



## Multi-Agency Resource Service

helping keep children safe

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# Significant case reviews

## Making them fit for purpose?

More than 100 professionals working in the area of child protection attended the MARS/SCCPN conference at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on 11 November. *Making significant case reviews fit for purpose?* was chaired by writer and broadcaster Ruth Wishart and organised in partnership with CLiCP (The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for UK-Wide Learning in Child Protection). It was attended by speakers from across the UK who offered perspectives on the conduct, use and analyses of significant case reviews.

### An improved learning culture

Feedback from the delegates very much emphasises the importance and value of providing access to research and activities which promote the use of research evidence in child care and protection practice. During round-table discussions, delegates debated the issues highlighted at the conference with colleagues and peers.

Many delegates said that a key challenge for significant case reviews is how they are experienced and perceived by professionals and agencies. A key theme to emerge was the importance of stimulating and facilitating a learning culture within organisations. Some professionals emphasised the importance of conducting local reviews of routine cases as well as

cases deemed to be 'significant'. They wanted to see a focus on good practice, with an increased emphasis on review and reflection on cases where intervention is effective and the outcomes are positive.

### More self-evaluation, reflection and support

Delegates also wanted to see a wider culture of self-evaluation, reflection and supportive discussion to assist analysis and decision-making in case work. They called for the encouragement of a process which was more proactive, with opportunities for self-learning, challenge and the use of critical friends in case work. Some suggested that within this culture of learning it would be possible to use significant case review processes and outputs as tools for learning. Delegates felt that reviews were too often perceived to be about public accountability and associated with a fear of disciplinary procedures.

Many thought it was important to publicise the professional roles and responsibilities of agencies to improve understanding and awareness of child abuse and neglect. Acknowledging the possibility of child deaths was critical and proactively engaging with the media, and working with them, was considered important in this respect. Engaging with, and improving



the knowledge of, politicians and the general public was equally important. Some delegates also mentioned the importance of communicating the successes of multi-professional responses in order to challenge widely-held negative perceptions of social work, in particular.

### Improved dissemination

Additionally, delegates made suggestions as to how learning from significant case reviews could be better distilled and disseminated. An annual/biennial review of all cases was seen as a helpful way of distilling learning and, in this context, some wanted to see less focus on individual cases. The use of thematic analyses that draw out learning in relation to specific issues (e.g. parental substance misuse, domestic violence) was also suggested along with basic monitoring of the characteristics of different cases. Delegates saw the central collation of all cases as a mechanism that could support the production of detailed analysis. The findings could then be used to inform national qualifying and post-qualifying training programmes or critical reflection of the issues/topics within practitioner forums.

### Comments invited on draft operational plan

The National CPC Coordinator, Catriona Laird, has produced a draft operational plan, which is now out for consultation and revision. If you would like to receive a copy, and contribute by providing comments and shaping the plan, please email [catriona.laird1@stir.ac.uk](mailto:catriona.laird1@stir.ac.uk).

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## Children's hearings: a better forum for parents with learning disabilities?



A study has been conducted into the effectiveness of using children's hearings to deal with cases where a child's parents have learning disabilities. The study drew on the perspectives of parents with learning disabilities, professionals and panel members and explored whether children's hearings provide a more constructive arena to support parental participation and safeguard children's welfare than adversarial court systems.



Key findings suggest effective parental participation requires time, sensitivity and awareness of parental needs from all parties. Language can be a barrier to participation, while advocacy support and more extensive involvement over time can lead to greater levels of participation.

### Other facilitating factors include:

- the extent to which parents fully understand the reasons for arranging a hearing as well as the formal processes
- the importance of having a skilled chair to direct the hearing and encourage parental participation; and the presence of a helpful supporter
- the significance of formal and informal collaboration between child and family and adult social work and health agencies
- the importance of ensuring that independent advocates have access to someone with knowledge of the hearings system; and the crucial role of family support for parents
- if not present, the important role of agencies in providing longer-term direct support

For more information about the study contact Susan Hunter, [susan.hunter@ed.ac.uk](mailto:susan.hunter@ed.ac.uk), or Janice McGhee, [janice.mcghee@ed.ac.uk](mailto:janice.mcghee@ed.ac.uk) at the University of Edinburgh.

### Find out more about recent SCCPN events

Visit our about us page at [www.sccpn.stir.ac.uk](http://www.sccpn.stir.ac.uk)

SCCPN has recently been involved in hosting a number of events. In early October, a seminar on *Working with children affected by harmful parental drinking* was held in partnership with the Scottish Network of Alcohol Practitioners for the Young (SNAPY). Held during Alcohol Awareness Week, both networks were seeking to highlight the most effective ways of supporting Scotland's 65,000 children currently living with a parent with an alcohol problem, and raise awareness of the impact of harmful parental drinking on children.

In late October, *The ecology of judgement in child welfare and protection* seminar was organised in partnership with the social work department at the University of Stirling. The seminar was very well attended by a wide range of professionals from frontline practice, management and strategic/policy positions and gave participants the opportunity to explore research and literature on the nature of judgement within the particular demands of child welfare and protection practice.

Copies of slides and information from past events, including the conference *Making significant case reviews fit for purpose?*, can be downloaded at [www.sccpn.stir.ac.uk](http://www.sccpn.stir.ac.uk).

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#### Conducting reviews

Delegates saw a need for consistency across Scotland in terminology, criteria, and the formats used to record and report on the review. The independence and skills of chairs and reviewers were highlighted as important, as was the involvement and support of families all through the process and the protection of their anonymity. The involvement and support of staff throughout the process was also seen as being important.

#### Reconvened short life working group

Points raised in these discussions have been fed into a paper informing ongoing debate and developments in relation to the publication of significant case reviews in Scotland. This will be used by the reconvened short life working group (SLWG) on significant case reviews in their work on recommendations made in *Significant case reviews (SCR): developing best practice*. This is available to download from [www.mars.stir.ac.uk](http://www.mars.stir.ac.uk).