



## Supporting the Third Sector Project

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### **GIRFEC Guidance Refresh – Stakeholder Consultation**

**10 December 2021**

#### **About Children in Scotland**

Giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish is at the heart of everything we do.

By bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves, we offer a broad, balanced and independent voice. We create solutions, provide support and develop positive change across all areas affecting children in Scotland.

We do this by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing our learning, while always working to uphold children's rights. Our range of knowledge and expertise means we can provide trusted support on issues as diverse as the people we work with and the varied lives of children and families in Scotland.

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Children in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence and highlight the opportunities decision-makers have to address key issues affecting the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

#### **About the Supporting the Third Sector Project and TSI Children's Services Network**

The Supporting the Third Sector project's ambition is that the Third Sector is fully integrated with Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) and contributes to the strategic planning of local children and family services as equal partners. This means:

- Increased local third sector engagement in planning, development and budgeting of services
- Strengthened local support structures and clear paths for effective engagement with third sector locally
- Local and community-based third sector voices are amplified within national policy development

- Stronger impact of the third sector across all areas of national and local policy development as a result of increased capacity and capability of Third Sector Interfaces.

Children in Scotland is pleased to be able to jointly respond with the Third Sector Interface Network to the GIRFEC Stakeholder consultation. Our response focuses on the Practice Guidance – Stakeholder Consultation covering six documents:

- Policy Statement
- The role of the named person
- The role of the lead professional
- Using the National Practice Model
- Information Sharing
- Information Sharing Charter

From 1<sup>st</sup> November, when the practice guidance documents were published, we have been engaging with organisations across the children's sector. The Supporting the Third Sector Project partnered with GCVS Everybody's Children to facilitate a TSI GIRFEC Consultation event which was attended by 63 participants. This included the direct services that Children in Scotland delivers to children and families such as Enquire, the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. The event allowed attendees from a diverse variety of third sector children's services to hear from the Scottish Government GIRFEC Team on the changes to the guidance documents. It was followed by an opportunity to discuss the features of the changes and how they would impact service and practitioner implementation of the policy.

In addition to this we have engaged with and contributed to the Scottish Government-led engagement sessions and the ALLIANCE-led consultation. We also consulted with Children in Scotland's children and young people's advisory group Changing our World. The group is made up of children and young people aged nine to 23 who share their experiences, opinions and ideas and try to influence decision-makers to make Scotland a better place for young people. Six members aged 10-24 looked over the Information Sharing Charter and the Policy Statement.

Our consultation response will provide general comments about the refreshed practitioner guidance as a suite of documents followed by specific responses to each document. Our response will conclude with key suggestions to improve or add to the refresh as identified through our TSI consultation event.

### **General comments across the GIRFEC Practice Guidelines**

The GIRFEC Practice Guidance is welcome, and the Third Sector children's services represented at the TSI consultation event felt the guidance refresh was needed. The Easy Read documents are also welcome and provide a good starting point for new practitioners, although there is some confusion as to whether these are for children and families or practitioners.

Whilst the guidance is clear and easy to understand, GIRFEC in practice is inconsistent across local authorities. The Enquire helpline hears from families and professionals who ask about being allocated a named person, lead professional or child's plan but have been informed their local authority doesn't have these named

services, causing confusion. Partnership working to '*reduce silos and build a common public service ethos*' as per the Christie Commission<sup>1</sup>, is instrumental to the success of GIRFEC, but this varies in quality between Third Sector and statutory partners across the country. The refreshed guidance acknowledges this inconsistency; however, it does not reflect the extent of it and the challenges it presents when supporting children, young people, and families to understand GIRFEC and how they fit into it.

Smaller third sector organisations find it challenging to keep informed of new policy, legislation, implementation and training available. Therefore, it would be beneficial to see this reflected in Children's Services Planning throughout Scotland to ensure all services can implement the GIRFEC approach effectively and consistently. The Independent Care Review highlights the Scottish Government's commitment to workforce planning around services and support for children, young people and families that will follow a holistic approach to ensure continuity with national policy initiatives in health, social services, and the delivery of national outcomes<sup>2</sup>. We hope to see this reinforced in the implementation of GIRFEC from a strategic level.

### **Policy Statement**

We are encouraged to see rights-respecting, strengths-based and inclusive language. It provides a shared understanding of wellbeing as holistic and central to children and family's outcomes. Clear connections are made throughout all the documents to significant policy areas such as The Promise and the UNCRC, bringing these approaches in alignment with each other. The Children in Scotland Manifesto, which is supported by a range of organisations across the children's sector, also highlights the importance of meaningful implementation of the UNCRC across public services alongside a suite of policies and actions that will realise children's rights<sup>3</sup>. The refreshed guidance provides a positive move towards this.

Children in Scotland's advisory group Changing our World met in person to look at the Policy Statement and agreed that it was a long document that was difficult for the younger members of the group to read through. The members identified the images used in this document as being important in representing the variety of people living in Scotland. However, they found some of the image's problematic and stereotypical. For example, the image of poverty was a sad face, the family depicted was a heterosexual couple, two child family and the image depicting experiences of problems later in life was a person of colour. The group suggested stick people or photographs to address this issue.

The children and young people would like to see the Policy Statement in different forms such as a booklet, video or interactive video as ways to make the statement easier to access and understand for children and young people. During the consultation session the members highlighted that generally adults and practitioners use phrases that don't make sense to children and young people. The questions 'at

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<sup>1</sup> [Christie Commission on the future delivery of public services - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

<sup>2</sup> [change-programme-one-pdf.pdf \(thepromise.scot\)](http://thepromise.scot)

<sup>3</sup> [Manifesto V2.1 March-21.pdf \(childreninscotland.org.uk\)](http://childreninscotland.org.uk)

the centre of what?' and 'earlier support than when?' were used as examples of this.

### **THE role of the named person**

The refreshed guidance of the named person and the lead professional is welcome and needed to clarify the differences in roles. What has been made clear throughout the named person guidance document is the importance of the named person being someone who is well placed to develop a supportive relationship with the child and family. This is a fundamental element of relationship-based practice which champions a reliance on effective relationships for successful outcomes<sup>4</sup>.

Several examples were highlighted to us with regards to families being unsure of who to approach for support. This does not reflect section 3 of the refreshed named person guidance which makes clear that information should be provided which makes it clear to the child and family who their named person is.

When considering current practice, it was felt that statutory named persons often had busy workloads with limited capacity to discuss early signs of wellbeing concerns. Third Sector colleagues felt this resulted in the potential of early offers of support, as referenced in the refreshed guidance, being missed. It was highlighted that more practical support is needed for practitioners to understand and fulfil this role within the context of their wider remit. Some of the supports identified included multi-agency training on the roles of the named person and lead professional that were ongoing for new practitioners to access. It was unclear if every local authority area had a GIRFEC lead or specialist and if so, there was limited Third Sector access to such a resource.

The current guidance does not detail how practitioners, children and families can resolve a breakdown in relationship with the named person or lead professional. Enquire has heard examples of parents, carers and young people feeling powerless and unheard. Despite the positive references to the UNCRC this highlights areas of practice that are not in line with article 12<sup>5</sup>. We suggest, for example, it could be made clear that families can use the local authority complaint process if they are unhappy with the delivery of the lead professional or named person role and how it is delivered.

### **The role of the Lead Professional**

Like the named person, this guidance is welcome and a need to clarify the details of the role of the lead professional has been identified across the sector. There was enthusiasm at the TSI consultation event for Third Sector practitioners being listed as a lead professional. An issue was raised that there is no mention of early years workers, despite allocated early years workers having the closest relationship to the child, thus being well placed to fulfil the role of lead professional.

The guidance emphasises the importance of the child and their family being involved with all decision-making, including the allocation of the lead professional,

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<sup>4</sup> [Relationship-based practice: emergent themes in social work literature | Iriss](#)

<sup>5</sup> [UNCRC summary-1\\_1.pdf \(unicef.org.uk\)](#)

as much as possible. The attendees at the event felt this was a positive shift in language when considering placing the child and family at the centre.

Like the named person, it was highlighted that communication with statutory partners is inconsistent across the country and numerous examples of agencies only acting once several wellbeing concerns had been escalated was highlighted. The purpose of the lead professional and named person roles identifying an accumulation of concerns has been lost in some areas. The practice guidance documents should address the variance of thresholds for escalating wellbeing concerns to improve understanding of GIRFEC being used for early intervention.

Service managers highlighted issues with a lack of confidence and understanding of the role of lead professional in addition to already busy workloads. It was felt the guidance would help to address this issue, but more resources would be needed such as practitioner training to support the understanding of the role.

### **Using the National Practice Model**

The National Practice Model practitioner guidance is also welcomed, noting the positive language throughout. Despite this, the language used is not at present child and family-friendly. Some organisations have consulted with their service users to adapt the language, making it more accessible for children and families. We believe the addition of best practice examples would be useful in bringing the model closer with the realities of practice.

Overall, the changes to the guidance are minor and participants at our consultation event felt the model was useful for practitioners to present their assessments in a way that would provide a common understanding across services.

### **Information Sharing**

This guidance is needed, and it was described as 'a strong anchor' however the general response from Third Sector attendees from the consultation event was this document is complicated and there is still an uncertainty around GDPR compliance and information sharing. It is very important that families and practitioners have confidence that information sharing is lawful, and clear guidance is essential to achieving this goal. This is another area identified for further training and practice examples to allow practitioners and service providers to better understand the implications of information sharing.

Practice examples would help to highlight the benefits of sharing information when making assessments to support a child's plan. Acknowledging the positives of information sharing whilst keeping the child and family at the centre would be a welcome addition to this document. The Christie Commission details seamless care and working in partnership as integral<sup>6</sup> and to embed this we should have information sharing protocols, recognising we can provide better support if we work in partnership. Many practitioners highlight that good practice means involving children and families in information sharing unless dealing with clear child protection concerns.

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<sup>6</sup> [Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

The links within the documents to the Child Protection Guidelines and the Additional Support for Learning Framework were identified as helpful for using the document online.

### **Information Sharing Charter**

The Information Sharing Charter was not considered to be child-friendly due to the professionalised language. It was felt more could be offered with this document and service providers discussed ways of changing the format of the charter to make it clearer and more accessible for children and families. Some suggestions for improvement included the use of visual diagrams and flow charts explaining how information sharing works to improve support provided to the child and family.

We also consulted with our Changing Our World group of children and young people on their views on the Information Charter. The group felt the easy read document, with its use of icons and color, was more engaging than the plain text document. The members felt the easy read version would support differing levels of literacy. However, the group also highlighted that the title 'Easy Read' was unhelpful. The members felt this title was patronising and emphasised that an easy read suggests '*you're not good at reading or you won't understand.*' The group highlighted those points 8 and 9 did not provide enough information about how the data would be stored and how long for. It was felt the document did not explain what data was being kept as the word 'data' was too general a term. The group did like the variety of images used in the charter document as they felt it was an important representation of people living in Scotland with a variety of protected characteristics.

### **Summary**

The GIRFEC refresh is welcome and, Third Sector children's services find the guidance clear and easy to understand. The positive language reflecting the UNCRC and the Promise, whilst identifying the current context of COVID recovery, is a positive step. The guidance documents would benefit from more practice examples and efforts to reduce the inconsistencies of GIRFEC in practice such as ongoing multi-agency training for lead professionals, named person and information sharing. This should be reflected at a strategic level through Children's Services Planning.

Amy Woodhouse  
Head of Policy, Projects, and Participation  
Children in Scotland  
Email: [awoodhouse@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:awoodhouse@childreninscotland.org.uk)