of The Promise Scotland, and the third featured Tom McNamara, Unit Head for Youth Justice and Children's Hearings at the Scottish Government. In the final event of 2023-24 members of CHS's leadership team discussed the Scottish Government's response to the Hearings for Children report.

These four events attracted collective attendance of more than 1,000, and recordings of the sessions have since been watched more than 600 times. Each received a wide range of questions from the Panel Community before and during the event. Follow-up feedback surveys received overwhelmingly positive reviews, while providing suggestions that we took on board to improve the design of the events with each iteration.



Continuing on a quarterly schedule in 2024-25, these Town Hall webinars complement in-person meetings and events to provide a valuable additional way for our Panel Community to engage with both the CHS National Team and partners in the wider sector.

For the individuals involved, they have proved very engaging, and they reflect and demonstrate our commitment to engaging with our volunteer Community on issues that matter to them.



3. FOCUS ON: Improving the system



FOCUS ON:

Improving the system



To deliver better outcomes for infants, children, young people and their families

We are proud of Scotland's Children's Hearings System, but complacency is not an option. Along with our partners, we are driving the change that is needed to ensure the system delivers for infants, children and young people today, tomorrow and long into the future. In the following section we outline transformative development work we have been a part of to shape and improve the system.

3.1 Consultation, participation, and influence

As a statutory body central to the hearings system, CHS is well placed to leverage a wealth of expertise and experience, including the insights of care-experienced people and Panel Members, to inform and influence policy and practice across the care and justice and youth sectors. Below are some of the groups, consultations and policy development processes in which CHS has been involved in 2023-24, helping to shape better outcomes for Scotland's children.



3.1.1 Care and Justice Bill

The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in December 2022. Now passed into law, the Care and Justice Act will extend access to the Children's Hearings System to everyone under the age of 18. This Act is an endorsement of the Children's Hearings System and a recognition that the principles the system was built on should be available to all young people.

It is a change that the CHS Community has been calling for, for a long time. Raising the age of referral to include 16- and 17-year-olds, as set out in the Act, will see an anticipated annual increase of up to 2,415 hearings and 1,020 more young people being supported by the welfare-based system. Together with SCRA, we have worked towards a commencement date (18 months post-Royal Assent) that will support and enable this positive but challenging change to the Children's Hearings system.

In support of this change, Stephen Bermingham represented CHS and presented to the Scottish Parliament on two occasions to give evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee and communicate our support for the Bill. We did not gloss over the

challenges our community and their capacity we will face as a result and the actions we will need to address before changes can take place.

The CHS Practice and Policy Team worked closely with the Government throughout the year to influence the content and timeline of the Bill, and to ensure the proposed changes will work for CHS and the Panel Members it supports. This has involved:

- providing guidance to the government on suggested additions and amendment to the Bill
- representing CHS at Parliamentary consultation on the Bill
- developed a forecasting model with SCRA to accurately plan for the implementation of the Bill
- producing communications and engaging with our Community and the wider sector to promote our stance on the Bill

IMPACT:

The Practice and Policy Team were invited to join the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill Implementation Group, which was established to provide strategic oversight of the implementation of the Bill and communicate needs to the government surrounding it.

3.1.2 Staying Together and Connected: National Implementation Group

Children tell us how vitally important it is to them to maintain relationships with their siblings. For many within the hearings system they are an anchor during tumultuous times. The Promise highlighted the separation often endured by siblings within the system, despite the legislative progress made to protect these relationships.

To better understand the challenges and barriers to implementing the legislative changes that aim to enshrine sibling rights, a Staying Together and Connected (STAC) National Implementation Group was established in November 2021, of which members of the CHS Practice and Standards team were a part.

To progress this work, four working groups were established from within the implementation group to focus on: learning, development and leadership; scaffolding and infrastructure; legal matters ; and data. The groups worked with Who Cares? Scotland on a small participation project to receive feedback from care experienced children and young people aged six to 27.

IMPACT:

In May 2023 the National Implementation Group submitted its final report which detailed the priority areas for action to ensure the ‘aspirations of the legislation and guidance can be met for all brothers and sisters’. The report was presented to the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise.

3.2 Transformational Change

3.2.1 Hearings Redesign

The launch of the Promise in 2020 was a landmark moment, pushing Scotland's care system to further embed children's rights. CHS was part of the Hearings System Working Group that was formed to implement the Promise, which extensively consulted care-experienced children and young people. This work culminated in the 'Hearings for Children: Hearing System Working Group's Redesign Report', published in May 2023. In December 2023 the Scottish Government published its response, widely accepting the majority of recommendations and committing to consult further on those which require legislative change.

Publication of the Scottish Government's response to the report gives us a renewed opportunity to work with the government and all our stakeholders, including our Community and people with lived experience, to make transformational changes to how the hearings system operates.

3.2.2 Tribunal Support Model

During 2023 we began an organisational change programme to better support the delivery of high-quality hearings through a new Tribunal Support Model. The model was designed to provide a supportive structure that made CHS voluntary roles more sustainable, manageable and rewarding and to better enable our volunteer Panel Members to do what they do best: support children and young people.

As part of our Tribunal Support Model, we have introduced several new roles in our National Team and volunteer Community to deliver our ambition that a children's hearing will be a place that upholds and promotes children's rights, is a child and family friendly care and justice space, and puts children's participation at its heart. These roles have enabled CHS to improve the experience of its volunteers, maintain national consistency and quality, and most importantly, prepare for the coming reforms to the Children's Hearings System.

Due to the level of changes within the sector, as well as our organisation, we have engaged widely with our Panel Community to keep them informed about and involved in the thinking and process. Members of the National Team attended local meetings or created materials to present and deliver information and updates as required. Presentations centred on challenges and opportunities facing the hearings system and highlighted for our Community how these align with our work to implement the Tribunal Support Model.

In implementing the Tribunal Support Model we moved from 22 Area Support Teams to nine regional Area Support Teams, aligned with SCRA localities, providing alignment and clarity with our key hearings system partner. This change enables CHS to:

- deliver better outcomes for children and young people
- address unrealistic expectations placed on volunteers, enabling them to focus more directly on supporting children, young people and their families

- provide an enhanced support structure to Panel Members that is consistent across the country
- provide a strong foundation to support our panel community to take on the requirements of the Care and Justice Act and any recommendations the Scottish Government takes forward from the Hearings for Children report

Throughout the 2023-24 year we have worked with our Community and National Team to successfully implement this new model and deliver substantial improvements to the infants, children and young people in the hearings system.

3.2.3 Organisational Transformational Change Programme

CHS embarked on a substantial organisational change programme starting in April 2023. The primary drivers for this organisational change programme were the launching of our Tribunal Support Model and to ready ourselves for the anticipated reforms brought about by the Hearings for Children report.

We carried out a comprehensive organisational review and redesign to ensure that our new structure would have the right capability, capacity and flexibility to meet the demands of the future. We reshaped our National Team structure to focus on the areas of Tribunal Delivery, Positive Outcomes, People and Culture, and Business and Finance.

The new organisational structure increased the headcount by 35 colleagues. We created new roles to enable us to deliver change, improved tribunal delivery and Panel Member support, and ultimately an improved hearings system. Below are the new roles that are already delivering positive impacts for Panel Members and the children and families they serve.

Wellbeing

Hearings are increasingly complex and in line with our trauma-informed approach we appointed nine Wellbeing Co-ordinators, one in each region, who work alongside our volunteer roles to enable timely and effective wellbeing support to Tribunal Panel Members across Scotland. Supporting our overall approach is a new Wellbeing Manager, a subject expert and central resource to support practice across the organisation.

Learning

The legislative context for hearings is changing with the introduction of the Care and Justice Act, the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act, and accepted recommendations from Hearings for Children report. This requires high quality and effective learning to enable our Panel Members to continue to make effective decisions that support children and young people in the new context. Our expanded Learning team is responsible for the implementation of a modern and refreshed five-year Learning and Development strategy, building on the foundation work that has already been done, to further develop and evolve CHS's learning culture and

Learning Academy brand.

Quality

The new role of Quality Manager is central to driving CHS to strive for continuous improvement and the highest possible standards in volunteers' decision-making. Building on the improvements led through our Panel Practice Advisors Forum, our Quality Manager will support PPAs to provide vital feedback to Panel Members and identify thematic improvements and best practice through delivery of a quality agenda.

Change Management

The incorporation of a dedicated change function, supported by Change Managers and a Programme Management Office (PMO), has enabled us to successfully implement the Tribunal Delivery Model, including its new Resource Allocation function. Our Change team are supporting us to shape and deliver the changes we can currently deliver from the accepted recommendations within the Hearings for Children report, and those that may come through any legislative change.

Partnership

Partnership Co-ordinators in each region support Regional Delivery Managers to maintain vital links with our key hearings system partners and to support our Corporate Parenting responsibilities. They enable us to maintain our strong local relationships with other people who care passionately about children, young people and families.

Resource Allocation – rota management

Our Resource Allocation team, made up of experienced rota managers from within our Community, made it possible for CHS to bring 34 area rotas into a central system. Centralisation has enabled us to offer more consistent support to Panel Members and deliver a better experience for children, young people and their families attending hearings. In its first six months of operation, rota centralisation has facilitated over 300 additional hearings and 350 continuity requests.

Volunteer roles

In order to make our Panel Community volunteer roles more sustainable and rewarding we introduced new roles and ways of working. The volunteer roles of Local Panel Engagement Leads, Learning Champions and Lead Panel Practice Advisors look after Panel Members in their areas by providing feedback, support and guidance.

CONCLUSIONS:

A year of change

In any given year, in any organisation of CHS's size and nature, there will be business-as-usual activities punctuated by one-off events or changes, some more exceptional or dramatic than others. In 2023-24, CHS underwent the biggest transformation to date in its history.

While this included growth to the size of the National Team, the purpose was to improve the support for our most important people, the volunteers serving children and young people across the country, and to put the organisation on the right footing for the future, as we approach further changes to the hearings system that we know lie ahead.

Always following the north star of children's and young people's needs, and guided by our Board, we successfully designed and implemented a phased transition to our new Tribunal Support Model. This was a complex process involving many individuals, which we needed to achieve without interruption to hearings. Meanwhile the business-as-usual cycle, including volunteer recruitment and training, and one-off events such as our Parliamentary Reception, received their requisite energy and dedication.

Having achieved this transformation means we are now ready for the changes that will follow the Scottish Government's Hearings Redesign Consultation, and those that will result from the implementation of the Care and Justice Bill. In 2023-24 and beyond, we look forward to working with our care-experienced advisers to best support our volunteers to help make Scotland the best place to grow up.



Glossary

Area Support Teams (ASTs)

Teams who provide support and guidance to Panel Members at the local level. There are 22 of these across Scotland, with 400 volunteer members.

Corporate Parent

An organisation or person that has specific responsibilities and duties to people with care experience and their wellbeing. These responsibilities are defined in Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland Act) 2014.

Deferring/Deferral

When Panel Members are unable to make a decision (for example due to missing information), so the hearing is stopped ('deferred') until a later date.

Hearings System Working Group (HSWG)

Group made up for partners from the hearings system established to facilitate the redesign of the hearings system. It was chaired by an independent chair.

(CHS) Learning Academy

Provides a range of training to ensure our volunteer community's learning is current and relevant for the role.

National Convener

This role leads and oversees the Children's Panel. He or she 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. The current National Convener is Elliot Jackson.

Panel Members

People who 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.

Relevant Person

Someone who has been deemed to have, or to have recently had, significant involvement in the upbringing of a child.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)

The Children's Reporter works for SCRA; they decide if a child needs a children's hearing, arrange children's hearing and ensure all necessary documentation reaches the necessary stakeholders.

Language Leaders

The Language Leaders group is a Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) backed initiative which has seen Children's Hearings Scotland working alongside young people from Our Hearings, Our Voice, the CELCIS VIP project and a local Champions Board, as well as professionals within the Childrens Hearing System.

Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP)

The CHIP brings together a range of people from organisations across Scotland who have a common interest in developing and improving the Children's Hearings System. Chaired by the Scottish Government, it includes representatives from all key partners in the Hearings System



