



# SCRA RESEARCH PROGRAMME – 2009-10 AND 2010-11



## Introduction

SCRA carries out research to meet its business priorities as set out in its Corporate Plan and annual Business Plans. It also carries out research to support and inform development of the Children's Hearings System and raise awareness of the issues facing children and young people involved in it.

SCRA is pursuing a more outcomes focused approach in how it plans its business and assesses its performance. This approach is not confined to SCRA as an organisation but also the wider Hearings System with a particular focus on children and young people.

SCRA has developed this two-year research programme, in consultation with partners in the Hearings System. All the research will be carried out by SCRA's Information & Research Team either on its own or in collaboration with partners in the Hearings System.

This paper provides an outline of each research project within the programme. It is intended as an overview of the research that SCRA will be conducting over the next two years to inform SCRA's staff and Board, and partners in the Hearings System. Detailed specifications will be prepared for each project, and those that are finalised to date are attached as appendices.

### SCRA Research Forum

A Research Forum of partners in the Hearings System has been established to inform SCRA's research and to encourage collaboration. This is to ensure that the research is relevant and of use to partner organisations and practitioners and that its main focus is on outcomes for children and young people. The Research Forum first met in August 2009, and will meet every six months. However, there is regular correspondence between members in the development of projects, dissemination of findings and in collaborative research, where appropriate.

### Consulting with children and young people

To be of value research that aims to explore the views and experiences of children and young people must be informed by them – both in terms of how the research is carried out (e.g. what methods are best to get children's views) and also to make sure research questions (and therefore findings) are relevant to them. Very often, research is designed without input from children and young people, and as a result may not address the issues they would want explored and be meaningful to them.

The Research Forum recommends that a systematic approach is developed to involve children and young people in the research process. This includes their input to individual research projects and also the wider programme to identify the issues that are important to them. There will be two approaches to this:

1. **Young advisors** on specific projects – see proposal below on children & young people's views on Children's Hearings decisions, interventions and outcomes. Young people will be asked to advise on specific research projects on subjects that they have direct experience of - by, for example, helping to develop the research questions and advising on how best to seek children and young people's views.

2. SCRA is establishing a **Young People's Reference Group** to inform and input how the organisation works in delivering its service. Part of the remit of this reference group will be to *'make sure SCRA undertakes research that is important to children and young people. And for children and young people to help with this research.* It is planned that the Reference Group will be led and co-ordinated by four young people (who will be employed as Modern Apprentices) these young people will have had experience of the care system, and will come on board early in 2010-11.

The Young People's Reference Group is part of a wider strategic project on 'Engagement with Children and Families' which is part of SCRA's Modernisation Programme.

### Research ethics

SCRA follows ethical guidance from the Social Research Association and British Sociological Association in conducting research.

To summarise:

- All SCRA researchers have Enhanced Disclosure Scotland clearance.
- Informed consent is always sought from children (of all ages), young people and adults who are invited to participate in SCRA research. For children and young people consent is also sought from their parents or carers, and where in residential care their key worker and/or manager of the facility.
- Information about the research and the questions that will be asked is provided in advance.
- It is stressed to all interviewees that participation is entirely voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time.
- Interview participants are assured of confidentiality unless they disclose harm to themselves and/or others. SCRA has a duty to act on such information in line with its Child Protection Policy.
- Prior to selecting children, young people and adults to take part in SCRA research, advice is sought from the Reporter involved in their cases on whether there are any reasons why they should not be involved (e.g. could it cause distress due to issues affecting child and/or family).
- Given time commitment, children and young people are given a thank you gift (e.g. gift voucher) after taking part in an interview, and are not informed of this beforehand to prevent influencing their participation.
- Research materials (completed questionnaires, interview recordings and transcripts) are held securely and are destroyed once analysis has been completed.
- All reporting is anonymous.
- Participants in SCRA research are informed of its results.

## Research Programme

This research programme has been informed by the SCRA Research Forum. It covers the period to the end of SCRA's current Corporate Plan (i.e. 2009-10 and 2010-11).

The research programme covers two main types of activity:

1. Surveys, research and evaluation on SCRA practices and service
2. Research on wider Children's Hearings System, particularly outcomes for children and young people.

### SCRA practices and service

#### *Annual staff survey*

SCRA carries out an annual survey of its staff's views on working in SCRA. This was issued to staff in September 2009 and analysed by end of October. Results will be communicated to all staff in November 2009.

#### *Evaluation of SCRA's Victim Information Service*

Following a pilot of the Victim Information Service (VIS) from February 2006 to August 2009, SCRA was allocated resources by the Scottish Government to roll out VIS nationally from September 2009.

This research will evaluate VIS nationally through exploring victims' views on the service and their experiences of being a victim of youth crime, to find out:

- Whether victims are satisfied with SCRA's VIS
- Whether the VIS works for victims
- From their own perspectives, what victims' participation in the Hearings System involves
- What victims want from the VIS and suggestions for improvements
- How their experiences of youth crime have impacted upon their perceptions of VIS.

The research will be largely qualitative in approach and will involve interviews with 20 adult and 10 children and young people who have been victims of youth crime. SCRA staff who are involved in the VIS will also be interviewed to seek their views on how well the VIS is working and if and how it can be improved.

It is planned that the research will begin in December 2009 and will be completed by July 2010.

### Children's Hearings System

#### *Children & young people's views on Children's Hearings decisions, interventions and outcomes – collaborative research between SCRA and Aberlour*

There is little research information on the views of children and young people who have been involved in Children's Hearings on the decisions made about them and the interventions they receive. This research aims to address this gap. The research specification is currently being developed.

The research aims to:

- To explore the views and opinions of young people who have been involved in the Children's Hearings System in terms of:
  - the decisions made in the Hearing System (and how these are communicated to young people)
  - the outcomes of Hearings
  - the interventions received as a result of the Hearing.
- To identify how young people involved in the Hearings System feel about the decisions made and how they perceive the resultant outcomes and interventions.
- To give young people who have been through the Hearings System the chance to input into the research as advisors.
- To provide an evidence-base for improvements within the Hearings System.

A group of six young people involved with Aberlour as Research Advisors will identify the issues of importance and questions to be asked in interviews with children and young people. These young people will have been involved in the Children's Hearings System at some point in their lives.

Thirty young people aged from five to 17 years will be interviewed. These young people will be from across Scotland, involved in Aberlour's services and will have been involved in the Children's Hearings System at some point in their lives.

The research will begin in December 2009 and be completed by end of September 2010.

### *Secure care outcomes*

The Scottish Government has asked SCRA to carry out research to find out whether or not secure authorisations made by Children's Hearings are fully implemented by and, where they are not, what alternative interventions are put in place.

This research uses a case study approach. A sample of 100 children and young people who received secure authorisations from Hearings between start of April 2008 and the end of March 2009 (this is approximately a third of all children with secure authorisations in this period) will be examined to obtain information on:

- Socio-demographics
- The reasons why the Children's Hearing made a secure authorisation
- If a secure placement was provided and, if not, what interventions received (and why) as a result of the initial Hearing
- Decision made at the first Review Hearing and reasons for this decision
- Outcomes for the child/young person six months after first receiving secure authorisation – further referrals, changes in placement, changes in levels of risk, etc.

The research began in October 2009 and will be completed by March 2010.

### *Referral pathways*

Most referrals of children and young people to the Children's Reporter are from the police. In 2008-09, 88% of referrals were from the police, followed by social work – 6%, education – 4% and health – 0.5%. For very young children (less than two years old) referrals from the police have increased in recent years but those from social work and health sources are declining.

This raises questions about how children at risk are identified and how agencies act to protect them, what thresholds referral agencies use in determining if a child should be referred to the Reporter in need of compulsory measures, and has consequences for how quickly children receive interventions and the nature of these.

This research will use anonymised case studies to first explore with practitioners (representatives from police, social work, health, education and voluntary sectors) how they decide on thresholds for referral to the Reporter or other actions – and if these have differed with the introduction of GIRFEC. Then look at how they deal with children in these circumstances, from concern first being identified/raised, to how they decide whether to refer to the Reporter, to outcomes in terms of interventions and impact.

It is planned that this research will be completed by July 2010.

### *Impact on children and young people on availability of resources*

Children's Hearings make Supervision Requirements and other forms of compulsory measures; it is then responsibility of local authorities to implement them. There is very limited information on whether children and young people receive the resources identified by Hearings as being necessary to protect them or address their behaviour – either when SR made or at a later date – and what is the effect on children and young people if resources are not available at point of need.

This research will explore with children and young people and the professionals who work with them if they received the required resources, and how this had affected them.

It is proposed that this work is carried out in 2010-11.

### *Analysis of trends/ outcome measures*

Analysis of SCRA's data is proposed to provide more longitudinal information on children's histories and outcomes in the Hearings System. In addition, it is proposed that SCRA works with partners to develop outcome measures based on available data.

Two initial areas of analysis were identified by the Research Forum:

*Trends in Child Protection Orders (CPOs)* – SCRA has already carried out research on CPOs in Edinburgh, following an increase in the numbers of very young children being subject to CPOs. However, since this research was carried out, there has been an increase in most areas in the numbers of CPOs. Local authorities, in particular, would find a national analysis helpful, to help them assess effectiveness of decision taken to apply for the CPO and to bench mark against other local authorities.

Proposals for analysis: following referral patterns, Reporter and Hearing decisions within specified timeframe from 2<sup>nd</sup> working day Hearing. Comparison at national and local authority area levels.

SCRA will explore whether such an analysis is possible from Data Warehouse, and if it is this work will be carried out in 2010.

### *Children subject to Supervision Requirements*

1. *Referral patterns* (including Reporter and Hearing decisions) and changes to Supervision Requirements following first being placed on Supervision – within specified timeframes. Comparison at national and local authority area levels.

**2. Length of Supervision Requirements** – how many children are subject to Supervision Requirements for 5 years and more (and other periods) – compared at national and local authority level. SCRA will explore whether such analysis is possible from the SCRA data, and if it is this work will be carried out in 2010.

### ***Reform of the Children's Hearings System***

The Scottish Government is proposing changes to the Children's Hearings System. It is planned that a draft Bill will be produced in early 2010. It is likely that this will introduce changes to the Hearings System such as new roles, forms of compulsory measures, grounds for referral, etc. It will be important to find out what the impact of these changes will be on children and young people involved in the Hearings System. It is not possible until the changes introduced by draft Bill have been implemented to determine what research will be required on this. This will be a focus of the research programme in 2010-11.

However, some changes (not requiring legislation) have already been introduced, and SCRA will be undertaking research to look at the impact of one of these - changes to the role of the Reporter at Children's Hearings.

***Role of the Reporter at the Children's Hearing*** – SCRA has made refinements to the role of the Reporter in Hearings. The focus of these refinements is to ensure compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights. The refinements to the way Reporters carry out their role at Children's Hearings have been in place since 14 September 2009.

SCRA will carry out research, in collaboration with Children's Panel representatives, to obtain the views of Panel Members and Reporters. This information will be used to see if there are any implications from this change for Reporter and Panel Member practice in relation to ensuring that the rights of children/young people in Hearings are being met.

The research questions are being developed by small team of two Panel Chairs, Children's Hearings Training Organiser, a Reporter and SCRA researcher. A questionnaire will be distributed nationally to Panel Members and Reporters to seek their views. The research will begin in December 2009 and be completed by March 2010.

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