



## FOREWORD

Over the last year, Highland Children's Forum (HCF) has continued its work of listening to children and young people, seeking to ensure that their voice leads to change in policy and practice. HCF is grateful for the ongoing support from the Highland Council for the Service Level Agreement (SLA) that allows us to continue this work. We are also grateful to New Start Highland for offering HCF office space within its headquarters in Carsegate Road.

Emma Thomas, the Consultation Lead, has published the report from her consultation on transition from children to adult services: "Moving on – Life After School" (2017). Gillian Newman, as Policy Lead, sits on the Joint Transitions Project Board, seeking to ensure this report influences policy direction.

The subsequent consultation being undertaken under the SLA is an evaluation of sexual health and relationship education (SHARE) in schools, particularly for young people who may be more vulnerable to poorer sexual outcomes. The issue of access to good and appropriate sexual health information is one that has been raised to HCF by young people and by parent carers in the past. We are delighted to be able to undertake this consultation, which will be ongoing over the next year, publishing in 2018.

This year HCF has been able to use unrestricted funds to carry out a second consultation project on the theme of children and young people not in full time education. HCF were delighted to employ a temporary Project Worker, Maggie Hume, to support Emma in this exciting piece of work. HCF were grateful to be supported by the "Family Firm" Care Experienced young

people in the recruitment of the Project Worker. The issue of children and young people who are not in full time education has been flagged up to HCF over the years and is also a current focus for the For Highland's Children Additional Support Needs Improvement Group.

Gillian Newman continues to pursue young people's recommendations from previous HCF reports both locally and nationally. She represents HCF at various meetings for The Highland Council, NHS Highland and a variety of third sector groups. HCF promotes participation and involvement of children and young people with additional support needs in personal planning, service evaluation and policy development. Gillian has continued to lobby elected officials on behalf of children and young people with additional support needs, to protect public services and support the early intervention often offered by local voluntary sector organisations.

The staff appreciate the strong and committed leadership of the HCF Management Committee members. This support allows the staff to progress the work of HCF to a high standard. The committee ensures that Highland Children's Forum continues to develop and progress its aim to ensure that the voice of children and young people who face various challenges influences policy and practice in Highland. At this time of increased opportunity for community engagement and continued pressure on public services, this has never been more important.

**Donnie Macleod**  
Chair

# ANNUAL REPORT 2016 / 2017

Listening to children and young people - Speaking to policy makers

# Annual Report

## April 2016 to March 2017

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### Committee Matters

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HCF has a committee of 9 members (a couple share one position). Office bearers are: Chair, Donnie Macleod; Vice Chair, Heather Duncan; Treasurer, Mark Boulton and Minute Secretary, Judith Hope. The annual service evaluation was carried out in September followed by a team away day in October to develop the work plan for 2017-18. An area of development identified was to increase involvement of young people in the management and strategic direction of HCF. As a first step, Rebecca Nicholson, a younger member of HCF, was co-opted on to the management committee as a youth representative.

The development plan, minutes of committee meetings and other relevant committee papers are available on the website. Committee meetings are held approximately bi-monthly with team meetings of the Chair, Vice Chair and staff members occurring in between.

*"It was great to have a teacher who totally understood and didn't think I was stupid as that was how I felt about myself."*

### Staffing

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Emma Thomas continues as the Consultation Lead and has this year been joined by Maggie Hume as Project Worker to support the consultation on children and young people not in full time education. Maggie comes with experience of therapeutic group work with children and young people affected by domestic abuse and most recently coordinated Fife MARAC - a multi-agency, victim-centered response to addressing the safety needs of the highest risk victims of domestic abuse and their children. Gillian Newman continues in the role of Policy Lead.

### Activity report – Listening to Children

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The transitions report, *Moving on - Life After School HCF 2017*, was published and presented by young participants to the Education, Children and Adult Services Committee in March. This is the third report on transitions that HCF has carried out (*It's My Journey 2007*, *How's Your Journey 2012*). Young people with a range of additional support needs took part. Participants unsurprisingly aspire to have positive destinations post-school in either employment or further studies. For those young people with significant challenges, young people wanted a person-centred approach to the information and support received during transition.

Where professionals knew the young person well enough to respond in a person-centred way, the support had generally been helpful. Where young people were not known well by those supporting them, young people had not felt listened to and reported being given generic information rather than relevant information with the result that transition had been more problematic. Young people did not speak positively of transitions meetings where these had occurred. Transition from school carried other stress factors that affected the wellbeing of young people: losing friends and known supportive adults was a big issue; for some young people, a lack of life skills meant they felt ill-prepared for the journey forward and Young Carers and young people with mental health needs described particular vulnerabilities with respect to transition.

There are two current consultations being undertaken. The "Not in Full Time Education" consultation is now underway. Emma Thomas and Maggie Hume are working together on this project. The consultation participants include young people not in full time education, parents and relevant professionals. The report should be completed by April 2018.

The second consultation is on the issue of sexual health and relationship education. There is a quantitative element to the consultation to evaluate the current Sexual Health and Relationships curriculum and delivery. There is also a qualitative element to the consultation listening to young people who may be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation or other concerns due to: social circumstances; physical or mental health issues; learning or communication challenges. This part of the consultation is still in the design stage.

HCF has been considering for some time the development of Peer Consultants, to support its work. A number of Peer Consultants have been identified and will be trained and supported to consult with other young people participating in the Sexual Health and Relationships consultation.

*"Before she was my year head she was my Guidance ...[she] knows me and knows what I want to do and points me in the right direction."*

### Activity report – Speaking with Policy Makers

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The Policy Lead continues to work with the Care and Learning service to ensure that the recommendations and responses from children and young people are heard and do influence the direction of strategic planning. The Policy Lead is a voluntary sector advisor to the Education, Children and Adult Services committee and contributes to the delivery of For Highland's Children Service plan (FHC) through membership of the Leadership Group and the Additional Support Needs, Young Carers, Mental Health, Highland Practice Model and Play Improvement groups. The Policy Lead is also on the Joint Monitoring

Committee, the Joint Transitions Project Board and attends the CHAMPS board meetings led by Care Experienced Young People.

As well as this strategic role, the Policy Lead works to see developments at an operational level to carry out the hopes and suggestions from children and young people.

"... They asked me what my 3 main interests were and they would try to set me up [with an Activity Agreement]. I don't think they could have done anything better to be honest."

This year, work has included a pilot project with Duke of Edinburgh to enable volunteering opportunities for young people to support peers with additional support needs to access activities of mutual interest. While the pilot project has been slow to get off the ground, lessons learned will contribute to the development of the pilot in the future.

The Policy Lead continues to seek to follow up the recommendations from the "My Child's Plan: My Views" 2014 report requesting a version of the Child's Plan that was "child friendly" and therefore able to provide the child or young person with a sense of ownership. Two young teams in Wick High School developed a prototype for an App that could provide ownership of the child's action plan as well as allowing the child or young person to record progress towards identified outcomes, which could then feed directly in to the Child's Plan review. This record of progress could also provide evidence of change for use of Self-Directed Support monies. There is currently no backing for the development of such an App, but this is being pursued. The interactive My World Triangle and My Transitions Guide tools, part of the participation toolbox HCF was funded to develop by the Scottish Government in 2008, are also in need of updating. The Policy Lead will continue to seek progress on these issues in the hope of developing interactive tools for children and young people to be actively involved in their Child's Plan development, action planning and review.

## Partnership Working in Support of Participation

The Community Empowerment Act and Local Community Partnerships present new opportunities for children and young people's participation in local service provision and policy development. The Policy Lead is working with Third Sector and FHC improvement groups to establish good practice in community engagement with children and young people, including those experiencing challenges in their lives.

HCF has supported young people to participate in an event about Child and Adolescent Mental Health; Strengthening the Voices of Young People Scotland and an EU Northern Periphery Project. This latter participation opportunity enabled one of the young people representing HCF to take part in broad media

coverage. This has enabled good academic links to be developed between the work of HCF, University of Aberdeen and Luleå University of Technology in Sweden.

HCF has supported a young person to be part of the advisory board to the Inclusion Scotland's "Inclusion Highland" project, encouraging people with disability to participate in local democracy.

## Lobbying Activity

HCF lobbied Elected Members in advance of proposed cuts to third sector organisations (November 2016) and before the budgetary decisions taken in February 2017.

"When I was having a really bad time the Depute sorted for me to get a shorter timetable even through it was only for 2 weeks."

HCF recognises the difficult position that the council is in regarding having to make significant cuts year on year and how progressively challenging that becomes. However, HCF also recognises that building community capacity would seem to be a way forward in a time of sweeping public sector cuts. There is a lot of good will in Highland and a lot of people who make significant voluntary contributions in their local communities. To enable community capacity building, continued support of the voluntary sector will be necessary especially where the voluntary sector is good at making a significant difference: with youth; children and families; people with disability and other vulnerable groups. The added value of volunteer contribution and monies being brought into Highland through grants mean that money given to the voluntary sector can often deliver better value. Many voluntary sector community groups are able to support people at the point of need who may otherwise escalate into crisis, which will always be more costly in every sense.

## HCF Internal Activity

HCF is appreciative of the funding received from Highland Cross last year to update the office and computer hardware. This allowed the purchase of new office chairs, computers and smart phones. HCF also registered with the Technology Trust that enables access to free or much reduced software. HCF continues to be grateful to New Start Highland Offices for providing our office space, now well-equipped and furnished to enable HCF staff to continue to develop its work.

"It's good to get all the information as it's quite hard to think of it all yourself. As I'm only 16 it's hard to think beyond school as this is all I know."



Highland  
Children's  
Forum

## VISION

That children and young people facing challenges are given opportunities to talk about their lives and that their views are listened to, respected and acted upon.

## MISSION

To enable children and young people facing challenges to have their voices heard. To represent them by influencing positive change in policy and practice which leads to better outcomes.

## AMBITION

Children and young people facing challenges are actively engaged in influencing service design, delivery and development.

### HIGHLAND CHILDREN'S FORUM COMMITTEE

Donnie Macleod	Chair
Heather Duncan	Vice Chair
Mark Boulton	Treasurer
Judith & Stephen Hope	Minute Secretary
Anne Watmough	
Christian Maclean	
Kirsty Hunter	
Pamela Sutherland	
Alasdair Christie	

### CO-OPTED YOUNG PERSON

Rebecca Nicholson

### STAFF

Gillian Newman	Policy Lead
Emma Thomas	Consultation Lead
Maggie Hume	Project Worker



### CONTACT DETAILS

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### ONLINE PRESENCE

Full details of HCF activities, constitution, policies and finances are available from the website:

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

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