

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 26TH SEPTEMBER 2011

REPORT ON: THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2010-2011

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 350 - 2011

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform members of the work undertaken by the Children's Rights Officer for Children and Young People Looked After by Dundee City Council, for the year 2010/2011.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee;

2.1 Note and approve the annual report on the work of the Children's Rights Officer for the period 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 Background

The attached report covers the work of the Children's Rights Service for the period 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011. The report lays out in detail the extent of the work of the CRO as well as the impact it has on children and young people and how this links to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The Children's Rights Service plays an important role in the monitoring and safeguarding of young people who are Looked After by Dundee City Council, particularly those young people who are placed out-with the city. The primary need for the Children's Rights Officer (CRO) and associated work is the UNCRC. Dundee City Council has signed up to the UNCRC and has agreed that all practice, policies and procedures should be congruent with it. It is a key objective of the CRO to help promote a culture of rights with those delivering services to children and young people. The Children's Rights Service reached its 21st year on the 1st December 2010.

The service is also available to those professionals and adults with responsibility for the welfare of Looked After Children. The Children's Rights Service has significant experience in partnership working with *Who Cares?* Scotland, to make up the Children's Rights and Independent Advocacy service. This partnership will soon extend further with the appointment of an advocacy worker dedicated to supporting children in the Child Protection system.

4.2 Key Findings

The report highlights emerging themes from advocacy work over the period and gives practice examples of the work undertaken. In summary these were issues regarding:

- family and sibling contact;

- location of placements and;
- staff shortages impacting on progressing care planning.

The report shows an increase in complaints across all agencies since last year but still shows a decrease over a three year period. Highlighted is the success of the newly created Champion's Board. Other key findings include:

- the requests for an advocacy service increased from 281 in 2008/2009 to 330 in 2010/2011;
- young women are more likely to self-refer and re-refer than males, 256 to 186 respectively;
- The number of formal complaints supported by the service over the past year was 11 compared to 5 the previous year;

Incorporated in the report is a brief evaluation of the parts of the service and statements from young people and professionals about what the service means to them. There is also an evaluation of training delivered in partnership with young people, to social work students. Finally the report outlines the shifting priority of the children's rights officer away from residential care towards foster care. Both these evaluations show a very high level of satisfaction with the Children's Rights Service.

4.3 **Key Challenges and the Way Forward**

The overwhelming demand for the service comes from residential services. Given that residential services are subject to a very high level of external scrutiny it has been agreed that the profile of the Children's Rights Officer should be developed further in foster care, over the next few years. The service will remain high profile for those young people placed out-with the city. The CRO will continue to contribute to the LAC theme group, the Youth Justice Partnership and the Integrated children's services group addressing service user engagement and participation. The CRO is also committed to supporting young people's participation in the Champions Board. Over the coming year, the CRO will be involved in the following:

- developing a higher profile within Foster Care to reach the highest population of the 'looked after' population. This will be done in consultation with colleagues in Family Placement Teams.
- conducting a number of exit interviews in relation to children and young people who move or leave the system. Some of these will be in-depth interviews that will be targeted at those youngsters who have multiple placements.
- maintaining a high profile with those children and young people who are placed out-with Dundee.
- maintaining a specific role for those children and young people in secure accommodation.
- providing a range of services to children and young people with disabilities, including providing long-term advocacy

5.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management. There are no major issues.

5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and will be made available on the Council website <http://www.dundee.gov.uk/equanddiv/equimpact/>.

6.0 **CONSULTATIONS**

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and Director of Finance have been consulted in preparation of this report.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Equality Impact Assessment.

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

DATE: 6th September 2011

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT

STRATEGY PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT SERVICES

**DELIVERY OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS SERVICE FOR LOOKED AFTER AND
ACCOMODATED
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

ANNUAL REPORT

31st March 2010 - 1st April 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Report

This report highlights the work of Dundee City Council Social Work Department Children's Rights Service from 1st April 2010 - 31st March 2011.

It provides key statistical information on work undertaken in respect of the children and young people who have been recipients of the service. The report also provides information on the effectiveness and impact of the service on children and young people. A brief evaluation of the service was undertaken to elicit the views of young people, social workers and residential workers who commented on the effectiveness of the service and other relevant points relating to the impact of the service on service users.

Background

The Children's Rights Service plays an extremely important role in the monitoring and safeguarding of young people who are 'looked after', particularly those young people who are placed out-with the city. The primary source and basis for the Children's Rights Officer (CRO) and associated work is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Dundee City Council has signed up to the UNCRC and has agreed that all practice, policies and procedures should be congruent with it. It is a key objective of the CRO to help promote a culture of rights with those delivering services to children and young people.

In accordance with Article 2 of the UNCRC, this report will further promote the status of children and young people of all abilities looked after by the Council, to give them parity with other service users and safeguard them from discrimination. The work of the Children's Rights Officer has a focus on participatory rights of children and young people Looked After, creating equality of opportunity for active citizenship to a group acknowledged as having diminished life-opportunities.

The Children's Rights Service reached its 21st year on the 1st December 2010. During this period the service has matured and developed as an advice, information and advocacy service for children and young people with disabilities and those who are 'looked after' and accommodated by the Council. The service is also available to those professionals and adults with responsibility for their welfare. The Children's Rights Service has a positive reputation throughout Scotland and Children's Rights Officers now exist in many Councils in Scotland. The CRO is a member of national groups, including representing Scottish Children's Rights Officers on "Together", the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights.

The concept of children's rights is universally accepted as a crucial feature in the creation, development and delivery of services to families, children and young people. The UNCRC, is a key source for all national policy relating to children and young people. It can be described best as the promises that governments have made to children and young people to keep them safe, provide services they need and allow them to express their views and for those views to be taken seriously. However, children and young people are not a litigious group and violation of their convention rights is still commonplace. For example, any child 'accommodated' because they have been harmed or neglected by parents have had their convention rights violated. Likewise, so has the child whose services do not meet national and local standards. The services provided to children and young people by the CRO are designed to minimise violations and promote the UNCRC as a tool to guide professional practice, achieved mainly through training and consultation with professional staff.

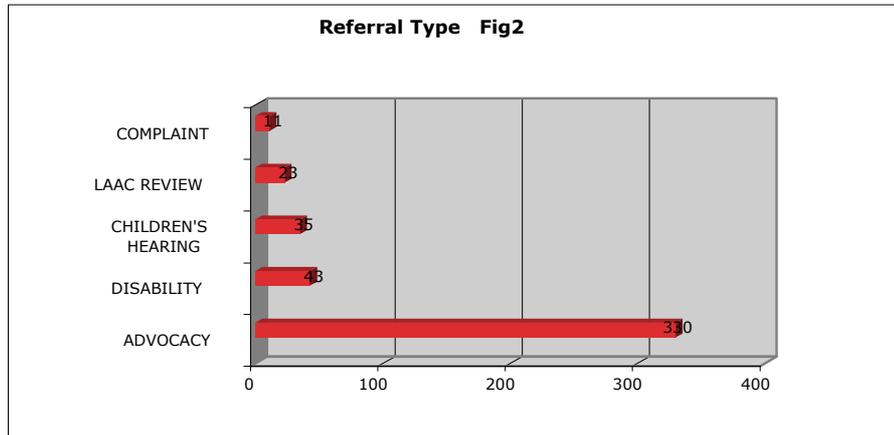
WHAT KEY OUTCOMES HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

Key Outcomes

TOTAL NUMBER OF REFERRALS = 442

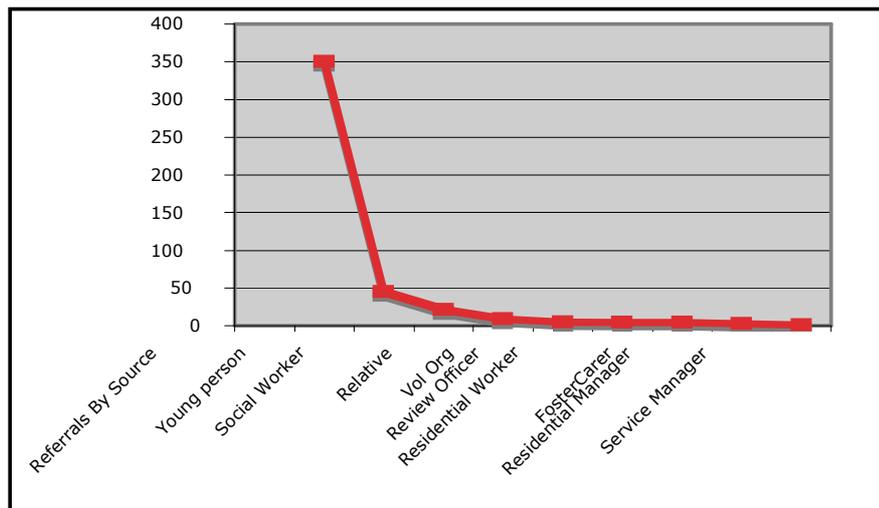
Referral Type

Figure 2 shows the type of referrals received by the Children's Rights Service 1st April-1st2010 to March 31st 2011.



Over the past year, the high demand for advocacy has been maintained. The attendance at Reviews and Hearings are recorded separately to requests from advocacy as this places a significant demand on the CRO's time, given the need for preparation time as well as in attendance. The primary purpose of this is to support children and young people to express their point of view and help them deal, where required, with disappointment when their wishes are not accepted by those acting in their best interest. This often arises when the professional assessment is in conflict with the young person's views.

Fig 1: Referral by Source



The wide range of the source of referrals indicates good partnership working practices. While it would have been better to see a higher number of referrals from these sources it is encouraging that the Children's Rights Service is valued by so many. Unsurprisingly, The highest number of referrals come from the young people themselves. The low number of referrals from residential staff was surprising given

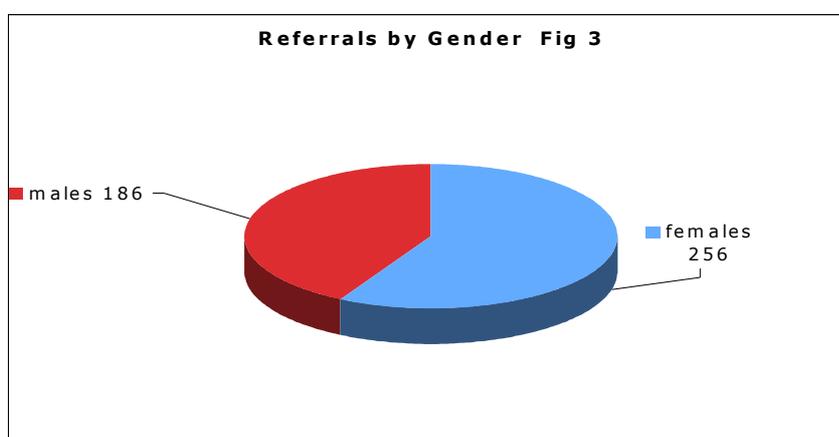
the amount of referrals from young people in the residential sector. The high number of referrals from relatives correlates with the kinship issues discussed earlier.

Table 1. Comparative Advocacy figures for the past three years.

Request for support at LAAC review	2008-2009 33	2009-2010 30	2010-2011 23
Request for advocacy service	2008-2009 281	2009-2010 260	2010-2011 330
Request for support at Hearing	2008-2009 33	2009-2010 37	2010-2011 35

Gender Considerations

A significant consideration in the referrals is the high number of females seeking support from the service. Young women are more likely to self-refer and re-refer than males, 256 to 186 respectively. This figure is consistent with the higher number of young women 'looked after and accommodated' and the high number of young women in secure accommodation. There is no obvious reason why young women would refer to the Children's Rights Service more than young men. It may be that young women have no inhibitions in asking for support while their male counterparts feel they can resolve issues themselves. It is particularly remarkable when considering the overall population of 'looked after' and accommodated children and young people.



This figure is particularly remarkable when considering the overall population of 'looked after and accommodated' children and young people. The figure for that is as follows:

Table 2 . relates to period 31st March 2011

Male	258
Female	223

It is clear from this then that the Children's Rights Service has a greater impact on females than their male counterparts. The gender split is a significant factor and has to be considered in terms of equality of access to the service. There have been occasions where young women have stated they would prefer a female advocate. The CRO, being male, would always ask young women if this is what they would prefer. Choice for children and young people is an important principle of the

Children's Rights Service and it is possible to offer this through the partnership with Who Cares? Scotland, whose Young Person's Worker is female.

In an attempt to evaluate the Children's Rights Service and gain some measure of the impact it had on Children, young people and stakeholders, The CRO devised a basic evaluation tool to that effect. The CRO sent a questionnaire to young people, social workers and residential staff capturing their views about different aspects of the service and whether they felt it made a difference to young people.

The questionnaire returns were as follows: 5 young people from residential care; 3 from through-care and aftercare and 2 from foster care. There were 10 returns from social workers and 13 from Residential workers:

The questionnaire was designed to ask **6** pertinent questions about partnership working and the impact of the service on young people and staff. They were invited to score these questions on a **10 point scale**. 10 Young People cast their views thus:

Min =1 Max score =10

	Grand Average
Q 1. Did the support of the CRO improve matters?	=8.8
Q 2. Did adults listen more when you were supported by CRO	=8.5
Q 3. Were you seen quickly?	=7.9
Q 4. How well were your rights explained to you?	=9.5
Q 5. How satisfied were you with the outcome	=9
Q 6. Would you recommend the CRO service?	=8.9

Young people said this about the Children's Rights Service:

"I think the CRO listens to us more than workers and he respects our decisions."

"My CRO cares a great deal about children. Anytime I needed his help or advice he is always there...I think he is the best support I have in my life right now."

Nobody would listen to me in my placement. I asked my dad to contact my CRO and now I get listened to."

"Every time I needed help or support I've always felt confident to ask him...the CRO does a great job with kids and I have recommended him to others."

"That's all." "(CRO)... is a pro to the Max."

Slightly different questions were put to **10 social workers** to ascertain their views about the value of the service for young people and themselves. Their views were expressed thus:

Min = 1 Max=10

	Grand Average
Q1. How well does the CRO Represent young people's rights?	=9.2
Q2. Was there a positive outcome for young people?	=8.4
Q3. How well does the CRO work in partnership with you?	=9.4
Q4. How courteous is the CRO?	=9.6
Q5. How child-centred is the CRO?	=9.6
Q6. How well does the CRO act in the child's best interest?	=9.6

Social workers said this about the service:

"...found him very helpful."

"In my experience the CRO helps to keep the child's interests at the centre of what we do, especially when there is disagreements between adults."

"I feel this service is essential to young people...(CRO) can also advocate at LAAC Reviews or Children's Hearings."

"Excellent service provided."

The same questions were put to 13 residential workers who responded thus:

Min = 1 Max=10

	Grand Average
Q1. How well does the CRO Represent young people's rights?	=6.75
Q2. Was there a positive outcome for young people?	=6.6
Q3. How well does the CRO work in partnership with you?	=6.4
Q4. How courteous is the CRO?	=7.9
Q5. How child-centred is the CRO?	=8.1
Q6. How well does the CRO act in the child's best interest?	=7.7

Residential workers said this about the service:

"Rarely see you in Drummond House. Dropping in every now and again would be good and not just when young people have complaints."

"We don't see the CRO unless young people complain. Would be better if CRO came in to the unit every so often."

"Always available...will strongly advocate on young people's behalf...service is invaluable to young people and staff."

It is clear from this evaluation that residential staff scored lower than young people and social workers. However the scoring is still highly encouraging with all of it towards the positive end of the scale. The comments are extremely helpful and the point is well made by residential staff that they feel the only time the CRO is in the unit is when there is a complaint. This is a matter that is easily remedied. There is much that is very positive about this simple evaluation and it is an exercise that will be repeated annually with each report.

WHAT IMPACT HAS THE SERVICE HAD ON SERVICE USERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS?

The Social Work Inspection Agency defines impact as:

"the direct experience of people, including children, who use our services."

a) Impact on People Who Use Our Service:

Children and young people who engage with the Children's Rights Service can expect a service that is speedy, responsive, child-centred and thorough. The range of services available to children and young people of all ages and abilities are in accordance with Article 2 of the UNCRC, non discriminatory. These are:

1. Advocacy.
2. Information and advice
3. Support and advocacy at Children's Hearings
4. Support and advocacy at LAAC Reviews
5. Support to register a complaint where desired.

Key Themes Arising From Advocacy

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy defined: Advocacy is helping people to say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain services that they need. Advocates and advocacy schemes work in partnership with the people they support. It promotes social inclusion and social justice. *Source: A voice of their own, BILD 2006*

There are a range of ways that has demonstrated the impact on children and young people. The following themes offer an insight into the type of issues that emerged for young people, that were of sufficient concern to them that they felt they needed to refer to the CRO for support. All of these issues were taken through to their conclusion and advice given about how to manage the dilemmas that often occur when trying to balance rights that are sometime competing. A number of solutions were available but there were some factors that made it difficult to resolve some issues. For example, a lack of internal resources sometimes meant that children and young people were placed outside Dundee against their wishes. Some of the themes emerging from advocacy were as follows:

- Family contact, particularly between siblings. Where siblings are placed apart, their care plans sometimes exclude contact with each other. This is a complex area made more difficult when the assessment demonstrates that contact is not in one or more of the siblings best interest. The issue however, illustrates the need to keep siblings together where this is possible and to give those siblings living apart the highest priority when assessing best interest in relation to contact.
- Placement issues such as young people being unhappy about the placement they are in and wanting to move or conversely, wanting to remain when they have been told they have to move. This issue s exacerbated by the need to place young people in out-of-authority placements.
- Staff shortages impacting on care plans. Where young people had planned outings or activities which had to be cancelled by lack of staff to facilitate this. Young people were unhappy that care planning is affected due to social work and residential staff turnover, or sickness.
- Bullying. A number of referrals related to bullying in young person's units schools and the community. The CRO acted as mediator in a number of these cases. Although the issue of bullying is a national concern, the 'Extraordinary Lives' report highlighted bullying as a significant feature in the lives of 'accommodated' children and young people. It was not the main referring factor in Dundee. All young person's units have clear anti-bullying policies but sometimes young people and children do not want adults to act as they believe it may make things worse for them. There is sometimes a professional dilemma about this as the risk and level of harm has to be assessed to determine whether the matter should be passed on as a child protection concern.
- Kinship care: A number of referrals were received by relatives who were concerned for children being rehabilitated to parents with substance misuse issues. In all of these cases there was a professional assessment of the risks. School placements were also an issue for kinship carers who wanted to place children in schools closer to their home. Some children however were not in agreement with this and their views were given due weight in the ensuing discussions.

- Advocacy themes for children with disabilities were exclusively related to service provision: school; health; care packages etc. The Children's Rights Officer now acts as advocate for 4 individuals on a long-term basis. Access to specialist services and the service response time are the primary concerns of children with, and families affected by disabilities. More than any other group, these children and young people require agencies to work effectively together. This has not been the experience for some of the children supported by the CRO. One young woman with complex needs was disadvantaged by inflexible and unresponsive services that lacked a person centred approach. At a recent LAAC Review for this young woman, the attending agencies acknowledged that their systems were not as child friendly as they should be. It was noted that individual workers were child centred in their assessments, but it was often the supporting systems that made this focus difficult to sustain.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE:

Jill is 13. Following a child protection investigation she was accommodated with an external fostering agency due to no internal placements being available. After 10 weeks Jill was told that she must leave her placement as an internal foster carer had been identified. Jill contacted the CRO, upset that she had grown very close to the carers and their family which was in direct contrast to her own family experience. She felt that if she had known the placement was temporary she would not have let her emotional 'guard down' Following a discussion with the CRO an appointment was made to meet with the Head of Service. At that meeting Jill explained her case articulately and respectfully. Given the points made by Jill, it was agreed that she should remain in her current placement. While the CRO had prepared Jill for the meeting he allowed her to speak without adding anything. Best practice dictated that Jill was prepared and supported, empowering her to explain herself without interference, thus allowing her to exercise her right to self-determination. This clearly had a positive impact on Jill who continues to thrive in her current placement. It was, in her own words, "the best outcome possible"

Information and Advice

Young people who are 'looked after and accommodated' should receive information outlining what the Children's Rights Service offers. The CRO along with two colleagues from Glasgow and South Lanarkshire devised a booklet that explains young people's rights and responsibilities while they are 'accommodated'. This was funded by Scottish Government and made available to all young people in Scotland. Therefore, all young people should have service and contact information given to them when they are accommodated by their social worker

Article 12 of the UNCRC affords young people the right to express their views in any decisions that are made about them. In line with this the council has established a Corporate Parenting Champions Board. The development of, and the first meeting of the Champions Board is a welcome innovation and a meaningful example of the right accorded by Article 12. An evaluation of young people's views demonstrated that they felt the Champions Board was a resounding success. They felt that the adults in the board were respectful and listened to what they had to say.

Young people have worked hard and showed tenacious commitment to making the Champion's Board work. There is an optimism and momentum within the young people's group to make this a success, to try and help improve services for those young people who are "looked after" by the council. The Champions Board comprises 6 young people with current or previous knowledge of the care system

and support workers, chief executive, chief officers, elected members, children's rights officer and senior managers from other agencies. The main function of the Champion's Board is to act as a forum for listening to the experiences and recommendations of the young people.

The CRO has supported a number of young people to be a part of the recruitment of residential staff. Young people form part of the selection group giving their views about each candidate. They never fail to surprise in demonstrating insight and a great sense of fairness in the process. Being involved in staff selection affords the young people a true sense of belonging in their residential units and a meaningful example of how seriously their views are taken by residential staff.

Complaints Referrals

The CRO works to the principle that issues should be resolved at the lowest level possible. Having said that, the CRO would discuss with children and young people what options are available to them and advise the best way to resolve these. Ultimately though the child or young person will decide which course of action they would like to take. Complaints are viewed as a way of reflecting on and improving services. Any complaint made should be accepted in that spirit.

A key objective of the CRO is to ensure those complaints and concerns raised by young people, are given proper consideration by responsible officers. The role of the CRO is to advise and support young people to voice their complaints and offer assistance throughout the process, to resolution. The vast majority of concerns are resolved through mediation and negotiation with concerned parties, without the need for formal processes. Generally, young people are not prone to making false claims or complaints. They are not a group who are litigious and are on the whole, likely to take a responsible attitude in resolving concerns. This undermines a common stereotype that sometimes exists with some adults.

Table 3: Complaints for year 2010-2011

Complaints: Social work	4
Complaints : Other Agencies	7

The number of formal complaints supported by the service over the past year was 11 compared to 5 the previous year. This includes complaints across all agencies. The complaints arose when young people were unhappy with the service they were receiving or the way they perceived they had been treated by the police, secure unit staff, foster carers and residential staff. 11 formal complaints is a very low number given the daily transactions between children and young people and all agencies . Only 4 of the complaints related to social work, 4 related to the police and the remainder were in external secure and residential units.

Young people's experience of the complaints systems could be best described as mixed, with 5 of the 11 young people who made complaints very unhappy about the outcomes while 6 were satisfied. The Children's Rights Officer raises these complaints with relevant Service Managers to ensure follow up about the concerns. It is an area that a number of agencies could improve on. While table 2 below shows an increase from the previous year, it can be seen that the number is still significantly lower over the three year period.

Complaints supported by CRO	2008-2009 20	2009-2010 5	2010-2011 11
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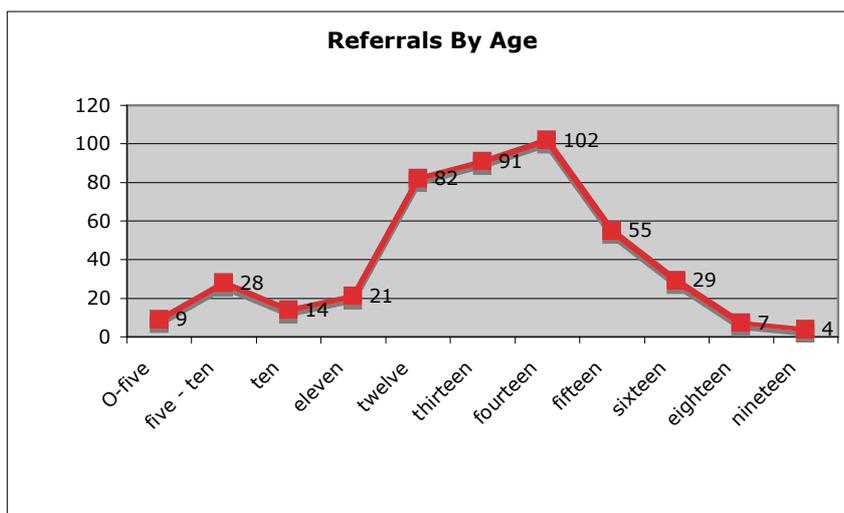
Table 4: Complaints over last three years.

Effective Practice Example, illustrating how complaints can be used to improve services:

Complaints lodged with the police related to searches. These were thoroughly investigated and while the police acted within regulations, some practice issues emerged. The CRO raised the issues with the Head of Service who has agreed to meet with police and develop a best practice model for dealing with young people who are required to be searched. The outcome demonstrates that complaints can be effective in changing practice.

The age of referral is an important factor to observe. While the greatest number of referrals came from teenagers, a significant number came from children under ten years old. These children tended to be looked after by relatives, as discussed earlier. Working with younger children often imposes a demand on the CRO to work effectively in partnership with both the children and their relatives or carers. The example given below shows the work of the CRO with a younger child and his mother and baby sister.

Figure 4: Referrals by age



Practice Example:

The following is a practice example that demonstrates the work regarding a younger child

Jon is a 4 year old boy with Down's Syndrome. He lives with his mum and his baby sister in a third floor flat. Jon has poor muscle tone in his legs and can't climb the stairs unaided. His mum has to carry his baby sister so struggles to keep the children safe on the stairs. Having approached the housing department for more suitable accommodation Jon's mum was awarded points on the housing list that would take up to 18 months to rehouse the family, as no points were awarded for Jon's medical issues.. The CRO contacted Jon's consultant and arranged for a medical assessment that reflected the difficulties with his poor muscle tone and the need for a garden to help Jon develop to his full potential.

Outcome: *Jon's mum was awarded extra points that reflected his medical difficulties and will be re-housed much sooner than initially proposed.*

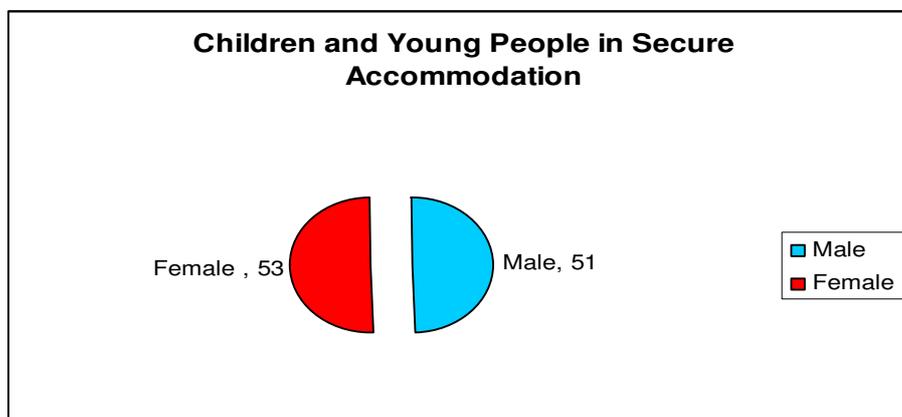
Secure Accommodation Referrals

The CRO has a specific role in relation to children and young people who are placed in secure accommodation. When a child or young person is made the subject of a secure order, the CRO is notified by the relevant social worker. A standard has been agreed that the CRO should make sure contact is made within two working days of notification of an admission. Regular visits are arranged with the agreement of the young person. The CRO was able to maintain this standard, except on one occasion. The CRO ensures that young people understand their rights in relation to their circumstances and gives advice, support and assistance when it is requested.

Staff are made aware of the CRO's powers and the range of assistance offered by the service. There was a rise in referrals from secure accommodation. This may be due to the growing profile the CRO has in this area. 12 individual young people were subject to secure orders. 5 were young women and 7 young men. This ratio illustrates that Dundee has a significantly higher proportion of young women in secure accommodation than the national average. Dundee has consistently placed more females in secure accommodation as an average, than any other authority in Scotland. Young women were also far more likely to be readmitted than young men. All the current young women apart from one were readmitted. The CRO has a high profile with young people in secure accommodation with 104 of the total referrals coming from young people placed there. The CRO will conduct file audits for all young people who are admitted to secure accommodation which will form part of self-evaluation and performance improvement.

The loss of liberty is a serious matter. Children and young people are placed in secure accommodation almost exclusively because of concerns for their safety and the safety of others. There are often misunderstandings about this, with a common belief being that children and young people are placed in secure accommodation because they are bad. Only one young person had been admitted to a secure setting because of offending. 2 of the young people returned home when discharged, the remainder moved to other local authority provision. The greatest need for young people in secure accommodation appears to be access to psychological and health services when they need it. This deficit is a common feature for young people in that setting, often making what is a difficult task for staff all the more challenging. Young people often spoke of their time in secure accommodation with some gratitude and affection, speaking highly of the staff who cared for them.

Figure 5: *Children and Young People in Secure Accommodation*



Article 37(b) of the UNCRC states: No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be used only as a matter of last resort and for the shortest period of time

The CRO considers this article a primary source when considering the human rights of children and young people in this setting and has brought it to the attention of social work management in the course of the past year.

Table 5: *Secure Accommodation Referrals*

Referrals from secure accommodation	2009-2010 85 (F56 M 29)	2010-2011 104 (F 53 M 51)
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HOW GOOD IS OUR OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Partnership Working

Virtually all the work of the CRO involves partnership working. Whether that is with young people, families or professional staff from all agencies, working together to resolve or understand concerns from the child or young person’s perspective. The aim is always to resolve or improve matters to the young person’s satisfaction.

The Children’s Rights Service has significant experience in partnership working with the service combining with Who Cares? Scotland, to make up the Children’s Rights and Independent Advocacy Service. This partnership will soon extend further with the appointment of a Care and Protection Engagement Worker, dedicated to supporting children in Child Protection processes. This post will be located within Children 1st, working closely with the CRO and will be a welcome addition to the Children’s Rights and Independent Advocacy Service.

The CRO recognises the importance of partnership working, whether with children, young people and those who care for and provide services to them. Figure 1 illustrates the range of referral sources and shows the Children’s Rights Service is valued by a variety of sources

Training

In accordance with the objective of promoting a culture of rights, the CRO provided training on 4 occasions to an external secure unit, foster carers and Dundee University social work students. The Training for new foster carers is vital to promote the service and the notion of Children’s Rights to a group of carers that are under-represented in the referrals. However, the CRO has an agreement with senior managers that he will have a much higher profile in foster care while the coming year while the Who Cares? Scotland worker will take a more prominent role in residential care.

The CRO supported 2 young people who had been through the care system in a question and answer session with the university students. This followed on from sessions about Children’s Human Rights and the UNCRC. The following evaluation illustrates a commitment to listening to stakeholders and partners while including young people in a crucial activity that gave them a huge boost in terms of their self esteem and self worth. The young people were rewarded with tokens from the university in lieu of the valuable contribution they made to social work education. Training is designed to promote the UNCRC as a live, working document to influence professional practice. This is in accordance with Article 42 which states:

State parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.

The following evaluation of that training illustrates the positive method employed to have a positive impact on young people and stakeholders by promoting the UNCRC to influence professional practice.

EVALUATION: *The following evaluation gauged the effectiveness and impact on the learning of the students. Students were asked six questions and invited to score on a 5 point scale. Below is the average figure from 21 students scoring on that scale.*

Students average score.	Min=1- -Max =5
Q 1 Was the subject interesting?	4.55
Q 2 Were your views challenged?	3.8
Q 3 Was your knowledge improved?	4.3
Q 4 Was the session presented in an interesting way?	4.5
Q 5 Did the CRO know the subject well?	4.8
Q 6 Will the session influence your practice?	4.5

What did the students say?:

“Great hearing young people’s views”

“I think the involvement of young people brought the subject home...how our practice impacts on service users.”

“I have thought about the impact of siblings being separated.”

“The session will definitely influence my practice.” “Gave me further insight into the UNCRC” “I found the session valuable from an academic and practical perspective”

“I enjoyed the content” “Maybe more case studies would have been useful”

“I really enjoyed the two young speakers. Their input made the session more honest and real.”

“The discussion with the two young people was the most valuable.” “I found the session really helpful.” “Invaluable.” “I learned a lot”

Evaluation such as this has been a positive tool to sharpen the focus of the sessions, particularly with social work students. The input of young people brings their voice to social work in an unprecedented way. Young people too benefit from the training as it empowers them to speak about their care experience and as one young person said:

“That did more for my self-esteem than all the praise in the world”

The Children’s Rights Officer, along with others, has conducted 30 exit interviews with young people who had moved on from residential and foster care. These interviews explored safety, service provision and participation. The findings are soon to be presented in report form. Put here how this is to be reported on

The overwhelming demand for the service comes from residential services. Given that residential services are subject to a very high level of scrutiny it has been agreed that the profile of the Children’s Rights Officer should be developed further in foster care, over the next few years. The service will remain high profile for those young people placed out-with the city.

Finally, the CRO will continue to contribute to the LAC theme group, the Youth Justice Partnership and the Integrated children's services group addressing service user engagement and participation. The CRO is also committed to supporting young people's participation in the Champions Board.

CAPACITY FOR IMPROVEMENT AND THE WAY FORWARD

Over the coming year, the CRO will develop the following:

- A higher profile within Foster Care to reach the highest population of the 'looked after' population. This will be done in consultation with colleagues in Family Placement Teams.
- Conduct a number of exit interviews in relation to children and young people who move or leave the system. Some of these will be in-depth interviews that will be targeted at those youngsters who have multiple placements.
- Continue to have a high profile with those children and young people who are placed out-with Dundee.
- Continue to maintain a specific role for those children and young people in secure accommodation.
- Provide a range of services to children and young people with disabilities, including providing long-term advocacy.