

The Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group - looking back and looking forward 2025 video

Featuring:

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Laura Steckley, University of Strathclyde

Charlotte Wilson, The Care Inspectorate

Jennifer Muir, The Good Shepherd Centre

Michelle Howard, CrossReach

Phil Coady, Care Visions Residential

Gemma Watson

Welcome to the Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group - looking back and looking forward 2025 video. Each year, members of the Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group, or SPRAG, reflect on their collective activity over the previous 12 months, in line with the SPRAG priorities. This year, SPRAG came together in person to focus on our priorities and share learning. We used the opportunity of being together in person to record the annual video. We invited members to offer some reflections on why being a member of SPRAG is important to them, and to reflect on the impact of SPRAG in 2025.

Louise Bouchier-Hayes

Being a member of SPRAG is important to me, as well as my organisation, The Promise Scotland, because, as it says in The Promise, Scotland wants to become a nation that does not restrain its children, but becoming a nation that does not restrain its children is not an easy thing to do. It's very complex.

Laura Steckley

Being a member of SPRAG has been really important to me because it has created a real momentum in terms of knowledge mobilisation. And by that I mean the different kinds of knowledge, whether we're talking

research findings, practice wisdom, theories that help people make sense of what's happening in their practice actually are being actively used to have impact on the lives of children, young people and the adults who care for them.

Louise Bouchier-Hayes

But additionally, for us as an organisation, it allows us an opportunity to really hear what is happening in frontline services and really listen to the workforce. And that's really important for us as an organisation, because we have to represent the workforce as well, of course, as the children, young people and families.

Charlotte Wilson

I think for us, being a member of SPRAG is important because it's that opportunity to work really collaboratively with the sector. So for us to do something together, rather than us doing it to the sector, and particularly in relation to such a complex area of practice.

Jennifer Muir

Being a member of SPRAG is important to me because it's more than just about safe practice. It's about dignity, respect and accountability. It gives me, and more widely, the workforce of Scotland, the opportunity to contribute to shaping standards to protect both staff and your young people. It ensures that restraint is always the very last option and never just a reaction.

Michelle Howard

I've been involved in SPRAG since its creation, so to speak, and I've seen it evolve enormously into a kind of group now, a space that seems to be carrying quite a bit of influence.

Phil Coady

So for me, there's something really unique about SPRAG within residential childcare in Scotland, and that is that for most of us, we operate within our own organisations, and there are many organisations, and they have very little contact with each other. We're all like little islands. So what SPRAG does is it creates a community out of those organisations and out of those individuals.

Michelle Howard

So I think for me, being part of that group, it kind of anchors me into the sector again, anchors me into the complexity of the role, and it creates a bit of space to think about and consider and do that amongst like-minded colleagues, which I think quite often in the sector, you can feel quite isolated as individual organisations. It can feel like a bit of a silo. So for me, in the job that I do, and having been in residential childcare for as long as I have, I think being part of this group in this space has been incredibly important for me in terms of helping me to stay abreast of best practice principles, helping me to stay abreast of the legislative landscape, or even just the landscape in general, at a national level.

Phil Coady

And also the kind of exchange of views that goes on. It's sometimes quite difficult, because SPRAG's quite big now, but especially when we split up into small groups, there are opportunities for you to talk about how you're seeing things, what your beliefs are, what you're trying to do in your organisation, and also to hear from other people in the same way, talking about what they're trying to do. And it helps us to kind of test out our thinking and what we're doing against what other people are doing, and to hear other people respond to our kind of thoughts and our views about things.

Charlotte Wilson

We've been a member of SPRAG right from the start, and I feel we've been able to achieve so much together over the last few years that's had real benefits for us as the regulator for the sector, and most importantly, for children and young people.

Jennifer Muir

For me, it's about being part of a collective voice that always strives to deliver safer, more compassionate approaches across Scotland, with UNCRC being central to that.

Louise Bouchier-Hayes

I think particularly over the last year, I saw a big leap forward in the way that SPRAG members collaborate and share. And I think particularly because of the way the problem Scotland as an organisation works. That's something that's very, very important to me, to see the development of collaboration and sharing and the different strands of work that happen

and that often come out of a conversation with, you know, sometimes it's in a full SPRAG meeting, sometimes it's three or four members, and other times it's one member who asks a question that sparks a piece of work that then turns into something really purposeful and meaningful, that it takes us in the direction that we didn't expect. And so I think in terms of impact of SPRAG, I think it's really far reaching and probably a lot wider than any of us expected it to be.

Charlotte Wilson

The main impact of SPRAG this year, I think for us, has been in relation to the ongoing work that we've been doing around definitions and reporting and what our reporting expectations are, particularly in relation to school care, accommodation services and secure services where there's a care and education being provided within the same service, and that's important for a number of reasons, partly because it gives us improved data and improves our annual reporting of that data, but also, because it's helped really to highlight the gap in external reporting expectations for education settings, and that's really giving some weight behind the argument that there's a need to be filled there, and whether that's by us or somebody else going forward. But I think it's really helping to address that.

Jennifer Muir

So the biggest impact of SPRAG for me is about the driving culture that it helps to promote, which is backed by shared values of respect and safety. This year, the group has helped shape our training. It's improved consistency across the teams, and it gives a clearer framework for reflection after incidents.

Michelle Howard

I think SPRAG's been absolutely instrumental in helping organisations to be aware of what's happening at a national level. But not only that, have an opportunity to influence and respond to some of that, I think is hugely significant.

Phil Coady

Like lots of other organisations, this year has been a difficult year. There's been a lot of other things to think about in terms of recruitment, retention, those kind of practical things that that are so important that they can take up all of your attention. So SPRAG has really helped me to come away from those things, sometimes, to put the time aside to think

about, what are we trying to achieve culturally, and what do I need to do within my organisation, to try and do my bit to help us to achieve those things.

Laura Steckley

The funding period has finished for the RALF project. And even though that started several years ago, and the funding period started two years ago, it wasn't until the spring where we collected systematic evidence as to its impacts. And those impacts have been pretty amazing in terms of people's deepening capacity to really reflect and engage in collective reflection in a way that's improved relationships between adults, between adults and children, and improved people's confidence in responding to children and young people.

Phil Coady

And within the RALF part of SPRAG in particular, the thing it has helped me to do is to do something really practical, which is to bring a group of leaders in the organisation together and create a reflective space for them, and through that, to try and help us to create our own community where people are able to talk about deep things, to talk to share vulnerability, to talk openly about their feelings about things, and to help us to think about what kind of leaders do we need to be so that we can enable people in our organisation to be the kind of caring adults that we need to look after our children.

Jennifer Muir

There have been some really rich discussions across the course of the day and the year in general about reflection and containment and getting that right will not only result in fewer restraints, but better relationships, greater staff confidence, and a real strong commitment to creating those really safe, compassionate environments that we're all striving for.

Laura Steckley

And then I guess the last impact is the continued growth of SPRAG, both in terms of membership that has continued to grow, but also the growth of activity that SPRAG has been involved in this year, including now, in the last 12 months, we've had two in person meetings and really the deepening of understanding of the importance of collective reflection as a key component of being able to improve practice around reducing or eliminating, where possible, physical restraint.

Michelle Howard

But actually it feels that with SPRAG, we're gathering momentum, and we're going from strength to strength. And I think I'm certainly excited and encouraged about the impact that the group can continue to have in lots of different spaces within the sector, but most importantly, around this discourse and discussion around the use of restraint with children and young people.

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