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Foreword

Outcomes for children and young people in their learning and in their lives often improve when they are actively involved in decision making. The increasing recognition of rights of children and young people to be heard, to have their views taken seriously and to be involved in decisions affecting their lives is expressed in national and international developments in legislation and policy.

It is recognised in *Curriculum for Excellence*¹ which sees the learner as at the heart of the educational process. The active engagement of learners and rich communication between learners and educators are prerequisites to apply principles such as personalisation and choice and relevance. It is recognised in *Getting it Right for Every Child*² (GIRFEC) which seeks to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people through better working arrangements between professionals who work with children. A key feature of the GIRFEC approach is the involvement of children and families in planning and supporting and reviewing their development and reviewing the impact of partnership support.

*Improving Scottish Education*³ reported good practice in involving children and young people but it also recurred as an aspect for development. References to 'better use of the child's voice' and developing a 'sense of personal responsibility for their own learning' appear as aspects for improvement in the primary and secondary sectors and the need to increase the participation of children and families is highlighted in relation to child protection services.

These reports highlight good practice in how staff in the universal services of education and health and in targeted services including statutory, voluntary and independent organisations are increasingly using the voices of children and young people to improve the quality of experience and outcomes achieved. The reports illustrate good practice specific to the sector or service. The first report focused on the primary schools and the primary stages of special schools. This report focuses on services to support children and families, including services working with children to help keep them safe.

Listening to and engaging children is an area where improved processes can improve outcomes. The report should be used to share, evaluate and increase good practice in this important area.

¹ The four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence are: successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens; and effective contributors.

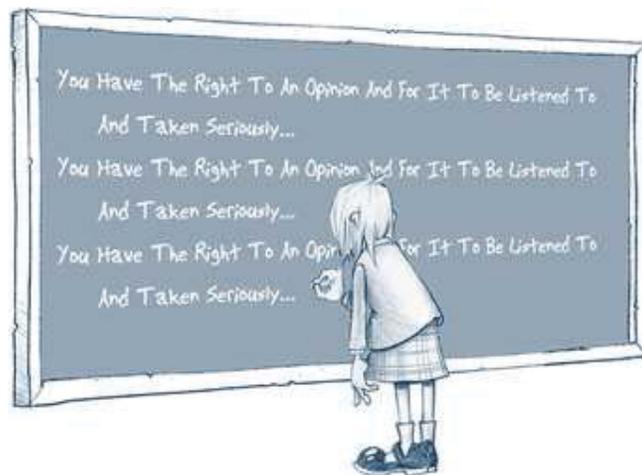
² www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/childrenservices/girfec

³ Improving Scottish education: A report by HMIE on inspection and review 2008

Introduction

This report identifies and promotes the sharing of good practice in empowering children and young people to have their views listened to and respected in order to help services to meet their needs more effectively. Every child and young person has the right to have their views taken seriously whenever decisions are being made about them, including how they learn and how they are supported. Effective methods of consulting children and young people enable them to influence the way that services impact on their lives and the way that they learn. They also help children and young people to shape what is provided to support them in achieving better outcomes.

This series of reports presents examples of good practice identified from a wide range of our inspection and review activity in nurseries, schools, colleges, education authorities and services for children and our ongoing work in partnership with our stakeholders. It draws on the key messages from relevant and recent research and from developments in policy at local and national levels.



In order to provide evidence for these reports a small team of inspectors carried out visits to schools, and services delivered by local authorities, health, police, and voluntary and independent sector providers. Inspectors met and shared information with relevant stakeholders. They conducted interviews with a wide variety of individuals including staff from services, as well as children and young people. The visits included focus group meetings, observations of practice and attendance at meetings. Visits focused on capturing examples of good practice. Relevant evidence from recent nursery, school, community learning and development, education authority, and children's services inspection reports and college review reports was also considered and included where appropriate. Inspectors reviewed relevant recent and current research. They reviewed and discussed current initiatives and approaches to hearing the voices of children and young people.

Hearing the voices of children in children's services

In 2004, HMIE was asked by Scottish Ministers to lead the joint inspection of children's services beginning with services to protect children. In order to evaluate the quality of services to protect children a framework of quality indicators, *How well are children protected and their needs met?* was published to be used both in self-evaluation and inspection. There is a close relationship between this framework and the *Children's Charter*.

Three of the quality indicators within the framework are particularly relevant to hearing and acting on the voices of children and young people. The first quality indicator is 1.1: *Children and young people are listened to, understood and respected*. Its themes are about communication and trust and the illustration describes how children's views should be taken into account. A second quality indicator, 3.1 *Involving children and their families in key processes*, includes a focus on participation in formal meetings and the provision of advocacy services for children and families. This leads to ways that children and families are involved and informed throughout child protection processes and how services deal with complaints. A third quality indicator, 4.3 *Participation of children, young people, families and other relevant people in policy development*, looks at how services collect the views of children and young people and involve them in developing services.

Before beginning the programme of child protection inspections, HMIE consulted children and young people in partnership with one council's Children's Commission. The aim was to find out what children thought of the proposed inspection methodology for joint inspections of services to protect children. An inspector spoke to children and young people to ascertain their views on:

- the importance of inspectors being able to inspect written records;
- consent to access records;
- confidentiality; and
- how children and young people could meaningfully participate in child protection inspections.

Two groups of children and young people were brought together in December 2005 and January 2006 to take part. All of the children contributed to group discussion. Their views were reported directly without interpretation and were considered in developing the Scottish Minister's Code of Practice for conducting joint inspections. These views also influenced the ways in which inspectors speak to children and families during inspections.

The following are quotes from children and young people about inspection.

“We need to know that there is going to be an inspection.”

“...children need to know what will happen with what they say right at the beginning.”

“...children have their own rights to say what they want...”

“...children should have choices.....not everyone wants to talk in a group ...some might want to speak on their own”

“We don’t want a long report in adult’s words...”

“...maybe it’s better just to know what’s going to happen afterwards to make things better.”

From the 25 reports published to date of inspections of services to protect children, examples of good practice have been identified relating to each of the three quality indicators mentioned above. There is a close and sometimes overlapping relationship between these three quality indicators and, in some cases, the examples illustrate good practice in more than one area.

Are children listened to, understood and respected?

In one council area a research project was undertaken with young people to establish the type of substance misuse service that they would find helpful. The young people did not wish a specific service but rather wanted the skills of staff they knew and trusted to be developed further. This led to the employment of youth support workers and further training opportunities.

A similar approach involved young people in developing a sexual health and information service. In one rural area, consultation with young people indicated that they preferred a discrete service. They did not seek advice from their GP as they thought this may affect confidentiality, and take-up rates were lower as a result. The service was established in separate premises. Following further feedback from young people, the waiting area layout in the new premises was also changed.

Dialogue Youth and the Scottish Youth Parliament give young people opportunities to make their views known on a range of local and national issues. Young people have been involved in discussions with decision makers on topics as diverse as educational maintenance allowance, measures to raise the legal age for buying cigarettes and local public transport.

There is clear evidence from inspection of the impact of children's workers in forming trusting relationships with children affected by domestic abuse and in offering them support to cope with their experiences. Four local authority areas have set up 'Domestic abuse pathfinders' applying the principles of GIRFEC so that children affected by domestic abuse receive the help they need when they need it.

Across Scotland, councils use questionnaires to obtain the views of young people and their parents about the quality of the service received. In one council area the Child Protection Committee lead officer had used questionnaires to ascertain children and young people's views of the help and support they had received in the child protection process. This led to a revision of staff recording practice to ensure that the views of children and young people were noted.

Are children and their families informed and involved in decision making?

Practice is currently developing in listening to the voices of children involved in the child protection system and considering their views in decision making. One child protection committee had consulted children regarding the sources of information they would use to find out how to seek help about their own or other people's safety. In response, relevant contact numbers had been included in school diaries and local children and young people designed bookmarks to promote child protection.

Children's advocacy services

There has been increasing recognition of the role independent advocacy services can play in helping children and young people to have their views heard and to influence decision making for individuals and for groups with specific needs. Around two thirds of local authorities now have children's rights officers. Most are employed by the local authority but some are commissioned from voluntary sector partners. Some children's rights officers work at a strategic level to involve children in policy and service development and to give them a voice in decision making by elected members and senior managers while others work with specific groups of children or support individual children.

Children 1st Advocacy Service

Children 1st Advocacy Service provides support to all children over eight who are on the Child Protection Register in one council area. Each child has a personal advocacy worker who helps them to make sense of their situation. Advocacy workers help them to express their views and to participate in decisions about what everyone involved needs to do to protect them.

They use many methods to help children to express their views including the use of art work, photography, multi media such as video and animation and writing down important messages for meetings. Children are helped to describe their fears and what they think must change to make things safer for them.

A social worker summed up the benefits of the service – “***one of the most vulnerable children I work with has gained the confidence to put forward their point of view***”.

Every child is regarded as being able to participate, and the decision making process is designed to be child-friendly and flexible enough to ensure that they can do so. Advocacy has helped children to feel that they have more control over their lives and what is happening to them. They experienced their opinions being valued and adults listening to them. Children who lack positive role models learned how to communicate in a positive and constructive way.

Looked after children

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance⁴ makes clear the need to consult looked after children about decisions that affect them. Materials which were developed for regular review of children’s care plans stressed the need for staff to seek and represent children’s views at key points. However, a national review of the use of these materials in 2004 showed that this was not done well overall. Staff in many areas have found effective ways of gaining children’s views. These include designing child-friendly reports in which children can express their views about the contents of the report, using computer programmes such as ‘Viewpoint’ and ensuring looked after children have advocates to speak for them at formal meetings. In this way, even very young children have been helped to contribute to decisions about their care.

⁴ The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance Volume 2 Children Looked After by Local Authorities (Scottish Office, 1997)

Who Cares? Scotland

Who Cares? Scotland provides valuable advocacy services for children who are looked after away from home across many areas of Scotland, mainly in residential placements. Support workers prepare young people for Children's Hearings and case conferences and support them to participate in decision making. Who Cares? Scotland has also played a key role in representing the views and interests of young people who are looked after away from home through its website and magazine 'Speak Out',⁵ by public campaigning and supporting young people on local and national task groups.

Regulations and Guidance for young people leaving care in Scotland⁶ implemented on 1st April 2004 stated how local authorities should support looked after young people in the transition to adulthood. This introduced Pathway Planning, which gave a central place to the views of the young person in determining their needs and in planning how they should be met. Pathway coordinators are responsible for ensuring the young person's views are understood and considered at every stage of the planning process. The Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum⁷ works to ensure the views of young care leavers influence the development of support services across the country.

Advocacy services are less widely available for:

- the large number of looked after children in foster placements;
- those living with friends or relatives in kinship care placements; and
- children looked after at home under a supervision order made by a children's hearing.

In some areas, children's rights officers play a key role in ensuring that these children's views are represented. A number of local authorities ensure that meetings to review children's care plans are chaired by independent staff who make sure that each child's views are appropriately considered. Prose and poems by children and young people with direct experience of foster care in Scotland were published by the Fostering Network in 2008.⁸ It is generally recognised that more work is needed to ensure the views of children looked after in the community are listened to and understood.

⁵ www.whocaresScotland.org

⁶ Supporting Young People Leaving Care in Scotland Regulations and Guidance on Services for Young People Ceasing to be Looked After by Local Authorities (Scottish Executive, 2004)

⁷ www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk

⁸ Forgotten voices: thoughts, ideas and feelings (The Fostering Network, 2008)

Having your say

A *Having your say* forum was set up for looked after young people in a council to give them a voice and a structure to influence decision makers. A range of groups operated within the forum, reflecting different age ranges. Representatives from each age range came together to look at areas of common interest, such as education opportunities, leisure and child care review meetings. The group had met with senior managers from social policy and education to affect change. The *Having your say* committee stood for election every two years. A candidate training school was supported by two local MSPs and 70 young people attended elections with the chief executive of the council acting as the returning officer. This group of young people felt listened to and valued.

Talkback

A *Talkback* group resulted from a long process of engagement with looked after children in another council area. Following input from this group, a children's rights officer was recruited. The group had also given their views on case conferences and children now have their own form they can complete and submit to decision-making meetings. They were involved in the launch of the council's corporate parenting strategy. They presented a podcast of their views of life as a looked after child in school and more generally at the launch.

The presentation also included a summary of important issues for children looked after away from home. For example, in one residential unit the kitchen was locked in the evening as it was an industrial kitchen unsuitable for unaccompanied young people. The group had taken a photo of the locked door and showed this to senior managers as part of their presentation. This and other units now have renovated domestic-style kitchens which are accessible in the evenings.

The Children's Hearing System

Scotland has continued to develop a unique approach to justice and welfare for children through the Children's Hearing System. At the heart of this approach is listening to the child's and young person's voice. Children's panel members are required to seek and actively consider the views of children when making decisions about what action to take in the child's best interests. Children who attend panels are encouraged to complete a *Having Your Say* form to give their opinions to the panel members. In many areas a range of promotional material is available to help vulnerable children express their views and be involved in decisions about their lives. This allows their voice to be heard. Often if children are anxious about speaking, they are helped to express their views in other ways. In many areas a Children's Rights Officer or advocacy service helps vulnerable children to express themselves.

Some services use text messaging or e-mail to seek the views of children. Their views may be conveyed to the Children's Hearing by the child or young person in writing, on audio or videotape, through an interpreter, an advocacy worker or by a Safeguarder appointed by the Children's Hearing.

In 2005, the Scottish Executive commissioned the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration to carry out research into the extent of children's participation in Children's Hearings and how their views are taken into account in decisions made about them⁹. Children and young people's accounts suggest that there is a range of factors that may help or inhibit their participation.

Factors described as helpful included:

- providing papers which are accessible;
- preparation and discussion before the Hearing;
- knowing what to expect;
- evidence that adults are listening;
- providing explanations;
- creating a comfortable environment; and
- asking for views about possible decisions

Adult behaviour that children and young people described as inhibiting their participation included:

- talking over children and young people;
- using language and terminology that is not understood;
- repeating statements or questions;
- directing questions to others;
- asking difficult or awkward questions;
- talking about children and young people rather than to them; and
- discouraging children and young people from speaking.

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration conducted a national survey with children and families in November 2008. Two hundred and thirty-two children and

⁹ Big Words and Big Tables-Children and Young People's Experience of Advocacy Support and Participation in the Children's Hearings System, SCRA 2006

398 adults took part. The survey gathered feedback on SCRA's service and how individuals experience the run up to a Hearing. It highlighted both positive aspects and areas for improvement. SCRA is using the survey to improve its service to children and families and is exploring ways it can do this through in-depth interviews with some of the children and families who took part. The findings are published on SCRA's website.¹⁰

In one area, panel members sought children's views through making time at every hearing to speak to the child on their own without other adults being present.

Some things children said.

"It's a good idea to get to speak to them on my own, because it's quieter and there were less people"

"It was good because there was less pressure on me because there was less people"

"Because no one else would be listening it made it easier for me"

¹⁰ www.scra.gov.uk

Continuous Opportunities for Gathering and Sharing (COGS)

In one council, senior officers have promoted the use of the COGS model which stresses the importance of engaging meaningfully with individual children. As a routine practice children are encouraged to express their views and concerns to known and trusted adults. This is particularly the case for children who need support from services. The model seeks to promote and support a greater emphasis on the role of staff in recording children and young people's views in routine contact. It encourages staff opportunities to promote participation and to model respect, responsibility and inclusion.

The Children and Young Person's Services Plan Steering Group has developed a good practice guide for staff to promote the COGS model. It is intended to support staff to:

- Identify what is important to children and young people and establish their views on these matters;
- Develop clear processes for recording issues of importance to children and young people; and
- Establish mechanisms for reporting children and young people's views into the planning processes and feeding back outcomes of this.

The COGS model assumes three essential elements in recording the views of children secured through engagement and consultation. The essential elements are:

- Record and action:
- Report and pass on to the next level; and
- Feedback.

Following consultation or routine contact with children, issues are identified and action is taken. The engagement and action taken is recorded, reported on and passed up to the next level in the organisation. Feedback is given to children and young people on the outcome of any action. At each subsequent level there is a continuation of the three essential elements.

The COGS model allows for grass roots issues to be fed into the decision-making process, good practice to be shared, evidence gathered, and communication to be good and two-way and service planning and delivery informed. Early indications are that the approach has been effective.

Are children and families encouraged to participate in policy development?

Integrated Children's Services Planning

Section 19 of The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 requires local authorities to prepare and publish plans for children's services. An ongoing challenge for them is to develop ways of meaningfully involving children in the formulation and implementation of Integrated Children's Services Plans.

One council established a Children's Commission made up of stakeholders to improve outcomes for children through the planning and delivery of integrated children's services. From 2005, the Children's Commission has involved children and parents in its development and implementation of integrated children's services.

- Children were involved in the same way as staff, voluntary sector providers and parents, in assessing the needs of children in the council area. This resulted in all partners including children identifying and agreeing priorities for service development.
- One member of the group was a care leaver. The council used its Modern Apprenticeship scheme to develop this young person's talents and skills. She now has a permanent job with the Council as a Community Education Trainee. Part of her remit is to support the ongoing involvement of the current group of children involved in the implementation of the Integrated Children's Services Plan.
- The ten children and young people in the group came from across the council area and were balanced in gender and age ranges. Some had additional support needs. All were using their involvement to work towards Youth Achievement Awards accredited within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).
- Four of the group were part of a selection process to appoint senior managers to lead on the development of integrated children's services in two localities. A community education trainee developed their skills to participate in a children's interview panel through a meeting with human resources staff, holding mock interviews and preparing interview questions. A second interview panel consisted of senior managers from health, social work, police, the voluntary sector and a representative from the parents group who is a member of the Children's Commission.
- The views of both interview panels were given serious consideration before appointments were made. The children's group held a follow up meeting with the two successful candidates to find out what they intended to do in their new posts.

- Together with Young Scot, the council carried out a consultation on the draft community plan with young people across the council area. The main method of consultation was a survey developed and hosted on the Young Scot website and also available in paper form. Responses were sought from school children and young people, college students and members of the Council Youth Parliament. Over five hundred young people were involved. The young people agreed with the themes of the community plan and thought it was a real opportunity for “pride” to be put back into their area. They welcomed the opportunity of being consulted.

Youth Councils and Youth Forums provide opportunities for children to participate in policy development: One forum has an annual event for over 3000 young people. This event involves activities such as music and also allows the forum to gather the views of young people which the group can use in discussions with members of the authority. This Forum actively lobbied the council and was instrumental in it establishing a strategy for engaging more effectively with young people.

Across Scotland, children and young people increasingly work together with their local and wider communities to make their lives and communities better. The communities to which children and young people belong can help them to become more responsible citizens and effective contributors. One of the national outcomes that the Scottish Government and COSLA have agreed to pursue is:

“We have strong resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.”

Further development work is needed to effectively involve children in community planning. This work should result in all public services taking account of priorities from the perspective of children and promote their early participation in becoming more effective contributors and responsible citizens. Children and young people have an important role to play in community development. Their role will lead to better public services and changed policies, and make a difference to people’s lives.

Young people making a difference to their communities

Young people from a secondary school were very active in a council's youth strategy executive group. They were active members in the Youth Forum which brought together young people and staff from a range of public agencies including police and leisure services. The Youth Action Team of the Forum participated in a range of innovative projects to improve services for young people in the community. For example, children and young people, youth workers and community police organised *Blue Light Discos* to provide safe leisure time activities whilst raising young people's awareness of issues concerning alcohol, drugs and sexual health.

The children and young people were also trained to take part in a project to inspect public services called Inspector8. They wrote reports with recommendations for improvement and revisited provision within six months to evaluate progress. These projects had a very positive impact on children and young people's self-confidence and helped them to develop skills that would be useful in future employment. The projects also achieved significant improvements in the quality of life for young people in the local and wider community.

Community planning

One council has established a Children's and Young People's Representative forum as part of the local authority's decision-making processes. The forum was established alongside another thematic Equalities Forum. It linked to Local Community Planning Forums, Committees and Boards of the local authority and its partners and through these to the Community Planning Partnership Board. The forum meets at least twice per year and an executive group also meets twice per year with elected members. Outcomes and discussions are recorded and papers are directed to the decision making body within the Community Planning Partnership.

Consultation events were held with secondary school pupil councils, representatives from two schools for young people with additional support needs, the forum for children looked after away from home, and local youth forums. Specific consultation took place with children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. At the consultation events, children and young people were asked how they would wish to be involved in the decision making processes. They stressed that the forum should represent all children and young people, including all age groups. A main message was that they wanted to be listened to and taken seriously, and wanted actions rather than words.

At the first annual workshop, the Children and Young People's Representative Forum identified important issues which they wanted to take forward. The subsequent forum discussed "Community and Personal Safety" and identified four key issues.

- Young people's access to contact numbers relating to their support and personal safety.
- The reliability of ID for young people.
- The need for safe places away from peer pressure and binge drinking.
- How relationships with community police, fire service and other agencies can develop respect and safety.

The forum agreed an action plan which set out action required, the lead officer to take the action forward and timescales for completion.

The forum has given children and young people access to elected members, to a formal structure of the local authority and to ways of having their opinions and views heard. It has enhanced the ability of children and young people to influence policy and strategy.

Police seeking the views of children

Strathclyde Police consulted with children as part of their evaluation of their pilots of campus police officers. Young people with a campus police officer in their secondary school reported that bullying was being tackled more effectively and that they felt safer both in school and in their communities. The police produced a DVD of the children's evaluation. As a result of positive feedback from children and their families, the number of campus police officers was being increased through joint-funding by the police and the local authorities.

Students hearing the voices of children and young people

Children's Holiday Venture (CHV) is a student-run charity catering for children from areas of high deprivation. Children are referred by schools and social work services. The students felt they were not listening enough to children's views or taking sufficient account of them when deciding events and activities. They set up a children's committee where children decided on a set of rules for all to follow. Children suggested items for the agenda and acted as group leaders. With help from the students, they ran an Awards Ceremony to celebrate each other's success. Children decided who should get awards and why. Awards were given for developing personal and social skills demonstrated in 'avoiding arguments', 'helping each other' and 'making others feel happy'. The children now feel that they have a greater say in the activities of the charity and gain self esteem from taking on responsibilities. Their parents are very positive about the impact that this is having on their lives.

Health and wellbeing

There is increasing recognition of the need to help children and young people to improve their health and wellbeing by providing them with information about how they can maintain their own health and by involving them in shaping the decisions and services that affect them.

A crucial aspect of the remit of NHS Scotland is engaging children and young people in ensuring that the delivery of health services supports them well across the areas of Scotland.

NHS Education for Scotland (NES), a Special Health Board responsible for the training and education of Scotland's healthcare workforce, is developing a number of initiatives that will enable active engagement with young people. NES has linked with the Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People (SCCYP) to involve children and young people in improving health services. Current initiatives include the NES Young People's Public Partnership Forum (PPF) and the Young People's Health Advisory Group (YPHAG).

The group took as its core value Article 12 of the UNCRC (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) which states that young people should be allowed to give their views; these should be listened to and taken seriously.

A Public Partnership Forum (PPF) is the main way that members of the community or the voluntary sector can be involved in the health sector and express their opinions on health issues. It acts as a bridge between the decisions taken by senior executives and those who are immediately affected by those decisions. The NES Young People's PPF consists of eleven young people aged between 15 and 19, and

is the first of its kind in Scotland. Its main aim is to provide ongoing input into the development of education for staff working with children and young people.

For example, PPF members have been involved in the development of scenarios for use in teaching and the assessment of GPs, Nurses, Paramedics and other healthcare staff undertaking national Emergency Care courses. In addition to development work on the scenarios, they are involved in role play related to these scenarios in an examination context. This ensures that these health and medical staff develop their skills in communicating with young people.

PPF members have also identified priorities that they intend to focus on, namely:

- Mental Health
- Sexual Health
- Better communication between children and young people and healthcare professionals

The Young People's Health Advisory Group (YPHAG) was established following a recommendation in "Delivering a Healthy Future – An Action Framework for Children and Young People's Health in Scotland"¹¹, to enable children and young people to input into health issues and provide a sounding board on health policy development.

Following a national recruitment campaign, eight young people aged between 14 and 19 from Scotland volunteered to form the YPHAG. Some had direct experience of using health services as young people, whilst all were determined to influence the development of health services and policy for young people. The aim of the group was to draw on members' own experiences, informal contacts and formal communication with other groups of young people. They would use this evidence to convey young people's perspectives to policy and decision-makers in the health field, and thus broadly 'represent' the views of young people in Scotland.

The YPHAG identified of the following key issues to work on:

- improving awareness of mental health and wellbeing amongst young people;
- increasing the availability of age-appropriate services; and
- improving communication between health professionals and young people.

To help address these, the group decided to:

- create a young person's version of current NHS policies that affect children and young people in Scotland today, for distribution to all secondary schools, health centres and hospitals; and

¹¹ Delivering a Healthy Future – An Action Framework for Children and young People's Health in Scotland, Scottish Executive 2007

- advise NHS Lothian to set up a young peoples' group to inform the development of the new Edinburgh Children's Hospital.

The Scottish Government is currently considering the recommendations of the evaluation to identify the best way to build on the achievements of YPHAG.

Borders Youth Health Forum

When four young people organized a 'Sex, Drugs and What You Know' conference in Galashiels in 2006, they wanted to do more than raise awareness about issues affecting young people's health – they also had ideas about how services could be improved.

The conference produced a series of recommendations from those taking part, and a Youth Health Forum was set up to give young people a direct say in shaping local health services. Ten young people now make suggestions for change and improvement to both local and national health services.

Forum members met with GPs, practice nurses and school nurses to report on the health conference and its recommendations. They also spoke with GPs and nurses about the changes that could be made to health services in the local area for young people, and invited them to suggest ways that improvements could be made in the health practices where they work.

A DVD has been produced to provide school pupils with a virtual tour of a local health centre, featuring services that are available, staff who are there to help, and information about young people's rights and service entitlements. A second DVD is being designed as a training tool for healthcare staff and will focus on the concerns that young people have in accessing health centres, and how staff can help overcome these issues.

The forum ran a roadshow for S1-S3 pupils providing key information and practical advice for young people on maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing. The roadshow visited all secondary schools in the area during 2008. The first roadshow held in a local school was filmed and made into a DVD for use in other schools. The Scottish Health Council has provided funding and information packs for the roadshow.

So far, the forum has adopted several approaches to reach out to young people, including using the 'Wired' show on Radio Borders and the 'YOB' (Youth of the Borders) section in a regional paper. A local health page is also being developed on the Young Scot website which will allow users to access information and post questions which will be answered by a health worker.

Housing services

The impact on children of homelessness is increasingly being recognised. Services are being developed by housing services, often with voluntary partners, to ensure that the views of children and young people are fully considered when they experience homelessness. In the past, children affected by homelessness were often placed in bed and breakfast accommodation at a distance from their previous homes. This meant they had to change schools, were unable to maintain involvement in after-school activities and clubs and lost contact with their friends. Temporary accommodation did not always have suitable space to study and do homework. When families were re-housed there was sometimes further disruption to their schooling, support network and social life. Many local authorities now provide more suitable furnished temporary accommodation for homeless families. In some areas children living in families who become homeless are allocated their own housing worker whose role is to ensure that their lives remain as normal as possible. Housing workers ensure that children and young people, whenever possible, continue attending their own school, are able to take part in the same clubs and social activities and meet their friends. The children and young people's views are considered in making decisions about where their family will be rehoused.

Conclusion

Lord Laming, in writing his first report following the death of Victoria Climbié, observed that child protection services are indivisible from wider children's services. In improving child protection services we improve all children's services. A similar point was made in *For Scotland's Children* "We need a much more robust approach to putting children and families at the centre of the service network. That will be facilitated by treating all services for children as part of a Children's Services System and by all staff perceiving themselves as operating within that single system."

The findings of this report would support the view that we are getting better at recognising the central importance of children and families in delivering children's services.

In listening to children the quality of communication, although already good in some council areas, has improved since the first HMIE reports on the inspection of services to protect children were published. Trusting relationships with adults working in children's services promote children's confidence that their views are taken into consideration and help inform decisions.

Staff working in child protection services involve children and families more fully in key processes. Children, including those with communication difficulties, are supported to express their views and take an active part in meetings. The views of children and their families are recorded more systematically. Staff keep children and families informed about their situation and their progress.

There has been a significant improvement in the involvement of children and families in planning services and developing policy. In the last year, evidence from inspection and from this task shows that staff across Scotland working in children's

services have established reliable systems to gather the views of vulnerable children and families. The views of service users are now being used more routinely to inform planning and designing services or developing policy.

There remain areas of work in children's services where listening to children, consultation and participation are not well established. In these areas the quality of experience for children and their families is diminished. Encouraging staff at all levels to become good listeners has the potential to transform children's services.

Signposts for the way forward

In taking forward Getting it Right for Every Child, **each practitioner** in children's services will consider how to:

- listen to and take more active account of children's interests and views in matching outcomes to their needs. Children will feel that they are respected and understood.
- provide opportunities for children as responsible citizens and effective contributors to take responsibility, develop skills of independence and express and debate issues affecting their lives.
- promote trust and effective communication with children and their families by getting to know them well.

At a **strategic level** in taking forward the work of children's services, senior officers and their teams will consider ways of:

- extending the range and significance of issues in which children and their families are consulted. The examples in this report will be helpful in identifying a range of ideas for involvement.
- maximising opportunities for meaningful involvement in the development of policies and services to support children.

Acknowledgement

This report draws evidence from inspections and visits to services. HMIE would like to thank all children, parents and staff who contributed to these inspections and visits to gather good practice included in this report.

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