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**Citation for published version:**

Elsley, S, Tisdall, EKM & Davidson, E 2013, Children and young people's views on child protection systems in Scotland. Social Research Series, Scottish Government.

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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Riaghaltas na h-Alba

# Health and Community Care

## Children and young people's views on child protection systems in Scotland



# **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN SCOTLAND**

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Scottish Government Social Research  
2013

This report is available on the Scottish Government Social Research website ([www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch)) only.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many thanks to:

Gita Anand, Donna McLean and Scott Wood of the Scottish Government for their support and advice.

All the organisations and individuals that contributed to the review.

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# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

- 1.1 This review considers the views and experiences of children and young people on child protection systems in Scotland. It aims to inform service delivery, communications on child protection and future potential ways to engage children and young people on this issue. The findings of this review will form the basis for future research on gathering the views of children and young people on child protection systems in Scotland.
- 1.2 The definition of 'child protection', according to the Scottish Government's National Guidance for Child Protection<sup>1</sup>, is to protect a child from abuse or neglect. The terms 'abuse' and 'neglect' include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. It is not necessary for abuse or neglect to have happened: a risk assessment identifying the potential or risk of significant harm is sufficient.
- 1.3 This review is one of two reviews commissioned by the Scottish Government in March 2013 to consider evidence on children and young people's views. The parallel review is part of the Scottish Government's work to inform the UK's next report on implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- 1.4 The reviews considered research, consultations, reports and other relevant data undertaken by government, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), academics and the public sector on children. Both reviews include evidence gathered since 2008 when the UK State Party's last report was considered by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- 1.5 In addition to wider calls for evidence on children and young people's views and experiences, contacts were made through national child protection networks to gather specific evidence for this review.

## Evidence on child protection

- 1.6 There is a wide range of evidence on areas of children and young people's lives that relates to child protection. However, there is not a substantial body of evidence on the views of children and young people across all the risk indicator areas which are outlined in the National Guidance for Child Protection and there are some areas where there is limited evidence. There is generally more evidence on the views of children and young people who are looked after than other groups of children and young people who require support from child protection services.
- 1.7 The family and caring environment had a critical role for children and young people, both as a form of inclusion and as a means of ensuring positive outcomes and wellbeing. For all children and young people, positive experiences of home and family were closely bound with the ability to input directly into decisions about their care.



- 1.8 Parents were of central importance to children and young people. Where this relationship breaks down (in the case of domestic abuse or parental substance abuse), it becomes more important to provide quality care and support that understands their experiences but does not treat them differently.
- 1.9 Children and young people with caring responsibilities as young carers continued to want more support. Recent work on domestic abuse with young people has demonstrated the need for the voices of children and young people experiencing domestic abuse to be heard and taken into account. There is little evidence on children and young people's views of physical punishment.
- 1.10 Looked after children continued to face a number of everyday challenges including being listened to and their views taken into account, stigma, a weak sense of belonging and identity and a lack of quality support. At the same time they also had positive experiences of care. There is a small amount of research undertaken on the views of children and young people on home supervision.
- 1.11 There was a significant body of work on the Children's Hearing System with clear messages about how the process could be improved. This includes: the need to improve information and preparation, issues relating to the adults involved in the Children's Hearings System, how decisions are made and communicated and whether children and young people are able to participate fully and give their views. At the same time, children and young people did identify positive experiences with examples of good practice and support from adults. There was less evidence that explored children and young people's views and experiences post-hearing.
- 1.12 Although there are limited studies on children and young people's views on advocacy support, a significant proportion of the evidence emphasises the importance of having trusted adults help children and young people to speak out whether these were independent advocates, other professionals or family and friends.
- 1.13 There is not a significant body of evidence on children and young people's views about information sharing between child protection services. The evidence that is available identified that children and young people considered confidentiality to be an important right.
- 1.14 There is also not much evidence on children and young people's views about online child protection. Children and young people reported understanding issues around security online. However, safety messages were often ignored.
- 1.15 There was little that looked specifically at trafficking in Scotland and no work was identified that took account of the views and experiences of children and young people. There was also currently little evidence on the views and experiences of children and young people and child sexual exploitation.
- 1.16 It was found that young people who run away were at particular risk of experiencing homelessness later in life.

- 1.17 There are some studies on children and young people's mental health but no evidence about how this relates to child protection and where they are at risk from harm. Children and young people were aware of school-based initiatives generally to tackle bullying but initiatives were not always successful.
- 1.18 Involving young people in national and local discussions about policy and services relating to drugs, alcohol and under-age sex was considered important.

### **Child protection systems**

- 1.19 Children and young people had diverse experiences of child protection services. Younger children were generally less likely to know why they were on the child protection register whereas older young people were more likely to state that they should not be on the child protection register. Most children and young people stated that being kept safe was the main reason for being on the child protection register.
- 1.20 Children and young people thought that they were listened to. However, from the evidence it is difficult to identify whether they felt they were listened to in all meetings and processes. Children and young people - where asked - thought that the computer programme Viewpoint was easy to use. It was suggested, by those reporting on consultations with children and young people, that Viewpoint could limit responses in comparison with interviews or other face to face interaction and that there was inconsistent use of Viewpoint in gathering children and young people's views. Evidence highlights that there is a need to use a range of approaches to gather the views of children and young people.
- 1.21 Children and young people were positive about their relationships with social workers and said that they could talk to them. Children and young people had different experiences of child protection case conferences with some attending them while others had not. Similarly, some understood what happened in meetings while others did not. Where it was explored, children and young people thought that their circumstances had improved and that their home lives were stable.
- 1.22 Children and young people who were asked about the provision of information on child protection processes thought that it could be provided more creatively with more use of pictures and less words, DVDs, face-to-face conversations and use of the internet. Some children and young people did not recall being given information.
- 1.23 Suggestions for improvements from children and young people included: ensuring that decisions were carried out or reasons given why this was not possible; giving children and young people the opportunity to attend child protection case conferences; providing information throughout and making the presentation of written information more interesting; having an advocacy worker; meeting the chairperson of the child protection committee; facilitating families' involvement; having fewer professionals at meetings; and requesting that police officers did not wear uniforms if visiting homes.

- 1.24 A scoping study focused on Scotland, but drawing on research elsewhere, found little research that had been undertaken with disabled children and young people.
- 1.25 Evidence from other UK studies, which mainly focused on England, identified: the importance of positive relationships with social workers; some children and young people being concerned about negative outcomes arising from their engagement with child protection systems; and that there was mixed understanding of meetings and processes associated with child protection by children and young people.

### **Gaps in evidence**

- 1.26 There is a range of useful and insightful evidence on areas relating to children and young people's views on child protection services. There is also a lack of evidence in specific areas which would be helpful to explore in future activities.
- 1.27 Overall, there were a number of clear gaps in understanding children and young people's own views and experiences of relevance to child protection, particularly in relation to child trafficking, sexual exploitation, household substance misuse and sexual health. Further knowledge on the role of the parent in children and young people's lives would also be helpful to better understand the parenting role and to consider how alternative forms of care can be improved. There is less evidence about children and young people's views on home supervision and experiences post-hearing. There is little evidence on children and young people's views of physical punishment.
- 1.28 The review found that there was not a substantial body of evidence on children and young people's experiences of child protection systems in Scotland. There was little formal research on children and young people's views of child protection services that was independently undertaken.
- 1.29 There is little on the views of specific groups of children and young people such as those who are younger (those under 5 years of age in particular), disabled children and young people, and children and young people from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community. This is applicable across all areas of diversity and inclusion.
- 1.30 Although there is a range of evidence on children and young people's views and experiences of child protection areas and associated systems, there are areas where the evidence is not available, not widely collected or easily accessible to wider audiences.

## Recommendations for moving forward

- 1.31 The following recommendations consider ways in which the findings from the review can be taken forward. In addition to identifying gaps in evidence, several overarching issues emerged from the process of gathering the views and experiences of children and young people in Scotland which should be considered in future work in order to improve the gathering and dissemination of evidence on children and young people's views and experiences.
- 1.32 The Scottish Government should consider areas for further participatory work with children and young people on child protection from the gaps in evidence as future research following on from this review.
- 1.33 Organisations and services working with children and young people should also consider if there are gaps which could be explored through their research, consultation and participatory activities.
- 1.34 Specifically, the Scottish Government should consider undertaking a review of the range of approaches used in gathering children and young people's views in child protection systems as there is insufficient information on the methods that are currently used. Such a review should also explore what children and young people thought worked best when giving their views in relation to child protection systems and services. It should take into account the needs of all children and young people across different age group and with specific needs.
- 1.35 The Scottish Government should consider, in partnership with stakeholders, how the gathering and dissemination of evidence could be improved so that there is more comparable data and analysis on children's views and experiences which could inform policy and service developments. This should take account of points raised in **paragraphs 5.29-5.38** on developing the evidence base.
- 1.36 The Scottish Government should discuss with relevant stakeholders how to maximise evidence from areas related to child protection in research, consultation and participatory activities which explore the views and experiences of children and young people.

## Conclusion

- 1.37 The review provides insights into children and young people's views and experiences on child protection gathered by organisations between 2008 and 2013. As a resource, the review assists understanding of children and young people's experiences of child protection. At the same time, the review can provide a baseline for further research which can draw on the views and experiences of young people.

## 2 INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH AIMS

### Background

- 2.1 This review considers the views and experiences of children and young people on child protection systems in Scotland. It aims to inform service delivery, communications on child protection and potential ways to engage children and young people on this issue.
- 2.2 The findings of this review will form the basis for further research on gathering the views of children and young people on child protection systems in Scotland.
- 2.3 This review is one of two reviews commissioned by the Scottish Government in March 2013 to consider evidence on children and young people's views. The parallel review is part of the Scottish Government's work to inform the UK's next report on implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Its purpose is to explore children and young people's experiences and views in order to input to the Scottish Government's contribution to the UK State Party's periodic review, which is due to be submitted in January 2014.
- 2.4 The specific objectives of the two reviews were to collect, collate, analyse, review, summarise and present evidence on the views of children and young people in Scotland. The reviews considered research, consultations, reports and other relevant data undertaken by government, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), academics and the public sector on children.

### Context for child protection

- 2.5 The definition of 'child protection, according to the Scottish Government's National Guidance for Child Protection<sup>2</sup>, is protecting a child from abuse or neglect. It is not necessary for abuse or neglect to have happened: a risk assessment identifying the potential or risk of significant harm is sufficient. The terms 'abuse' and 'neglect' cover a range of different circumstances where a child is maltreated or at risk of maltreatment. It can include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect (where a child's physical and/or psychological needs are not met) (see the National Guidance for Child Protection for more details).
- 2.6 The National Child Protection Guidance provides a national framework for practitioners to understand and agree processes to safeguard and protect the wellbeing of children. The Guidance is based on the principles of *Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)*, on the UNCRC, on the Children's Charter, the National Framework and the principles that underpin the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. The Guidance states that all agencies that work with, provide services and support children and their families have responsibilities in relation to child protection.

- 2.7 The Guidance emphasises the importance of child protection systems taking account of the ‘reactions, perceptions, wishes and feelings of the child’. This should include consideration of a child’s age and levels of understanding and requires different approaches to ensure that communication is effective.

### **Review aims**

- 2.8 This review aims to analyse and draw conclusions focussing on children and young people’s experiences of child protection systems in Scotland. It took two approaches to considering evidence.
- 2.9 Firstly, the review considers a number of areas relevant to child protection that are also included in the UNCRC review of children and young people’s views. These cover children and young people’s experiences in areas such as the Children’s Hearings System, being looked after and domestic abuse.
- 2.10 Secondly, it considered evidence specifically relating to the following areas: children and young people’s experiences and expectations of child protection services; how would they expect or did they get information about child protection services that helped them to make contact or a referral; their views on the process in regards to what would help, what would help more, and how would they want it, or were, their opinions or thoughts taken into consideration; their expectations and experiences of how/when information should be or was shared; their expectations and experiences of how things would or did change in their lives as a result.

### **Methodology for review**

- 2.11 The review’s methods mirrored those for the UNCRC review on children and young people’s views and experiences. A call for evidence for both reviews was issued to leading organisations, networks and email lists by the review team, the Scottish Government and through other networks. This sought to reach the range of different organisations, services and research bodies that would have evidence on the views and experiences of children and young people in Scotland.
- 2.12 The review team sought evidence from research, consultation, evaluations and evidence from other participatory activities that reflected the views and experiences of children and young people. The evidence had to relate to children and young people in Scotland, be in the public domain and provide information that would be of value to the review.
- 2.13 In addition to wider calls for evidence on children and young people’s views and experiences, contacts were made through national child protection networks to gather specific evidence for this review. The review included requests to centres for excellence, lead organisations and through searching online and relevant databases on children and young people’s views on child protection systems.

- 2.14 The review on children and young people's views and experiences in child protection systems focuses on evidence gathered since 2008, in line with the parallel review on children and young people's views on the UNCRC.
- 2.15 Evidence was gathered between March and April 2013 for the review and then identified by topic and applicability to both the child protection review and the wider UNCRC review.
- 2.16 The remit for the review did not include evidence from outwith Scotland. However, key findings from a small number of studies from elsewhere in the UK are included to provide additional context for the review.

### **Reflections on methodology**

- 2.17 Although additional searches were made by the review team around children and young people's experience in child protection systems, more evidence may be available but has not been accessed or come to the attention of the review team. In addition, the review found a range of relevant consultation or participation activities that were not currently recorded or where work was still ongoing. These should be taken into account in the second phase of the child protection review.
- 2.18 Evidence passed to the review team had to be in the public domain in line with the review's criteria. However, some of this evidence is not easily accessible as it was produced for internal service purposes. The references for evidence are not always detailed and access to the evidence may require direct contact with the named organisations.
- 2.19 In addition, some of the evidence relating to children's views on child protection systems did not include much detail about the context for the activity; was small-scale and/or did not analyse findings in depth. However, it was decided to include this evidence because of its relevance to the review aims.
- 2.20 Taking the above into account, a small amount of evidence was not included as it: did not meet the criteria of being based on children and young people's views and experiences; was undertaken prior to 2008; gave insufficient information about the activity or findings; did not include information on methods and/or ethics; compromised confidentiality; and/or was difficult to summarise for this review because of the nature of the evidence.
- 2.21 Attention was given to ensuring, where possible, that the evidence took account of different age groups, disability, ethnicity, geographical diversity, socio economic factors, sexual orientation and other areas that impact on children and young people's inclusion. However, most of the evidence gathered did not provide this level of detail so it is difficult to identify the specific characteristics of the samples of participants.

## Notes on the review

- 2.22 A child is defined in the UNCRC as being under the age of 18 and it is this age range which is the focus of the study. There are, however, some examples where specific studies have included older young people – for example, care leavers or young parents. Where studies include this extended age range it is noted in the text.
- 2.23 The term ‘children and young people’ is generally employed throughout the review. However, where specific pieces of evidence are being discussed, the terminology used by the authors is employed.
- 2.24 Where possible, the methodology undertaken for each piece of evidence is briefly described before summarising key findings from that study or consultation. Readers are encouraged to visit the source documents for more detail.
- 2.25 The Scottish Government has developed a number of tools and resources<sup>3</sup> which provide more details on child protection and associated systems and processes. Further details of policy relating to children and young people can be accessed through the Scottish Government’s website and through specialist networks such as WithScotland.
- 2.26 More information on the UNCRC and related policy is available through:
- Scotland’s Commissioner for Children & Young People  
<http://www.sccyp.org.uk/>
  - Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights)  
<http://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/>
  - UNICEF <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>



### **3 EVIDENCE ON CHILD PROTECTION**

#### **Introduction**

- 3.1 The following section includes evidence on areas relevant to child protection as outlined in the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland<sup>4</sup>. It includes those areas also included in the parallel UNCRC review on the views of children and young people. Additional detail has been added where specifically relevant to child protection.
- 3.2 The areas covered take account of circumstances where children and young people are subject to child protection processes such as being looked after. They also cover situations which may have an adverse impact on children and young people and are therefore risk indicators. These include, for example, domestic abuse; parental alcohol and drug misuse; disability; children and young people experiencing mental health problems; and parental mental health problems.
- 3.3 The review identifies that evidence is not available on the views of children and young people across all the risk indicator areas which are outlined in the National Guidance for Child Protection.

#### **Children's Hearings System**

- 3.4 The Children's Hearings System is an essential component of the child protection process. Changes were introduced in June 2013 to implement the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act (2011)<sup>5</sup>. These aim to strengthen and promote children's rights and include a number of mechanisms to support a child or young person's voice being heard.
- 3.5 A range of research and consultation has drawn on the views of children and young people in the Children's Hearing System. Much of this has focused on the experience of attending Hearings, with a significant focus on how children and young people voices are supported and heard.
- 3.6 Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) explored the experience of attending Hearings in a national survey involving 630 individuals. This included 232 (37%) of whom were children and young people aged 5 to 17 years, along with in-depth interviews with 13 children and young people<sup>6</sup>. Overall, children and young people, along with their parents, were supportive of the Children's Hearing System and its key principles. They had a level of understanding about what happened in Children's Hearings, especially when they were older. Many were provided with support in advance of Hearings. The research found that there was a need for greater continuity of Panel members between Hearings, improved communication and support for younger children, a reduction in the volume of information and for Hearings to be less 'court-like'. Children, young people and adults highlighted the need for greater awareness of everyone's rights, particularly children's rights.
- 3.7 Other research undertaken by SCRA involved 21 young people involved in the Children's Hearing System aged between 11 and 17 years.

The young people thought the process was fair, even though they might not always agree with the decisions made<sup>7</sup>. There were, however, barriers to children and young people's participation and more attention should be paid to how decisions were explained. Most felt that their lives had got better and that the Hearings could provide the impetus for change. The majority stated that it was their own commitment to change that had the biggest impact.

- 3.8 In research conducted by Who Cares? Scotland for SCRA<sup>8</sup>, over 100 young people between the ages of 9 and 17 years across Scotland participated in an online survey. The research looked at what worked well and what was challenging when attending a Hearing. The majority of young people did not understand what the advance paperwork meant. Most understood why young people attended Hearings and 69% said that they were able to participate in the Hearings. While both positive and negative examples of decision making were given, young people felt that the environment could be more welcoming and positive towards young people. Young people expressed a desire to speak to Panel members on their own and felt the use of advocates should be promoted.
- 3.9 Young people employed as Modern Apprentices at SCRA have undertaken research on children and young people's views in the Children's Hearing System. One study analysed findings from existing research and consultation (including evidence highlighted in this review)<sup>9</sup>. The analysis identified that trust, being listened to, respectful relationships and attitudes to children and young people were important for children and young people. Children and young people expressed concern about how information and decisions were communicated and the language that was used. Further research considered the physical environment at the Children's Hearings<sup>10</sup>. In line with other research, the way children and young people were greeted and the facilities could be more welcoming.
- 3.10 The Children's Parliament facilitated a consultation for the Scottish Government with 29 children who had experience of Children's Hearings<sup>11</sup>. Children talked about the way information was communicated before, during and after the Hearings and said that they often did not understand what was happening or the decisions that were made. The physical environment of a Hearing needed to be comfortable and welcoming. Children stated that there were too many adults at Hearings and they often did not know who they were. They wanted adults to listen to them and only be there if they were able to do things for the child. Going to a Hearing was generally seen as a difficult experience that could be intimidating and confusing. Overall, children wanted Hearings to focus on their best interests, listen to them, provide information and ensure that they were treated with respect.
- 3.11 A review was undertaken of the Legal Representation Grant Scheme<sup>12</sup>, which allowed free legal representation in Children's Hearings for children and young people in certain situations. Fieldwork was undertaken in 2008 with 23 young people aged 13 and 17, recruited from four secure units across Scotland. The young people thought such representatives should argue for what the young person wants, even if that was not in the young person's best

interests. Some young people did not know why their legal representative was present. While some young people preferred having the legal representative speak for them in hearings, others spoke for themselves. The main reason young people were dissatisfied with their legal representative was that they had 'just sat there' and not represented their views adequately.

- 3.12 A number of common messages emerge. These focus on the need to improve information and preparation, issues relating to the adults involved in the Children's Hearings System, how decisions are made and communicated and whether children and young people are able to participate fully and give their views. At the same time, children and young people did identify positive experiences with examples of good practice and support from adults.

### **Advocacy**

- 3.13 Advocacy can support children and young people to speak out in child protection processes. The National Guidance for Child Protection<sup>13</sup> provides examples of how children and young people can be involved in the work of the child protection committees. Methods of involvement include: drawing on information and surveys from different organisations and professionals; ensuring that inter-agency quality assurance mechanisms account for the views of children and young people; and promoting the establishment of advocacy services based in the community for children and young people.
- 3.14 The Scottish Government consulted with children and young people on draft principles and minimum standards of advocacy<sup>14</sup>. Responses were received from 112 children and young people aged from 6 to 25 years with 88 individual responses and 24 from groups. The analysis of individual responses found that two-thirds had had support to speak out from adults including social workers, family members and advocates. Children and young people wanted supportive adults to listen, help and be kind.
- 3.15 Research was undertaken by young people to explore views on the Who Cares? advocacy service<sup>15</sup>. While small scale, the study found that young people were positive about the support they received.
- 3.16 A review of advocacy support for Scottish Borders' Children and Young People's Planning Partnership involved research with 29 children and young people<sup>16</sup>. Most young people did not have support from an independent advocate but from a range of people including professionals such as teachers, youth workers, social workers, friends and family. Young people, who were older, emphasised the benefits of sharing experiences and support from each other and that young people needed to have opportunities to develop their confidence so that they could speak out for themselves. Young people emphasised that positive, respectful relationships were essential to helping them speak out. It was important to speak to people they trusted, who listened and respected confidentiality.
- 3.17 Although there are limited studies on children and young people's views on advocacy support, a significant proportion of the evidence emphasises the

importance of having trusted adults help children and young people to speak out whether these were independent advocates, other professionals or family and friends.

### **Confidentiality and privacy**

- 3.18 The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland<sup>17</sup> emphasises the importance of sharing appropriate information in order to support child protection. It states that children and families have a right to know when information is being shared and their consent given, unless it would result in increased risk to the child or others or impact on the investigative process.
- 3.19 There is not a significant body of evidence on children and young people's views on sharing information in child protection processes. However, a recent consultation<sup>18</sup> identified that children and young people saw confidentiality as an important right. Twenty nine young people (aged 15 to 21) involved in three discussion groups facilitated by ChildLine in Scotland understood this but were less clear about their legal rights in practice. The children and young people did not see confidentiality as an absolute right and did not expect this right to be upheld in serious situations. Children and young people thought that each situation needed to be assessed individually.
- 3.20 More generally, in the voting for SCCYP's 'a RIGHT blether'<sup>19</sup>, over one in 10 (13%) prioritised the statement 'help us be able to keep things private'. Over 70,000 votes were cast across Scotland, by children and young people at school up to the age of 21. Children and young people also expressed concerns about confidentiality and privacy in regards to advocacy and health.

### **Online child protection issues**

- 3.21 There is not a significant body of evidence on children and young people's views relating to online use and child protection. However, research on media attitudes undertaken by Ofcom<sup>20</sup> found that 84% of a sample of children and young people aged 5 to 15 years in Scotland used the internet at home (up 17% from 2011). This research also found that 90% of children and young people aged 8 to 15 years in Scotland in 2012 were confident about staying safe online. The same study found that 48% of parents talked to their children about staying safe online at least monthly with 82% having rules about internet access.
- 3.22 Despite the legal requirement for young people to be aged 13 or over to open a Facebook account, young people reported having an account under the age of 13. This was found in small-scale research by the Children's Parliament for a study for the Information Commissioner UK<sup>21</sup> and by Young Scot<sup>22</sup>.
- 3.23 Primary and secondary school groups participating in the reference groups for the Information Commissioner UK's research knew about privacy settings on social network sites and general rules about 'internet safety'. However, they did not always follow the recommendations from school. Parents' views were central to what primary school children actually did but not for secondary school pupils. The research generated many questions from children and

young people about information held about them by various services, and what control they had over it being shared, whether they could see it and whether they could amend it.

- 3.24 A report by Young Scot<sup>23</sup> looked at the issue of internet safety in five participative workshops with young people aged 11 to 18 years. The internet was part of young people's everyday lives, as was social networking. Like other studies, the young people reported understanding issues around security online. However, safety messages were often ignored, with many young people having 'random' friends, accessing social networking sites underage and 'hacking' parental controls.

### **Looked after children and young people**

- 3.25 Children and young people who are looked after are subject to child protection processes. There is generally more evidence on the views of children and young people who are looked after than other groups of children and young people who require support from child protection services.
- 3.26 Who Cares? Scotland undertook a consultation with 116 young people on the proposals for the Children and Young People Bill<sup>24</sup>. Young people stated that they wanted to be listened to and heard, respected and loved. Generally, young people wanted positive relationships that provided support. They highlighted the need for more support, both preparing for leaving care and after they had left care. Correspondingly, advocacy and throughcare workers were important. Young people emphasised that knowing about their rights was helpful in resolving problems and concerns, such as having contact with their families, during Children's Hearings and at Looked after Children (LAC) meetings.
- 3.27 Research undertaken by the University of Stirling explored feelings of belonging with 22 young people aged 10 to 22 who were looked after<sup>25</sup>. Personal items were highly significant for young people's identities as they moved through placements. Young people's sense of belonging was affected by frequent moves and was influenced by the places where they lived, such as residential units. Being able to make spaces their own was important, as was a need for privacy, security and sharing activities. Having insufficient financial resources had an impact on their transition to independent living.
- 3.28 Barnardo's undertook a scoping study of the rights of looked after children with additional support needs<sup>26</sup>. Fieldwork took place in 2009, involving a focus group with five children in residential care and interviews with five children in foster care. These children felt they knew their rights in terms of home and care but not in relation to additional support in learning. They had varied awareness of what to do if they had concerns at school, and wanted information to be accessible and understandable. They wanted support so that they could speak for themselves. They were concerned that they would be bullied if they were noticeably receiving additional support at school.
- 3.29 A series of short films<sup>27 28 29</sup> produced by the Centre of Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS) with young people from Who Cares?

Scotland, the Debate Project and the group, the Voice of Reason consider a range of experiences for young people in care. The films emphasise the importance of the corporate parent asking 'if this is good enough for your child?'. Children and young people wanted to be placed near their families and stated that young people generally experienced too many moves. Children and young people wanted supportive adults in their lives who would listen to them and who could bring about change. Children and young people who had additional needs often struggled with transitions in adult services poorly supported. Another film<sup>30</sup> made by the same group highlighted that stigma around care continued to be a significant issue.

- 3.30 Local authorities have evidenced different activities involving children and young people who are looked after. Dundee Champions Board<sup>31</sup> includes representation from young people and this has resulted in the involvement of a wide range of professionals including teachers, youth workers and housing officers. East Lothian Council has undertaken a range of consultations<sup>32</sup> to explore the views of children and young people who are looked after. Findings from questionnaires completed by 88 children and young people highlighted that young people had positive experiences around being looked after which included feeling safe, being involved in reviews, having information and getting help from social workers. More challenging experiences included not being able to see friends or family enough, not being able to do activities they liked frequently enough and not having information about their family background.

### **Residential care**

- 3.31 Who Cares? Scotland undertook a consultation with children and young people as part of its 30<sup>th</sup> year celebration in 2008<sup>33</sup>. The research focused on children and young people in residential care with 147 young people participating in an online questionnaire, nine in focus groups and 49 participating in one to one interviews with the majority aged 12 to 15 years. Over half stated that being successful was having 'happy and caring relationships'. It was also about avoiding particular negative situations such as being charged with offences, being placed in secure care or imprisoned. Some of the children and young people felt that they were not able to be successful because of a lack of opportunities. They told members of their families about their successes more than anyone else and wanted to stay connected with their family members. Having increased confidence and skills in coping and anger management were seen to be indicators of success. Children and young people stated that it was important to have control over their own lives. Having a member of staff in a residential unit that they were close to was important in providing support and motivation. Being viewed negatively because they were in care was viewed as a barrier to success.
- 3.32 A more recent consultation<sup>34</sup> was undertaken by Who Cares? Scotland with 95 children and young people living in different residential placements purchased by local authorities. Overall, children and young people stated that their placement was positively impacting on their lives. They were able to identify benefits including safety and being more engaged with education. Generally they felt more motivated and confident and stated that they felt

cared for by staff. Less positive experiences were reported around involvement in planning for their placement moves and in planning for their future. Those who had made a complaint identified that some felt their complaint had been responded to while others did not or did not know.

- 3.33 Who Cares? Scotland undertook a consultation with 51 children and young people aged between 12 and 16 in order to explore experiences around food in residential care<sup>35</sup>. Most children and young people identified that they were served poor quality food, wanted more consideration of their individual needs and likes and dislikes, and wished to be more involved in discussions and decisions about food related issues.
- 3.34 A short film<sup>36</sup> of a play produced by young people at Kibble Education and Care Centre highlights the positive and negative experiences of being in care. These include: love, care and support from residential staff; the challenge of being moved around a lot; realising that sometimes young people were better off in care; and the stigmatising nature of being in care. Young people who took part highlighted the importance of creative activities such as drama and storytelling.
- 3.35 The evaluation<sup>37</sup> of a pilot which considered profiling for the recognition of prior learning for looked after young people found that young people enjoyed the activity of profiling with increased skills and confidence reported. Overall, young people felt supported and there was increased awareness of career options.

### **Secure Care**

- 3.36 Research was undertaken by Who Cares? Scotland on young people's experiences of secure care<sup>38</sup>. It was undertaken in 2008 and therefore at the beginning of the period of this review. It was based on interviews with 76 young people, with the majority of participants being male. Although staff were welcoming on admission to secure care, young people said that they did not get enough information or were insufficiently consulted about the move to secure care. Sanctions within secure care were seen as necessary but young people were unhappy about the methods used. Young people welcomed contact with families, although they were concerned at the limited opportunities. The majority felt their education in secure care was good with leisure opportunities provided. However, young people highlighted that they often felt bored. Exit plans were relatively unknown to young people. Some had access to throughcare workers and many had support from agencies and workers in communities or residential care once they left secure care.

### **Foster care**

- 3.37 Who Cares? Scotland was commissioned by CELCIS and Scotland Excel to undertake a consultation with young people with experience of local authority and independent foster care provision<sup>39</sup>. Fifty two young people participated in either a survey or group discussions. Young people highlighted that their experiences were varied and not consistent in quality. They talked of positive experiences, as well as situations where foster care could have been

improved. Young people wanted their views to be heard about all aspects of their care and to be able to input into decisions. Support with education was appreciated as well as being able to participate in activities and go on holiday. The help they received from social workers, carers and advocates was important, particularly around managing transitions. Young people wanted their experiences in foster care families to be the same as other members of their foster carers' families. The study found that reasonable expectations in foster care were still not being consistently met.

### **Looked after at home**

- 3.38 CELCIS published a summary of research messages on home supervision in 2012<sup>40</sup>, which highlights the small amount of research undertaken on home supervision. It draws attention to early findings from ongoing research<sup>41</sup> with 23 children and young people across Scotland, which found that children and young people welcomed the mentoring, informal coaching and other forms of support that Home Supervision Requirements (HSR) gave. Children and young people did not always understand why they had a HSR. Continuity and stability were important. Other research<sup>42</sup> from a study including interviews with 10 young people found that children and young people complained about the frequent changes in social work and other staff. Although children and young people thought that HSRs could have benefits in terms of access to resources, there was scepticism about their impact.

### **Kinship care**

- 3.39 A study was undertaken by the University of Stirling and Children 1<sup>st</sup> that explored the views of children and young people between the ages of 11 and 17 on their kinship care<sup>43</sup>. Children and young people were generally positive about their experiences of kinship care and their new families, with no wish to return home. They were able to identify what had made the move to living with their kinship carers easier. This included their new carers being familiar to them, that the move had taken place over time, and that they only moved a small distance and did not have to change schools. They did not see themselves as different to other children and young people and found their new lives more stable than previously. Sometimes there were challenges in adapting to new approaches to parenting and concerns about the health of older carers. For some, unplanned meetings with parents were difficult, along with missing contact with some of their extended family.

### **Leaving care**

- 3.40 A conference held in 2009 by the Debate Project brought together 40 care leavers round Scotland<sup>44</sup>. The vast majority identified that they felt negative when leaving care, often feeling isolated, alone and uncertain about their future. Young people identified that they needed better options in accommodation as what was available was often unsuitable. They needed access to resources, both financial and practical as well as emotional support. They highlighted that having someone to listen to them or give them some help made them feel more included and the support of workers was crucial



- 3.41 The Debate Project made a short film<sup>45</sup> about the experiences of young people leaving care. This identified the challenges for young people who have left care including: being placed in unsuitable accommodation; low levels of benefits; the ways in which young mothers who are care leavers were viewed; and having to deal with major life transitions on their own.
- 3.42 Young care leavers in their submission<sup>46</sup> on the proposals for the Children and Young People Bill from the Debate Project highlighted the need for the UNCRC's Article 12 (the right of every child to have a say in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously) to be implemented appropriately. They felt their views were not consistently heard in the processes which affected them. This had a negative effect on their feelings of power and control in their lives, particularly in terms of their accommodation needs and the relationships that supported them. They also highlighted the need for young people who were looked after to be protected by children's rights up to the age of 21 or 25 years. The young people strongly wanted a duty to be placed on local authorities to provide support to care leavers up until the age of 25. The response highlights the need for young people to be able to choose their named person and the need for services to be 'joined up' in providing services. Generally, young care leavers emphasised the importance of their emotional needs being met, alongside ensuring that their practical needs such as housing are addressed.
- 3.43 Eleven young people were consulted about their past experiences of living in residential care by the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum<sup>47</sup>. The consultation explored rules, sanctions and culture and found examples of positive experiences although the consultation's focus was to identify those areas that had been negative or restrictive. Young people talked about bedrooms being locked and not being able to have friends over for sleepovers. There were restrictions which impacted on relationships with friends such as having friends over for meals and not being able to stay with friends unless police checks took place. Taking part in activities could be hindered due to health and safety requirements. Overall young people thought that there were too many rules and that these could provoke negative reactions from other young people.
- 3.44 An initiative<sup>48</sup> involved care leavers in the co-production of designing and improving leaving care services. Helpful and meaningful ideas for care leaving services were identified, for Argyll and Bute, from workshops focused on the social and emotional care of young people leaving. This approach was viewed as a productive approach that could be used in other settings.

### **Role of parents and families**

- 3.45 No specific research on children and young people's views and experiences of parental responsibilities was identified, although the broad topic of parenting relates to other issues such as health, household substance misuse and domestic abuse.
- 3.46 The 'Being Young in Scotland 2009' survey<sup>49</sup> emphasised the important role parents have in young people's lives, with 90% believing that parents/carers

take account of their views a 'great deal' or a 'fair amount'. Parents were an important source of information about rights and were the most frequently mentioned role model. They were also cited as those with the greatest influence on young people's attitudes and as someone that could be trusted and respected.

- 3.47 'A RIGHT wee blether' (2011)<sup>50</sup> asked young children who was special to them. Family was the most common theme with 98% of all children talking about a family member. Children consulted in the Children's Parliament (2012)<sup>51</sup> workshops said that the Scottish Government needed to make sure parents fully understood children's rights and acted on them. Parents and carers were also identified as key people who needed to know about children's human rights. For the children consulted, having protective and supportive parents, carers and guardians played an important role in making them feel healthy, happy and safe. Children were also aware that parents and carers can have their own worries or problems and they might need support to help them care for their children.

### **Role of adults**

- 3.48 A group of nine and 10 year olds from six primary schools in Fife, with other young people as mentors, explored what children in the early years need<sup>52</sup>. The Children's Parliament facilitated discussions to inform the report, 'Joining the dots: A better start for Scotland's children'<sup>53</sup>. The children identified the following issues: adults should keep children safe and healthy; adults should help children learn and grow; adults should be positive about and respectful of children; and adults should provide a loving and caring home for children.

### **Physical punishment**

- 3.49 About half of children and young people thought children and young people should be legally protected from 'being smacked'. Just over half (56%) of 11 to 16 year olds in the 'Being Young in Scotland 2009' survey<sup>54</sup> agreed with this; 44% of 17 to 25 year olds also agreed.

### **Young carers**

- 3.50 Children and young people with caring responsibilities continued to want more support. Three sources provide overlapping results. At the 2012 Scottish Young Carers Festival, 70 children and young people were involved in a round table discussion<sup>55</sup>. In an East Lothian survey of all Primary 6 and Secondary 2 pupils in 2011<sup>56</sup>, 31% agreed with the statement 'I regularly help to take care of someone in my family who is physically or mentally ill or has problems with drugs or alcohol'. Twenty young people aged 12 to 23 were interviewed, from across Scotland, for an academic research study<sup>57</sup>.
- 3.51 Both the Young Carers Festival and the East Lothian Survey found that children and young people wanted more support at school. They wanted teachers to listen more and treat them fairly, for the school to know more and understand, while respecting their privacy.

- 3.52 Children and young people valued their young carers groups. They wanted more of them and funding to be more secure. They wanted more help for their parents and themselves, including having someone nearby the young person could call upon and medication and medical equipment being in order and secure.
- 3.53 Young carers wanted to spend more time out of their homes since money concerns prevented them socialising, attending school trips and going onto further education.

### **Domestic abuse**

- 3.54 Domestic abuse is an area where children and young people have significantly influenced the policy agenda. Work began pre-2008 when children and young people were consulted on the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Group Draft proposals<sup>58</sup>. A group of young people subsequently met with Ministers to put forward their concerns about services supporting children affected by domestic abuse, their experiences of services and their recommendations for improvement (Houghton, 2008)<sup>59</sup>. This work demonstrated the need for the voices of children and young people experiencing domestic abuse to be heard and taken into account.
- 3.55 Two key initiatives have resulted. The first is Voice Against Violence (VAV). Launched in November 2009, it involved eight 'Young Experts' with first-hand experience of domestic abuse and different services. Acting as 'critical friends' of adults in power, the group sought to ensure that children and young people experiencing domestic abuse in Scotland had a voice and were heard in policy making. The process of using a peer education model of participation has been documented in 'Question Time'<sup>60</sup>. The group produced research and other resources, including a survey on domestic abuse of 610 young people in Scotland<sup>61</sup>. VAV was actively involved in the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People<sup>62</sup>.
- 3.56 The second is the service model, Cedar (Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Recovery), which provides a therapeutic 12 week group work programme for children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse, alongside a concurrent programme for their mothers. Evaluated using an action research approach that embedded children and young people's views into the process (Sharp et al, 2010)<sup>63</sup>, feedback was positive. Following engagement with Cedar, children and young people reported a better understanding of domestic abuse and safe behaviours, greater ability in managing emotions and a positive impact on their relationship with their mothers.

- 3.57 More recent doctoral research has explored children's participation in child contact in cases where there is a history of domestic abuse. This research involved in-depth interviews with 18 children; however, its findings are yet to be released. An initial analysis has been published that focuses on the processes of participation and the 'weight' given to children's views. The research concluded that, while children's views were taken account of, often the process of voicing their opinions was poor. The research calls for more empirical work on children's participation in family law proceedings<sup>64</sup>.

### **Household substance misuse**

- 3.58 Few studies explored directly children and young people's own experiences of parental alcohol and drug misuse, instead relying on adults' retrospective accounts. Other work has directed its attention on understanding prevalence rates across Scotland.
- 3.59 One study by Gillian et al (2009)<sup>65</sup> interrogated the ChildLine caller database<sup>66</sup>. The work revealed the corrosive effect of harmful parental drinking on family life. Negative impacts included severe emotional distress, physical abuse and violence and a general lack of care, support and protection. Children living with harmful parental drinking could experience isolation outside the home, while stigma and secrecy prevented them seeking help. Children were found to employ a range of strategies for 'getting by' including assuming practical and emotional caring responsibilities and getting 'out of the way' of a drinking parent.
- 3.60 Hill's (2011) doctoral research on children and young people's experiences of living with parental alcohol problems revealed that even young children 'know a lot' and 'keep things hidden' for many different reasons<sup>67</sup>. The study emphasised the negative impact of parental alcohol misuse and the diverse ways in which the issue is experienced and managed. This diversity, the study concluded, needs to be acknowledged by professionals. Children and young people wanted their experiences to be recognised but did not want to be treated differently. They appreciated time out of the home, as well as interventions delivered at their own pace and in confidence.
- 3.61 No studies on children and young people's experiences of other forms of substance misuse were identified post-2008.

### **Child contact disputes in court**

- 3.62 Mackay undertook research<sup>68</sup> on contact disputes in court concerning children. The research mainly focused on analysing evidence from children in court papers and questionnaires and interviews with law practitioners and parents. Interviews were undertaken with a small sample of two children. A significant number of children whose views were analysed from the court paper sample did not want contact with their non-resident parent. Where there was no fear of threat or harm, children generally wished to have contact with the non-resident parent.

## **Children and young people with a parent in prison**

- 3.63 The perspectives of children with a parent in prison were explored in a study commissioned by SCCYP. Interviews were undertaken with 11 children and young people between the ages of four and 14<sup>69</sup>. The research identified that having a parent in prison had a profound impact on children and young people. The majority heard about their parent being imprisoned from a grandmother, who was also highly important for support generally. Children were very concerned about the parent who was in prison. The impact of imprisonment was greater on the child or young person, if he or she lived with the parent previously.

## **Running away from home and homelessness**

- 3.64 Shelter Scotland (2011)<sup>70</sup> undertook a survey of 145 young homeless people (aged 16 to 24) across Scotland about their experiences of running away before they were 16. It found that young people who run away were at particular risk of experiencing homelessness later in life. Many had run away after being forced to leave and had run away multiple times. A large proportion had slept rough and reported issues at home, school and feelings of safety as factors influenced their behaviour.

## **Child sexual exploitation**

- 3.65 Child exploitation is regarded as child abuse across the UK but there are challenges in identifying its existence because of a lack of visibility and difficulties with proving its prevalence, according to a study undertaken by Brodie and Pearce (2012) for the Scottish Government<sup>71</sup>. This review of research and evidence found that there was currently little evidence on the views and experiences of children and young people and child sexual exploitation.

## **Child trafficking**

- 3.66 Child trafficking is included in the National Guidance for Child Protection and is embedded within the approach to child protection. There is a growing body of research on child trafficking<sup>72</sup>. However the review found that there was little that looked specifically at trafficking in Scotland and no work was identified that took account of the views and experiences of children and young people.

## **Mental health and wellbeing**

- 3.67 NHS Health Scotland commissioned a consultation with children and young people to contribute to the development of a framework for mental health indicators. This consultation involved 70 children aged from 3 years to young people in their early 20's with a range of experiences, including young carers, young Gypsy Travellers, black and ethnic minority young people, young people with learning disabilities and younger children<sup>73</sup>. The consultation focused on what contributed to children and young people's wellbeing.

- 3.68 In the NHS Health Scotland consultation, children and young people identified that they were not consistently listened to by adults. Family and friends were important for all the children and young people, as well as adults who they trusted and/ or who were professionals. Young people of all ages from 3 years upwards were able to identify a range of situations that they viewed as not being fair, including being bullied, excluded or being discriminated against as well identifying positive activities that they enjoyed such as being with friends, play outside and taking parts in sports and clubs and using online media.
- 3.69 The Scottish Health Survey<sup>74</sup> highlighted that the vast majority of children and young people (87%) were satisfied with their life, while 44% were very happy. Thirty nine per cent of children and young people often felt confident. A minority of children and young people always felt confident, with the figure for boys twice as high as that for girls between the ages of 13 and 15. The survey showed that happiness, confidence and feelings of not be left out have increased since 1994, when a measure of happiness was first included in the survey.
- 3.70 A study<sup>75</sup> undertaken by Highland Children's Forum on sadness involved 310 children and young people aged between 5 and 14. The children and young people identified that, when they were experiencing loss through separation or bereavement, other family members were also dealing with these experiences as well. Friendships could change and their experiences of loss could impact on their school work. Children and young people stated that it could mean that they did not go out and that they could get depressed and their mental health would be poorer.
- 3.71 The Junction project in Edinburgh undertook a survey<sup>76</sup> of 115 young people aged 14 to 17 years. Young people thought that their lives had 'ups and downs' with one in 10 young people aged 15 years and ethnic minority girls feeling negative about their lives. Thirty seven per cent of young people thought that their lives were fine at present, while 18% felt positive about their lives. One in four wanted someone to talk to about family issues. When they needed someone to talk to, young people wanted skilled adult staff and confidentiality.

## **Bullying**

- 3.72 Children and young people were aware of school-based initiatives generally to tackle bullying but initiatives were not always successful.
- 3.73 Research undertaken by the Scottish Borders Youth Commission<sup>77</sup> found varied practice across schools, in prevention, management and recording of bullying incidents. Young people undertook the research for the Commission, which involved a range of methods and over 500 children and young people. Key recommendations and findings of the Youth Commissioner were:
- To amend current definitions of bullying that require intent and aggression - Labelling people as 'bullies' and 'victims' was unhelpful.
  - To include parents, pupils and school staff<sup>78</sup> in a whole school approach.

- To target prejudice-based bullying specifically and to promote diversity positively.
  - To explore appropriate consequences and responses for children and young people demonstrating bullying behaviour.
  - To develop understanding of cyberbullying. Staff and young people were not confident discussing cyberbullying.
- 3.74 Responding to a *respectme* survey of children and young people aged 8 to 19 across 29 Scottish local authorities<sup>79</sup>, 16% reported being cyberbullied. Most (63%) knew who had done this and in 40% of these occasions the bullying carried on into school. A quarter of respondents were worried about cyberbullying when they were online.
- 3.75 For most of the 35 participants (aged 11 to 18 years) speaking to Young Scot on child internet safety<sup>80</sup>, the term 'cyberbullying' was familiar. Some had experienced it and most felt they knew how to report concerns online.
- 3.76 In contrast to generalised bullying initiatives in schools, initiatives to address homophobia, biphobia and transphobia were not well known to young people. When responding to a questionnaire for LGBT young people<sup>81</sup>, less than one third (31%) was aware that antiphobia education had been introduced in schools. Just under half of the young people said they would not feel confident reporting such bullying.
- 3.77 Certain groups of children and young people were particularly concerned about being bullied. Over two-thirds (69%) of LGBT young people responding to a survey<sup>82</sup> had experienced homophobic or biphobic bullying at school. The results for transphobic bullying were even higher. This negatively impacted on their education and employment experiences.
- 3.78 Looked after children reported bullying. Of the 30 young people interviewed in one local authority, just under half said they had been bullied<sup>83</sup>.

## Drug misuse

- 3.79 The Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS) survey<sup>84</sup> monitors the prevalence and trends in smoking, drinking and drug use among young people at a Scottish level. In 2010, 37,307 S2 and S4 pupils completed the survey. In relation to drug use, 21% of 15 year olds and 5% of 13 year olds reported ever having used drugs. Cannabis was by far the most common drug, with very few reporting the use of other drugs. Forty-two per cent of 15 year olds and 16% of 13 year olds reported being offered at least one drug and similar proportions felt it would be 'very easy' or 'fairly easy' to obtain drugs. Friends were the most commonly reported source. Of those who had taken drugs, very few reported that they had felt they needed help. Around three-quarters of young people agreed that their school provided them with the advice and support they needed to take important decisions about drugs.

- 3.80 In 2011, Young Scot undertook consultation into peer-led approaches to substance misuse education<sup>85</sup>. The work involved a national survey, local investigation days and a national discussion day. The survey found that teachers and parents are the main educators, while peers and the internet were less significant. Knowledge of 'peer education' was low, yet young people felt that this would be a positive way of learning about substance misuse, as would learning from someone involved in drugs in the past. While school was an important site for learning, young people also emphasised the importance of providing local services outwith educational facilities. Allowing young people to be involved actively in ongoing national conversations about drugs was also considered critical.

## Alcohol

- 3.81 SALSUS<sup>86</sup> provides comprehensive data on young people's relationship to alcohol. It reported that 44% of 13 year olds and 77% of 15 year olds have had an alcoholic drink at some point, while 14% of 13 year olds and 34% of 15 year olds had consumed alcohol in the week before the survey. While reported alcohol consumption declined between 1990 and 2002, this trend has ended and consumption in 2010 had again increased. The three most common sources for purchasing alcohol were friends, shops and relatives. Thirteen year olds were most likely to report that they usually drink at home, while 15 year olds were more likely to drink at someone else's home or at and a party. Drinking outside had declined slightly but still accounted for around a third of all 15 year olds.
- 3.82 The Edinburgh-based Health Opportunities Team (HOT) conducted a survey of 428 children and young people aged 11 to 18 on their drinking habits, attitudes to alcohol and access to information and support<sup>87</sup>. Drinking was a social activity for children and young people, normally associated with friendships. While perceiving a connection between alcohol consumption and mental well-being, children and young people were far more likely to identify with the physical consequences of drinking. In terms of support and information, children and young people favoured those services that enabled them to express themselves and to be listened to in a way that was relevant to their lives.
- 3.83 A visual resource by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (2012)<sup>88</sup> aimed to look at young people's relationship to alcohol through 'their eyes'. The research involved eight activity-based focus groups with young adults aged 16 to 30. Excessive alcohol use was regarded as an essential part of being an adult. Distinct gendered norms around drinking also existed. Female respondents described collective drinking as a strategy for reducing the risks of male violence whilst intoxicated. Male respondents, meanwhile, saw the risks of drinking as exclusion from commercial drinking establishments and threats of violence or arrest.



- 3.84 The Scottish Youth Commission on Alcohol was undertaken during 2009<sup>89</sup>, involving 16 ‘youth commissioners’ aged 14 to 22 in a year-long investigation into Scotland’s relationship to alcohol. As well as study visits and discussions with experts, over 3,000 young people were consulted in two national surveys and focus groups. Young people, it was emphasised, should be co-designers of alcohol strategies, with methods such as peer education and Youth Champions suggested as a means of establishing a permanent voice for young people in alcohol related policies. Suggestions were made for further research on topics such as pre-loading, the leisure needs of different age groups and passive drinking.
- 3.85 The role of alcohol education was emphasised in the ‘Being Young in Scotland 2009’ survey<sup>90</sup>. Around two-thirds of young people reported that alcohol education at school informed them about facts about alcohol, while two-thirds of 11 to 16 year olds said education had either completely or partly made them consider not drinking alcohol. Focus groups conducted by the Youth Commissioners<sup>91</sup> concluded that young people struggled to recall details about alcohol education at school. It was concluded that alcohol education needs to be embedded better within existing strategies for education about health and well-being and training for learning professionals strengthened.
- 3.86 ‘Peer Learning Through Dialogue: Young People and Alcohol’ (2010)<sup>92</sup> is an action research project which utilises ‘dialogic techniques’ to tap into young people’s knowledge, experiences and needs, enabling them to ‘co-design’ their own learning. Young people, they found, recognised the way in which alcohol in Scotland was simultaneously glorified and vilified. Not only could young people generate a high level of relevant knowledge about alcohol but they used this to develop sensible coping strategies for themselves and peers. The project was developed by a group of teenage volunteers, the AlcoLOLs, and two public relations researchers, tested in a local school, presented at the Scottish Parliament to policy stakeholders concerned with alcohol, and subsequently extended to a number of schools across Edinburgh.
- 3.87 Much of the focus on alcohol education has been on young people. The Rory Learning Resource<sup>93</sup> aims to help build resilience and raise awareness of alcohol with children aged 5 to 11 years and to explore issues surrounding parental alcohol misuse. It was piloted in West Lothian in 2009 and an evaluation was undertaken to understand how it was experienced. This involved evaluation sheets from 870 pupils across P1 to P7, as well as writing and drawing exercises. There was clear evidence that the resource was successfully educating children on the effects of alcohol and encouraging them to think about how to talk to someone if they felt sad or lonely.

- 3.88 The Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland Partnership Drugs Initiative (PDI) has been heavily involved in supporting and evaluating work that the voluntary sector is undertaking with children and young people affected by substance misuse. Working with Evaluation Support Scotland and six PDI funded groups, the 'Reversing the Trend' project aims to gain a better understanding of how preventative approaches can measure change. The outcomes of this project are yet to be released; however, the consultation emphasised that projects must put children and young people's voices at the heart of evaluation methods.

### **Sexual Health**

- 3.89 The Scottish HBSC study<sup>94</sup> collects data from 15 year olds (S4) on reported sexual intercourse and contraception use. Almost a third of 15 year olds said that they have had sexual intercourse, with girls (35%) more likely to report sexual intercourse than boys (27%).
- 3.90 Healthy Respect is currently seeking the views of young people on why they do or do not access sexual health services. This forthcoming consultation is particularly interested in the views of young people who are less likely to attend a service, and who may be more vulnerable to poor sexual health outcomes<sup>95</sup>.
- 3.91 The SYP consulted 30 MSYPs aged 15 to 23 on National Guidance: Under-age Sexual Activity<sup>96</sup>. The majority felt that whether under-age sexual activity was reported as a child protection issue depended on the particular situation. Most also felt that youth workers or practitioners should be able to support young people without the prior consent or knowledge of their parent or guardian. Eighty per cent were in favour of the minimum age remaining at 16.

### **Summary**

- 3.92 There is a wide range of evidence on areas of children and young people's lives that relates to child protection. However, there is not a substantial body of evidence on the views of children and young people across all the risk indicator areas which are outlined in the National Guidance for Child Protection and there are some areas where there is limited evidence. There is generally more evidence on the views of children and young people who are looked after than other groups of children and young people who require support from child protection services.
- 3.93 Overall, there were a number of clear gaps in understanding children and young people's own views and experiences of relevance to child protection, particularly in relation to child trafficking, sexual exploitation and household substance misuse. Further knowledge on the role of the parent in children and young people's lives would also be helpful to better understand the parenting role and to consider how alternative forms of care can be improved. There is less evidence on children and young people's views on home supervision and experiences post-Hearing. There is little evidence on children and young people's views of physical punishment.

## **4 EVIDENCE ON CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS**

### **Introduction**

- 4.1 The following is an analysis of consultations and evaluations of children and young people's involvement in child protection processes.
- 4.2 Child protection processes are outlined in detail in the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland<sup>97</sup>. They include: the process for assessing where a child is thought to be at risk of harm; the meetings associated with child protection such as the child protection case conference (which considers the child thought to be at risk of harm and actions which are to be taken); placing the child's name on the child protection register; approaches to ensuring the child's views are heard; and a child or young person's contact with social workers and other professionals involved in child protection.
- 4.3 The evidence is drawn from local authorities and NGOs. Many local authorities undertook consultations using the Viewpoint software, a computer-assisted tool for gathering children and young people's views. Viewpoint is used to engage with children and young people who are on the child protection register and are looked after. There may be other local authorities that have similar information but did not submit it to the review. Other consultations and evaluations used face-to-face interviews or group discussions.

### **Consultations with children and young people on child protection processes**

- 4.4 South Lanarkshire Council surveyed children and young people involved in the child protection process during 2012<sup>98</sup>. This involved 29 children aged from 4 to 14 years with participants being asked to complete a questionnaire. All those surveyed were able to say who their social worker was, and most knew why they had a social worker. Being kept safe was identified as the main reason for having a social worker. Those who did not know who was their social worker were generally younger. Children and young people stated that their social worker helped them with problems with their family. Over half said that the child protection process had helped to keep them safe.
- 4.5 When they felt unsafe, the majority would talk to their parents or other family members, followed by the social worker, with smaller numbers identifying their friends or teachers. Most children and young people taking part in the consultation appeared to have a good relationship with their social worker and stated that having a social worker had improved their situation. Over two-thirds had been asked what they wanted to happen and the majority felt that they had been listened to.
- 4.6 The South Lanarkshire consultation identified three areas for improvement: continuing to improve practice in children and young people's participation; ensuring that children and young people were seen within timescales; and that children and young people had the opportunity to see social workers on their own.

- 4.7 The findings from the South Lanarkshire consultation is complemented by formal research undertaken in Renfrewshire on children and young people's experiences of a child protection investigation. Eleven children and young people aged 12 to 17 years were interviewed<sup>99</sup>. The study found that none of the children or young people knew what to expect at the commencement of the investigation and the majority did not know that it was going to take place.
- 4.8 Children and young people had different experiences of the first child protection meeting, with a small number finding it helpful and five of the young people feeling that their views were not listened to. The majority did not understand the process as they were not informed about what was happening. Over half did not know that they were on the child protection register until they were contacted for the Renfrewshire study.
- 4.9 The study found that those who were informed from the outset were more positive. The children and young people had diverse understandings of what would happen, with some being confident because they were aware of procedures. Generally, however, children and young people in the Renfrewshire study were dissatisfied with the investigation process. This was due to the lack of information and little understanding about the process. However, the majority identified that the child protection investigation was positive in its impact on their lives.
- 4.10 All the children and young people who took part had views on how to improve the process. This included: involving children and young people more when decisions were being made; ensuring that decisions were carried out or reasons given why this was not possible; giving children and young people the opportunity to attend child protection case conferences; providing information throughout and facilitating families' involvement. Other suggestions included have fewer professionals at meetings and requesting that police officers did not wear uniforms if visiting homes.
- 4.11 An evaluation<sup>100</sup> of individual reports gathered through Viewpoint by Glasgow City Council explored the effectiveness of this tool in consulting children and young people around child protection processes. Viewpoint questionnaires have been used in Glasgow from April 2009 with different questionnaires used for three age groups: those aged 5 to 7 years; those aged 8 to 11 years; and those aged 12 to 16 years old. In addition to completing the questionnaire for the child protection process, children and young people were asked to give their views on using Viewpoint. Those children and young people that did use it were positive about Viewpoint and indicated that they thought it helped them get their views across.
- 4.12 In the 5 to 7 age group, 52% of those responding reported that they understood why professionals were supporting their families. Under one-third were not sure and 19% did not know why. The majority, two-thirds, saw their social worker as often as they felt they needed to.
- 4.13 Of the children aged 8 to 11 years responding to these questions, the majority (69%) knew that their names were on the child protection register (which records the main areas of risk to the child) with 59% of this group

knowing why they were on the register. Nearly 80% were unsure or did not think that they should be on the child protection register. The majority, nearly three-quarters, felt that they could talk to their social worker. Over 60% had been to child protection meetings previously. Overall, the evaluation found that children in this age group had a high level of awareness of the child protection process although they did not necessarily think that they should be on the child protection register.

- 4.14 In the 12 to 16 age group, 67% of those who responded knew that they were on the child protection register and the reasons why. The majority of young people (59%) did not believe that they should be on the child protection register with the majority of this group indicated that they felt their home lives were stable. Eighty two per cent felt safe all of the time. The evaluation highlights that there were different perceptions between young people and that of professionals about young people's safety and need for child protection interventions.
- 4.15 Across the 8 to 16 age group who responded in the Glasgow study, children and young people identified that they would speak to their mothers primarily as well as their social workers, fathers and siblings. The majority, 84%, stated that they were able to talk to their social workers.
- 4.16 Overall, the evaluation identified that Viewpoint was the only method of children and young people giving their views around child protection processes that had been monitored and evaluated. The evaluation emphasised that the analysis was a 'snapshot' of children and young people's views and findings might be limited to those who like completing questionnaires, and/or using computers and/or were given the opportunity to complete the Viewpoint questionnaire.
- 4.17 Aberdeenshire Council collated Viewpoint reports<sup>101</sup> gathered from 211 children and young people. Of these 39 (19%) related to child protection. All completed questionnaires identified a child or young person's gender, ethnicity and disability and were analysed using the SHANNARI indicators. The majority of children and young people aged from 5 to 16 felt safe at home all of the time (82%). Fifty five per cent knew why their name was on the child protection register, with a further 8% not sure and 37% not knowing why.
- 4.18 East Lothian Council regularly gathers information<sup>102</sup> from Viewpoint from children and young people involved in child protection. The report for 2012 acknowledges that the small sample size was not necessarily representative. All children and young people taking part, aged 7 to 14 years, said that they could talk to their social worker. All knew that their names were on the child protection register and what the child protection register was. The report suggests that there needs to be better take-up of Viewpoint as a means of ensuring that children and young people's views are heard.
- 4.19 Children 1<sup>st</sup> undertakes regular user evaluations<sup>103</sup> in its child protection advocacy service in North Ayrshire. The evaluations found that young people were positive about the support they received from the advocacy worker and that young people understood what was happening when workers were

involved in the family. Young people felt involved in decisions to some degree. Nearly all young people felt that their lives had improved since their names were put on the child protection register and that advocacy had helped them through the child protection process.

- 4.20 In a participation event<sup>104</sup> with 9 participants held by the Children 1<sup>st</sup> North Ayrshire Advocacy Service, young people identified that they thought leaflets would be useful to find out more about advocacy and child protection, with a request for more pictures, less words or adults telling young people information. Young people thought that they would use the internet to learn more about advocacy and child protection and that it was a good idea to meet the chairperson of the Child Protection Committee. Overall, young people had mixed experiences of going through the child protection process.
- 4.21 Fifteen children and young people supported by a Children 1<sup>st</sup> service in Dundee were asked about their views and experiences on the child protection register and previous case conferences<sup>105</sup>. Just under half had knowledge of a child protection conference taking place recently with a similar number not being sure of such a meeting taking place. The majority did not attend the child protection conference. There was mixed understanding of what the child protection register was, with 5 knowing what the child protection register was, 7 not knowing and 3 not sure. Those children and young people who had an understanding of the child protection register wanted to have their names removed.
- 4.22 The majority of children and young people in the Children 1<sup>st</sup> consultation could not remember seeing the information leaflet for children and young people on child protection. Some individual suggestions about improving the leaflets included: using more colour and pictures but less words; using stories or DVDs; and being age appropriate.
- 4.23 North Lanarkshire undertook a consultation with 16 children and young people aged 10 years and above involved in the child protection process in 2011<sup>106</sup>. The sample included children and young people with a disability. A senior social worker and Who Cares? Scotland worker met one to one with children and young people.
- 4.24 The majority of the children and young people who took part stated that their lives had improved. Some described specific positive outcomes. As in other consultation findings, children and young people were able to identify an adult that they spoke to and some said that they were listened to. Overall, the majority knew why they were getting support from professionals and what support had been available. They generally knew why their names were on the child protection register. Some had attended child protection meetings although this was generally at a later stage in the child protection process.

- 4.25 A scoping study<sup>107</sup> that focused on child protection and disabled children and young people in Scotland identified that little research had been undertaken with disabled children and young people that explored their views and experiences of the child protection system.

### **Approaches to supporting participation**

- 4.26 Viewpoint, a computer-assisted tool for gathering children and young people's views, was used by many local authorities to gather the views of children and young people. Children and young people who were asked about Viewpoint found it easy to use and accessible. However, there also appears to be some limitations on its use, based on the evidence considered for this review. Some reports question whether Viewpoint is the best tool or is sufficiently flexible to gather children and young people's views.
- 4.27 In addition, Viewpoint was not used consistently with all children and young people. It is not clear if this was due to professionals not using the tool or children and young people not wanting to contribute their views by this method. It was suggested from some consultation findings that insufficient qualitative information is gathered using Viewpoint and that it does not necessarily provide in-depth insights.
- 4.28 Some of the evidence highlights that there is a need to use a range of approaches to gather the views of children and young people because of limitations in the effectiveness of Viewpoint as an approach and also to ensure participation by as many children and young people as possible.

### **Evidence on child protection systems from the rest of the UK**

- 4.29 A small number of studies, from elsewhere in the UK, specifically England, were considered in order to provide additional context. This evidence does not generally take account of the differences in child protection systems but does identify some common messages.
- 4.30 A Scottish Child Care and Protection Network briefing<sup>108</sup> reviewed research about involving children and young people in assessment and decision-making. It found that the majority of evidence on this topic was based on small-scale qualitative studies across the UK. The study found little evidence on younger children's views (those under the age of 8). Only limited research was available on investigative interviews relating to child protection. The briefing found that children and young people's involvement was dependent on the skills and values of professionals working with children.
- 4.31 Research<sup>109</sup> commissioned by the Children's Commissioner in England found that children and young people often had a partial understanding of child protection processes, relying on parents or siblings for further information. Those who did understand more about these processes tended to be older and had previous experience of child protection meetings. Although some children and young people could identify positive outcomes from their social workers' involvement, many also spoke of negative factors such as increased family stress, intrusion and stigma arising from the intervention.

- 4.32 A review<sup>110</sup> on child abuse and neglect undertaken for the Department of Children, Schools and Families for the UK Government identified that there was little research that explored children and young people's (and parents' views) on the ways in which they would seek help, what would be the best form of support that children would seek and what would inhibit access to services.
- 4.33 A study<sup>111</sup> undertaken by Action for Children for the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) in England found limited evidence on children and young people's views of the child protection system. Research evidence identified that children and young people found being involved in the child protection system did make things better although they might lose control over what happens to them. Consultation with children and young people identified that relationships with social workers were of central importance. Children and young people wanted to be kept informed, to have choices, to be provided with explanations, their families to be involved and their views to be taken into account.
- 4.34 These other studies confirm the finding of this review that generally there is a lack of evidence on children and young people's views relating to child protection systems. It confirms findings from Scottish evidence on the importance of positive relationships with social workers, some children and young people being concerned about negative outcomes arising from their engagement with child protection systems, and mixed understandings of meetings and processes associated with child protection.

## Summary

- 4.35 Children and young people had diverse experiences of child protection services. Younger children were generally less likely to know why they were on the child protection register whereas older young people were more likely to state that they should not be on the child protection register. Most children and young people stated that being kept safe was the main reason for being on the child protection register.
- 4.36 Children and young people thought that they were listened to. Children and young people were positive about their relationships with social workers and said that they could talk to them. Where it was explored, children and young people thought that their circumstances had improved and that their home lives were stable. Evidence highlights that there is a need to use a range of approaches to gather the views of children and young people.
- 4.37 Overall, however, there was not a substantial body of evidence on children and young people's experiences of child protection systems in Scotland. There was little formal research on children and young people's views of child protection services that was independently undertaken.



## 5 CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

- 5.1 The review explored evidence on the views and experiences of children and young people on child protection systems in Scotland between January 2008 and April 2013. Overall, the review identified evidence undertaken by a wide range of organisations covering relevant areas, demonstrating a significant commitment to engaging with children and young people. A number of evidence gaps were identified that would benefit from further exploration.

### Findings

#### *Evidence on child protection*

- 5.2 There is a wide range of evidence on areas of children and young people's lives that relates to child protection. However, there is not a substantial body of evidence on the views of children and young people across all the risk indicator areas which are outlined in the National Guidance for Child Protection and there are some areas where there is limited evidence. There is generally more evidence on the views of children and young people who are looked after than other groups of children and young people who require support from child protection services.
- 5.3 The family and caring environment had a critical role for children and young people, both as a form of inclusion and as a means of ensuring positive outcomes and wellbeing. For all children and young people, positive experiences of home and family were closely bound with the ability to input directly into decisions about their care.
- 5.4 Parents were of central importance to children and young people. Where this relationship breaks down (in the case of domestic abuse or parental substance abuse), it becomes more important to provide quality care and support that understands their experiences, but does not treat them differently.
- 5.5 Children and young people with caring responsibilities as young carers continued to want more support. Recent work on domestic abuse with young people has demonstrated the need for the voices of children and young people experiencing domestic abuse to be heard and taken into account. There is little evidence on children and young people's views of physical punishment.
- 5.6 Looked after children continued to face a number of everyday challenges including being listened to and their views taken into account, stigma, a weak sense of belonging and identity and a lack of quality support. At the same time they also had positive experiences of care. There is a small amount of research undertaken on the views of children and young people on home supervision.

- 5.7 There was a significant body of work on the Children's Hearing System with clear messages on how the process could be improved. This includes: the need to improve information and preparation, issues relating to the adults involved in the Children's Hearings System, how decisions are made and communicated and whether children and young people are able to participate fully and give their views. At the same time, children and young people did identify positive experiences with examples of good practice and support from adults. There was less evidence that explored children and young people's views and experiences post-Hearing.
- 5.8 Although there are limited studies on children and young people's views on advocacy support, a significant proportion of the evidence emphasises the importance of having trusted adults help children and young people speak out whether these were independent advocates, other professionals or family and friends.
- 5.9 There is not a significant body of evidence on children and young people's views on sharing information in child protection processes. The evidence that is available identified that children and young people saw confidentiality as an important right.
- 5.10 There is also not much evidence on children and young people's views relating to online use and child protection. Children and young people reported understanding issues around security online. However, safety messages were often ignored.
- 5.11 There was little that looked specifically at trafficking in Scotland and no work was identified that took account of the views and experiences of children and young people. There was also currently little evidence on the views and experiences of children and young people and child sexual exploitation.
- 5.12 It was found that young people who run away were at particular risk of experiencing homelessness later in life.
- 5.13 There are some studies on children and young people's mental health but not evidence on how this relates to child protection and where they are at risk from harm. Children and young people were aware of school-based initiatives generally to tackle bullying but initiatives were not always successful.
- 5.14 Involving young people in national and local discussions about policy and services relating to drugs, alcohol and under-age sex was considered important.

### ***Child protection systems***

- 5.15 Children and young people had diverse experiences of child protection services. Younger children were generally less likely to know why they were on the child protection register whereas older young people were more likely to state that they should not be on the child protection register. Most children and young people stated that being kept safe was the main reason for being on the child protection register.

- 5.16 Children and young people thought that they were listened to. However, from the evidence it is difficult to identify if they felt that they were listened to in all meetings and processes. Children and young people, where asked, thought that the computer programme Viewpoint was easy to use. It was suggested by those reporting on consultations with children and young people that Viewpoint could limit responses in comparison with interviews or other face to face interaction and that there was inconsistent use of Viewpoint in gathering children and young people's views.
- 5.17 Children and young people were positive about their relationships with social workers and said that they could talk to them. Children and young people had different experiences of case conferences with some attending them while others had not. Similarly, some understood what happened in meetings while others did not. Where it was explored, children and young people thought that their circumstances had improved and that their home lives were stable.
- 5.18 Children and young people who were asked about the provision of information on child protection processes thought that it could be provided more creatively with more use of pictures and less words, DVDs, face-to-face conversations and use of the Internet. Some children and young people did not recall being given information.
- 5.19 Suggestions for improvements from children and young people included: ensuring that decisions were carried out or reasons given why this was not possible; giving children and young people the opportunity to attend child protection case conferences; providing information throughout and making the presentation of written information more interesting; having an advocacy worker; meeting the chairperson of the Child Protection Committee; facilitating families' involvement; having fewer professionals at meetings; and requesting that police officers did not wear uniforms if visiting homes.
- 5.20 A scoping study focused on Scotland, but drawing on research elsewhere, found little research that had been undertaken with disabled children and young people.
- 5.21 Evidence from other UK studies, which mainly focused on England, identified: the importance of positive relationships with social workers; some children and young people being concerned about negative outcomes arising from their engagement with child protection systems; and that there was mixed understanding of meetings and processes associated with child protection by children and young people.

### **Gaps in evidence**

- 5.22 There is a range of useful and insightful evidence on areas relating to children and young people's views and experiences on child protection services. There is also a lack of evidence in specific areas which would be helpful to explore in future activities.

- 5.23 Overall, there are gaps in understanding children and young people's own views and experiences of relevance to child protection, particularly in relation to child trafficking, sexual exploitation and household substance misuse. Further knowledge on the role of the parent in children and young people's lives would also be helpful to better understand the parenting role and to consider how alternative forms of care can be improved. There is less evidence on children and young people's views on home supervision and experiences post-Hearing. There is little evidence on children and young people's views of physical punishment.
- 5.24 The review found that there was not a substantial body of evidence on children and young people's experiences of child protection systems in Scotland. There was little formal research on children and young people's views of child protection services that was independently undertaken.
- 5.25 There was not significant evidence on how children and young people accessed information about child protection services. Some insights are provided on the different ways that children and young people wanted to receive information and how written information should be presented. However, this was only briefly explored and would benefit from further consideration.
- 5.26 There was no information on what would help children or young people to make contact or a referral and it is not clear what systems or processes were in place to support this. There was little evidence on children and young people's views on how, and when, information should be or was shared. Exploring these areas further with service providers in the public and NGO sectors would be helpful.
- 5.27 There was little on the views of specific groups of children and young people such as those who are younger (those under 5 years of age in particular), disabled children and young people, children and young people from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community. This is applicable across all areas of diversity and inclusion.
- 5.28 There was little information on what children and young people thought worked best in terms of giving their views on child protection systems and services. This could be explored further with social workers, Child Protection Committees and NGOs in order to ask children and young people what approaches are most effective and meet their diverse needs.
- 5.29 There was not a substantial body of reflective evidence on how children and young people's views were gathered in child protection systems. This includes evaluation of the widely used computer tool, Viewpoint.

## Reflections on the evidence

- 5.30 Although there is a range of evidence on children and young people's views and experiences of child protection areas and associated systems, there are areas where the evidence is not available, not widely collected or easily accessible to a wider audiences.
- 5.31 The review found that there were participatory activities being undertaken and recorded by Child Protection Committees, local authorities and NGOs to explore the views of children and young people in child protection services. The majority of evidence appeared to be gathered for internal reporting and monitoring purposes rather than for the purpose of wider dissemination. This gathering of information may be widely undertaken among local authorities. The evidence received for this review may therefore be a sample of wider activities across local authorities that collect the views of children and young people.
- 5.32 Some consultation and participation activities were currently being undertaken by local authorities with findings not yet available. These other activities may provide additional information of value. It may be helpful to discuss approaches to disseminating evidence with key stakeholders, such as Child Protection Committees, so that this evidence can be shared more widely when it is available.
- 5.33 Evidence passed to the review team had to be in the public domain in line with the review's criteria. However, some of this evidence is not easily accessible as it was produced for internal service purposes. The references for evidence are not always detailed and access to the evidence may require direct contact with the named organisations.
- 5.34 In addition, some of the evidence relating to children's views on child protection systems did not include much detail about the context for the activity; was small-scale and/or did not analyse findings in depth. However, it was decided to include this evidence because of its relevance to the review aims.
- 5.35 The lack of extensive evidence of children and young people's views on child protection services indicates that this is an area that could be developed and explored. In some instances, it may be difficult for children and young people to give their views where professionals from the same service are involved. In addition, there was little formal and independent research on children and young people's views of child protection services. This suggests that there is an opportunity for researchers to develop new work in this area.
- 5.36 There may be evidence that is contained in other reports, research or consultation evidence. For example, research and consultations on the views and experiences of children and young people who are looked after may contain useful insights into their experiences of child protection services but these may be included in perspectives on other forms of support or services. This could be addressed through discussion with other organisations which are gathering evidence in related areas.

- 5.37 Much of the evidence on children and young people's views on child protection systems did not include: details about the context for the consultation; information on the sample; whether consent had been given by children and young people for evidence to be shared; or detailed analysis of data. The review team is tentative about drawing in-depth conclusions from the available evidence because of the lack of detail.
- 5.38 Attention should be given to ethical issues that arise from gathering views from children and young people. This should include, for example, whether children and young people and their parents have given informed consent for evidence (rather on information relating to child protection) to be shared either locally or more widely. Where sample sizes are very small, it may be possible to identify participants so careful consideration should be given to anonymity and confidentiality.
- 5.39 Most of the evidence gathered did not provide a level of detail on the views and needs of children and young people from specific groups (e.g. different age groups, disability, ethnicity, geographical diversity, socio economic factors, sexual orientation and other areas that impact on children and young people's inclusion). It is therefore difficult to identify the specific characteristics of the sample of participants.

#### **Recommendations for future research**

- 5.40 The Scottish Government should consider areas for further participatory work with children and young people on child protection from the gaps in evidence in future research.
- 5.41 Organisations and services working with children and young people should also consider if there are gaps which could be explored through their research, consultation and participatory activities.
- 5.42 Establishing common areas of interest to explore across all child protection services would assist in providing a greater body of evidence which could be compared across Scotland.
- 5.43 Consideration should be given to promoting research and consultation by those independent of services such as academics and NGOs in order to provide a wider range of evidence.
- 5.44 Consideration should be given to ways in which research, consultations and evaluations could utilise larger samples of children and young people so that more detailed findings are available. This would allow for more details to be available on the needs of specific groups of children and young people.

### **Specific recommendations**

- 5.45 The Scottish Government should consider undertaking a review of the range of approaches used in gathering children and young people's views in child protection systems as there is insufficient information on the methods that are currently used. Such a review should also explore what children and young people thought worked best when giving their views in relation to child protection systems and services. It should take into account the needs of all children and young people across different age groups and with specific needs.
- 5.46 Developing more common shared understandings of a range of approaches across services and evaluating the use of Viewpoint as a tool would provide insights which would build on current experience. This would offer opportunities to develop knowledge and expertise about different methods of engaging children and young people which could be shared and evaluated.
- 5.47 The Scottish Government should consider, in partnership with stakeholders, how the gathering and dissemination of evidence could be improved so that there is more comparable data and analysis on children's views and experiences which could inform policy and service developments. The emphasis should be on developing reliable, high quality sources of evidence which take into account points explored in **paragraphs 5.29-5.38**.
- 5.48 The Scottish Government should discuss with relevant stakeholders how to maximise evidence from areas related to child protection in research, consultation and participatory activities. This would help in ensuring that evidence relevant to child protection is highlighted in evidence, for example, on parenting, looked after children and areas where children and young people are at risk from harm.

### **Conclusion**

- 5.49 The review provides insights into children and young people's views and experiences on child protection gathered by organisations between 2008 and 2013. As a resource, the review assists understanding of children and young people's experiences of child protection. At the same time, the review can provide a baseline for a second phase of activities which can draw on the views and experiences of young people.

## 6 ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

References are first provided as endnotes. A full reference list is then provided.

### Endnotes

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**Social Research series**

**ISSN 2045-6964**

**ISBN 978-1-78256-735-6**

**web only publication**

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APS Group Scotland  
DPPAS14465 (07/13)

