

# Evaluation Findings: From Act to Practice Phase 1

## Background

The Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 was introduced to modernise and strengthen the children's hearings system, with the ultimate aim of delivering better outcomes for children. Changes in the Act cover the structure for panel members and safeguarders, modernising the grounds for referral, clarifying who has rights in the system, and making the system and processes more transparent. The changes also provide for the ability of children and their families to participate more effectively in the process, as well as removing obstacles to implementation of hearing's orders, and generally aiming to improve consistency across the system. It was recognised that these changes would have a significant impact on everyone who comes into contact with the children's hearings system. Consequently, Cl@n Childlaw and the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELGIS) developed and delivered a programme of information seminars about the changes.

The overall objectives of each seminar were:

- To increase knowledge of key changes in the Act 2011 that will affect practice.
- To raise awareness of preparatory work required for the Act's commencement.
- To influence practice application to ensure GIRFEC principles of working and the embedding of children's rights into practice.

## Focus of the evaluation

The evaluation process, carried out by Dr. Rachel Harris of CELGIS. 905 participants were invited to complete the survey. 34% partially completed and 24% fully completed. A wide range of organisations and professional roles were represented. Social work departments made up the largest group.

Participants who responded to the survey were mainly very experienced and having a detailed knowledge of this legislation was an important part of their role. Despite this, less than 20% had attended prior formal training in relation to the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011. This suggests that the programme of seminars was very much needed. The following provides conclusions in relation to the key evaluation questions for this study.

## **What aspects of individual seminars, in terms of content and delivery method, did practitioners see as most effective?**

The format of the Act to Practice programme (i.e. a half-day seminar with linked resource pack) suited the majority of respondents. The seminars also more than met expectations in terms of providing information about changes to Children's Hearings as a result of the Act, and outlining the implications of the Act. The content of the different seminar sessions was also rated highly.

## **What components of the resource pack have delegates found to be useful?**

Over two thirds of respondents had used the From Act to Practice seminar and/or resources pack to raise awareness of the Act with clients, children and/or families, or with colleagues. Quite a few respondents commented that they or their organisations were planning their own formal learning activities, as well as local briefings and the resource pack was seen as being "of great assistance for this".

### **Has delegates' awareness increased in relation to changes in the Act that will affect practice?**

Yes, the majority of respondents reported their awareness of the implications of the Act had very much or moderately increased.

### **How have the seminars influenced delegates' awareness of any preparatory work required for the Act's commencement?**

Almost three quarters of respondents had shared information about the Act with colleagues, and well over half had had conversations with colleagues about the local implications of the Act. Yet these are fairly low-level preparations, and only around a fifth reported using the From Act to Practice seminar and resource pack to identify how their practice would be affected.

### **To what extent have the seminars influenced organisations and practitioners in changing their practices to comply with the Act?**

Over 40% of respondents reported that information about the Act had been or was being distributed by their organisations. However, a fairly high percentage was unaware of whether this had been done, and around half were unaware of whether or not their organisation was making any other preparations. It would not be expected that all those who attended would be involved in these preparations, but the findings do suggest that providing local training and guidance, and reviewing documentation was still some way off for a substantial number of organisations. This is perhaps surprising, given that the Act was due to be implemented shortly after the seminars were delivered. Phase 1 of the Act to Practice seminars provided dedicated time to discuss the implications, and give staff and organisations an opportunity to consider how they may need to respond in advance of the Act coming into force. It would take a substantial resource to provide the more detailed guidance on how different organisations might implement the Act, which was what some respondents seemed to want. This does, however, suggest that a Phase 2 for the programme could usefully focus on sharing how different organisations have responded to the Act in terms of policy and practice, as well as highlighting examples of good practice.

### **What influence have the seminars had on embedding of children's rights into practice?**

One respondent noted using the resource pack to "inform a carer about a specific child's situation and the implications the new act will have on this", so the resources were starting to be used directly in relation to children's rights.

### **How effective is the model of short seminars, delivered to large numbers across Scotland, in raising awareness of the issues that will affect practice, in relation to the Act?**

The From Act to Practice approach provided most or everything needed for more than 70% of respondents. This, combined with the findings relating to the content and delivery method, suggests the dissemination model chosen was effective.

### **Recommendations**

- I. Provide updates on the implementation of the Act, perhaps via an electronic newsletter. Make this and other information available via a single website to support consistency of implementation.
- II. Provide further support via seminars and/or guidance materials that address key concerns raised by delegates including the definition and status of relevant person(s), implications for foster carers, issues around pre-hearing panels, advocacy, and the general realities of working with the Act. It may also be useful to consider providing materials tailored to particular professional groupings.
- III. Promote sharing of policy and practice in relation to how different organisations have responded to the Act. Highlight examples of good practice.
- IV. Identify and share good practice on how to promote and support children's rights in the Hearings setting.