

# Highland Children's Forum

## ANNUAL REPORT 2010 2011

Full details of the Forum's activities, constitution and financing can be obtained from it's website:

[www.highlandchildrensforum.org](http://www.highlandchildrensforum.org)

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## Representing Children and Young People in Need in Highland



Highland Children's Forum is a parent carer founded and led charity that is committed to working to have the voice of children and young people with additional support needs of all kinds heard and appropriately acted on by those who design and deliver services.

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### Foreword

The past twelve months have been another productive year for the Forum – we have consulted with children and young people who have experienced bereavement or gender based violence, are teenage parents or are being supported by the Youth Justice System. This is in response to a widening understanding of additional support needs which can arise from life circumstances as well as illness, disabilities or complex needs.

The current economic climate sees some children's services losing funding, projects ceasing to function and others are struggling to deliver a service with reduced resources. When such organisations are facing difficult decisions about prioritising need what will happen to children's rights, the importance of children's and young people's views and the need for policy makers and practitioners alike to listen and respond?

Listening to children and young people with additional needs and to their parents and carers is one of the best ways to ensure that scarce resources are used to best effect - they know what produces the best outcomes for them. Embedding genuine consultation in service design and delivery is not only the right thing to do but it is a valuable tool for politicians and service managers.

As we look ahead to the proposed integration of care services across Highland the Forum will be alert to the challenges which this may pose for transitions and what role we can play in improving services for children and young people.

This is a headline report and a great deal more information about our work can be found on our website. The reports overleaf give you an introduction to a busy year engaging with a broad range of topics where the Forum has listened to many children and young people in need and taken their testimony to key policy makers.

**FRANCES NIXSEAMAN**  
CHAIR

### THE FORUM HAS THE FOLLOWING VISION, MISSION AND AMBITION

#### Vision

Highland Children's Forum believes that a truly inclusive society is one where all members are valued equally and their views are sought and acted upon appropriately.

#### Mission

To contribute to the provision of the highest possible standards of services in the Highlands for the benefit if children in need and their families.

To work in partnership to develop the most effective methods of consultation with children in need and their families that allow them to express their views on their lives and how services affect them.

To encourage service providers to reflect upon these opinions and adjust their services accordingly.

#### Ambition

To see services in Highland resourced and structured to maximise the potential of children in need and their families.

To see service providers automatically incorporate the views of children in need and their families at every level of their design, development and delivery of services.



**WORK FOR THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INCLUDED:**

- **A major consultation with young people on all forms of bereavement.** The topic of bereavement had been highlighted to us through the "Are we there yet?" project. This consultation took "The Sad Book" by Michael Rosen and looked at the different ways bereavement affected him and how he coped. The emerging themes reflect that every aspect of a young person's life can be affected if they are coping with grief or sadness and that people around them would need to understand that there are some times when they would need help and understanding but there are other times where they would want to be left alone.
- **A project with young people on the edge of the criminal justice system.** The emerging themes from this project are both positive in the stories of young people who were moving forward with their lives after

"I am old enough to be a young carer but not old enough to get a job caring."

*Young woman with a disabled mother.*

being through many challenges, but also negative in the way that young people can be unsupported during their transition out of prison and this leaves them vulnerable to returning to previous behaviours. There is also a story emerging of lost opportunities for earlier intervention; children who fell through the net and ended up in trouble. In a Getting it Right world these children should be supported much earlier in their lives.

"If I'm angry I fight, fall out or shout at others. Trying to keep cool but if anyone said anything I'd blow. Prison made me more of a fighter."

*From a young man who had experienced violence from within his family.*

- **A consultation with teenage parents.** Despite considerable work with partners to engage with teenage parents few participants took part in the initial consultation though their insights into services and the prejudices they experienced in society were valuable. The work will continue into the next year.
- **The completion of a second Whole School Evaluation in a secondary school – this evaluation focussed on the experience of inclusion.** The whole

school evaluation was returned to the school but was not shared by the school's senior management with the school community and the impact of the report is unclear. However, the lessons learned about carrying out a whole school consultation were captured and put on the website toolbox.

- **A consultation in support of the Getting It Right For Every Child implementation agenda in Highland with parents, carers and young people about their experience of being listened to in meetings with services.** The report was titled "It's not about money and resources; it is about empathy and intuition" which is a quote from one of the parents involved. The report had examples of practice where families were listened to and there was real progress towards better outcomes. In other instances children and families did not feel listened to or understood and this had interfered with better outcomes.

"My nurse knows and accepts me. I can talk to her about anything. She listens, doesn't rush. She knows how to speak to me. She explains and makes sure I understand."

*Beth*

- **The My World Triangle interactive self evaluation tool for children and young people in transitions was hugely influenced by the work of the Forum.** The interactive tool has ten different question sets and the voice over in ten languages. The tool has proved popular with both children and practitioners.
- **The work of the Forum continues to influence and develop the Scottish Government funded Consultation Toolkit.** This is hosted on the Forum's website which is being accessed by increasing numbers of users.

**SEPARATELY COMMISSIONED CONTRACTS INCLUDED:**

- **The completion of the three part consultation on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.** The first part involving working with children with additional support needs was published in 2009. This involved two consultations one with a small cohort of service users and the other with group young people from Highland Youth Voice. There was a lot of commonality in the things important to young people for a sense of wellbeing; the need for accessing a mental health service had impacted on some but not all of these areas.

"People want to pin a diagnosis on me. Not everything about me fits under a name. People are complicated and I am one too."

*Anna*

- **Designing a participation framework for children and young people affected by Violence Against Women.** The participation framework for those affected by gender based violence was developed with the support of children and young people from Women's Aid and CoVass. The consultation tools and methodologies were very well received by frontline workers but the participation framework has yet to be put into use by the strategy development group.

- **An evaluation of the work that the All Sorts Out of School Club in Dornoch was doing for Play Scotland. Adam Ingram, The Minister for Children, visited the project and saw the Forum's work.** This work has led to a collaboration with Evaluation Support Scotland and the development of evaluation tools for the Forum's website. All services will be required to carry out self-evaluation which is robust in terms of involving children and young people and in demonstrating improved outcomes rather than simply reporting the activities carried out.

- **Organising a focus group of children and young people who had experience of health services for the Open University.** This led to the production of a powerful piece of video testimony by a young service user who has complex needs which is being used by local services and is being taken by the OU and Napier University for use on their health courses.

- **The Forum is part of the consortium of Third Sector organisations that won the contract to review the Highland Play Strategy and to develop its successor.**

"I don't need the extra help this year as I have a teacher who listens to me. Also I can wind teachers up and she does not rise to it. I can't help it. If people shout at me I just react."

*Michael with social emotional and behavioural issues (from GIRFEC study)*

The Forum involved a number of children and young people with additional support needs to ensure these voices were heard as part of the review of the previous strategy and the development of the next one. The broader consultation has registered an unexpectedly high agreement with the idea of reducing speed limits in residential areas to 20 miles per hour as suggested by children and young people in the "Are we there yet?" report three years ago.

**WOMEN'S AID SUPPORT WORKERS HELP BECAUSE:**

"They listen and can help you with your family."

"If you are struggling they will talk to you and try to sort it out."

- **In partnership with Together we hosted a seminar in Inverness on The State of Children's Rights.** Together is an organisation which works throughout Scotland to promote children's rights and the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Our shared values meant that we were pleased to support them in a seminar which was well attended and thought provoking.

"It has been invaluable to have your insight and advice to help us weave a path through this virtual maze of bureaucracy"

*Comment from a Carers' Group*

- **The Forum continues to work on a range of strategic committees to have the voice of children and young people heard and acted on.**
- **The Forum has also used its access to key policy makers to support a carers group in a dispute with health services.**



*Illustrations in this report were created by young people in various consultations.*