



## Background

The Children's Hearings System is Scotland's distinct system of child protection and youth justice. Among its fundamental principles are:

- the needs of children or young people in trouble should be met through a single holistic and integrated system, whether concerns relate to their welfare or behaviour
- a preventative approach is essential, involving early identification and diagnosis of problems
- the welfare of the child remains at the centre of all decision making and the child's best interests are paramount throughout
- the child's engagement and participation is crucial to good decision making

SCRA operates the Reporter service which sits at the heart of the system. SCRA employs Children's Reporters who are located throughout Scotland, working in close partnership with panel members and other professionals such as social work, education, the police, the health service and the courts system. SCRA's vision is that vulnerable children and young people in Scotland are safe, protected and offered positive futures. We will seek to achieve this by adhering to the following key values:

- The voice of the child must be heard
- Our hopes and dreams for the children of Scotland are what unite us
- Children and young people's experiences and opinions guide us
- We are approachable and open
- We bring the best of the past with us into the future to meet new challenges.

**SCRA welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.**

Children's Reporters and Children's Hearings continue to work regularly with families who are affected by the problematic or excessive use of alcohol. SCRA agrees that alcohol can have negative effects on the ways in which an individual will parent their children / relate to their partner and or other adults and on an individual's physical and emotional health. Alcohol use by young people can affect the physical and emotional health of young people; can be anti-social within their community; can affect the decision making of young people

and their behaviour and can place young people at risk of harm. Problematic alcohol use is a reason for a young person to be referred to the children's reporter, and is also a reason for a child or young person to be referred to a children's hearing (although this is less common, with less than five young people being referred to a children's hearing in 2016/2017 for this reason). SCRA statistics show the numbers of children and young people referred to the Reporter for the misuse of alcohol ('k' ground for referral), and the number of referrals received ( a young person could be referred more than once for the same reason):

**Summary table 1b - Children and young people referred by grounds of referral**

Ground of Referral	Year	Children	Referrals
k. Misuse of alcohol	01-APR-13 TO 31-MAR-14	219	244
	01-APR-14 TO 31-MAR-15	282	330
	01-APR-15 TO 31-MAR-16	229	255
	01-APR-16 TO 31-MAR-17	121	131
<b>Total</b>		<b>799</b>	<b>960</b>

SCRA supports the principle of addressing problematic alcohol use and continues to support the ongoing government approach to ameliorate the negative experiences of children and their families as a result of problematic alcohol use.

We will be very interested to see the planned research results following the first five years of minimum unit pricing of alcohol.

*Melissa Hunt*

SCRA Policy and Public Affairs