

High Risk Young Offenders

Focused on children and young people most at risk, SCRA's fundamental purpose is to:

- Make effective decisions about a need to refer a child/young person to a Children's Hearing
- Prepare for and participate in court proceedings where Statement of Grounds or Hearings findings are appealed, and ensure the wellbeing of children and young people – particularly vulnerable witnesses – are protected throughout the court process
- Support Panel Members (though we are not involved in making Hearing decisions) and ensure fair process in Hearings
- Enable children, young people and families to participate in Hearings
- Disseminate information and data to influence and inform the wider Children's Services community
- Provide premises for Hearings to take place
- Work collaboratively with partners to support and facilitate the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) agenda

A minority of children and young people pose a high risk of harm to others. A key part of 'Preventing Offending by Young People: A Framework for Action' is to identify at an early stage which children and young people have the potential to harm others, and to intervene to prevent or minimise this risk.

SCRA carried out research to track the backgrounds of children and young people to the point when they were identified as potentially presenting a high risk to others, to help with the identification and management of these children/young people.

Backgrounds of children

Children and young people who are potentially a high risk to others, have backgrounds which are characterised by adversity from an early age and they have often been victims of, or witnessed harmful or risk taking behaviour by others, such as:

- Parental separation
- Violence between adults, sometimes extreme (including murder), in the home
- Parents who are offenders
- Parents with drug and/or alcohol problems
- Children/young people themselves were victims of physical abuse
- Children/young people have mental health problems

Risks to themselves

These children and young people went onto develop behaviour that put themselves at risk:

- Alcohol and drug misuse (sometimes starting at primary school age)
- Running away
- Truancy

Risks to others

These children and young people went on to develop behaviour that could put others at risk:

- Antisocial behaviour in the community
- Aggressive and threatening behaviour in the home
- Abusive to staff and pupils at school
- Offending, sometimes serious (carrying offensive weapon, fireraising)

Interventions

The children/young people received a range of interventions throughout their lives. At an early age, these were centered on supporting the family and the health of the child/young person and their parents.

As the children moved to primary school age, interventions were more focused on the child, including being cared for away from home, their educational, health (mainly mental health) and behavioural needs (ADHD, anger management, etc). However, supports were still being provided to help parents' health, substance misuse and domestic violence problems.

When aged 13 to 17 years, many of the supports provided when primary school age were still in place, but these young people were now also receiving interventions to address their social isolation and exclusion in the community and their offending. When in their teens, they were also likely to spend time in residential or secure accommodation.

SCRA's research shows that children who go on to present a risk of serious harm, often have multiple needs and need a high level of support to change their concerning and violent behaviour. However, the research found that this group of children had received interventions over a prolonged period of time but still went on to present a risk of serious harm.* These findings support the aims of the Scottish Government's Whole Systems Approach to youth offending - of identifying these children as early as possible and putting in place interventions to prevent them going on to be a risk of harm to themselves and others.

* Children who present a risk of serious harm (SCRA, 2008)



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