

Transforming Lives Transforming Policy

➤ Professor Fiona Dyer

Director, Children and Young People's Centre for Justice
Arctic Youth
1st June 2026



Vision statement



CYCJ works towards ensuring that Scotland's approach to children and young people is rights-respecting, contributing to safer communities and better outcomes for our children, young people and families





Children and Young People's
Centre for Justice

A group of diverse people are gathered around a large whiteboard in a meeting room. The whiteboard has several sticky notes and handwritten notes. One sticky note says 'SAIL RACING', another 'BEACH', and another 'ZIPLINE'. There are also notes about 'Dance' and 'Hotel'. The people are looking at the whiteboard and talking to each other. The room has a brick wall and a window with a view of the outdoors.

CYCJ Participation, Practice and Research

Participation, Policy and Engagement

How we work

- Trauma-informed, rights-based and co-produced
- We prioritise choice, emotional safety and meaningful participation
- We strive to go beyond 'voice' and listening to children and young people
- We do this by building opportunities that create tangible changes to policy and practice, whilst also supporting children and young people to build lasting skills that they want and need

What we do:

- **Participatory research** which supports skills in critical thinking and group work
- Projects in **secure care and custodial settings** which empower children and young people to lead change in areas that matter to them
- **Schools and community groups**
- **Parent/carers group**
- Opportunities to explore the role of wider systemic issues in children and young people's experiences of justice systems – focus groups; consultations; standards



Practice & Policy

- Forums & Roadshows
- Practice Papers; YJ Guide; Information sheets
- Training – START-AV, CARM & Developmental Wellbeing Approaches
- Post Graduate Certificate
- Webinars; Conferences; Events
- Podcast
- eLearning Platform
 - Criminal Exploitation of Children
 - Formulation
 - Digital Safeguarding in Practice
 - The Children (Care and Justice) Act
 - Rights-respecting in Residential care
 - Supporting Communication in Youth Justice Settings
- Government Groups; consultations





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June 2023

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE IN CONFLICT WITH
THE LAW: POLICY, PRACTICE
AND LEGISLATION

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Section 7: Diversity

Section 8: Mental
Health

Section 9: Theory
and Methods

Section 10: Early
and Effective
Intervention

Section 11:
Diversion from
Prosecution

Section 12:
Restorative Justice

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17 Practice Guide Chapters



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Section 13:
Supporting children
in the Court System

Section 14:
Residential
Child Care

Section 15:
Managing Risk of
Serious Harm

Section 16:
Reintegration and
Transitions

Section 17:
Depriving Children
of their Liberty
and Alternative
Measures

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Collaborating for Rights-Respecting Justice

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Youth
Justice
Practice
Guide

Research Workstream

CYCJ's research workstream undertakes a diverse range of projects, working with youth justice stakeholders to inform better outcomes for Scotland's children and young people. Our research aims to influence system change, support families and professionals and create an evidence base for community based responses to children and young people in conflict with the law.

Recent projects include:

We also conduct evaluations and surveys:



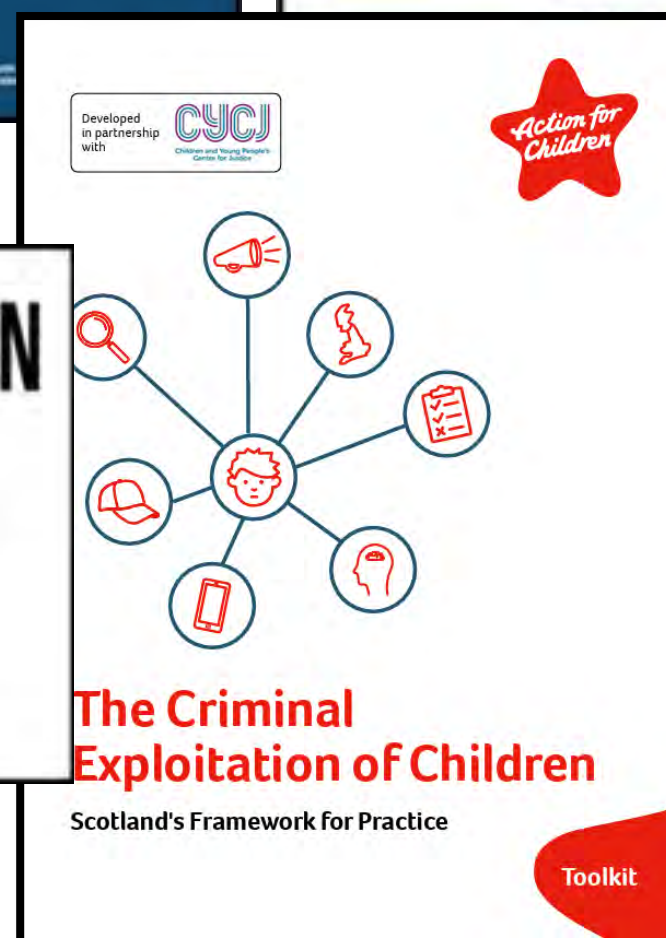
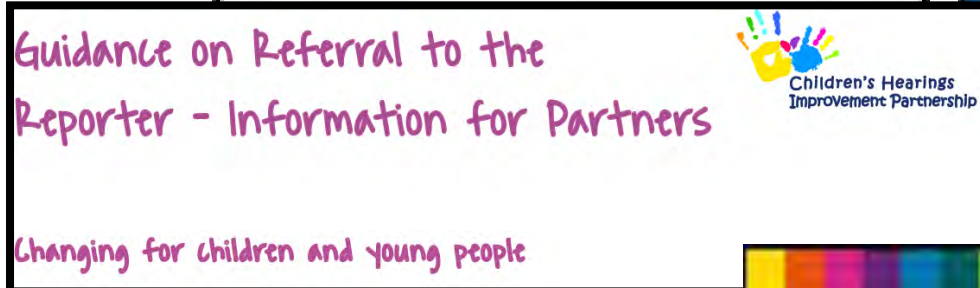
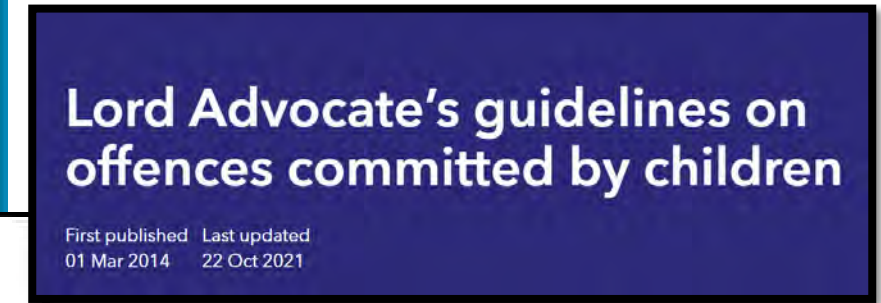
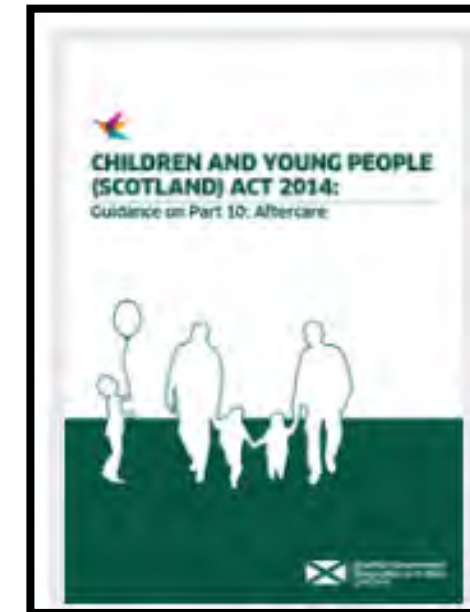
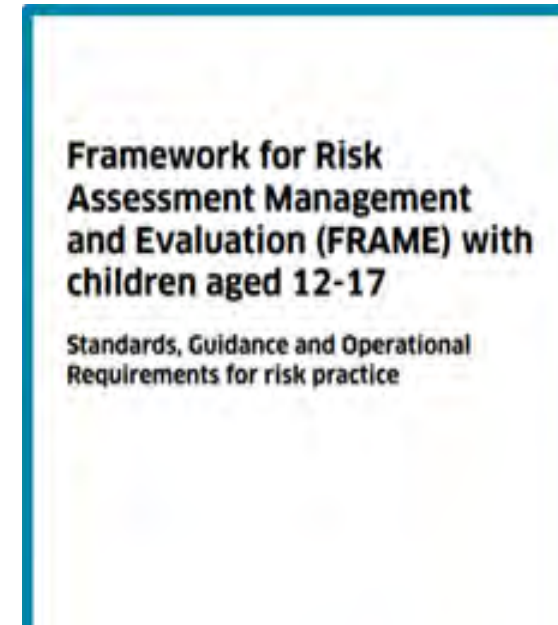
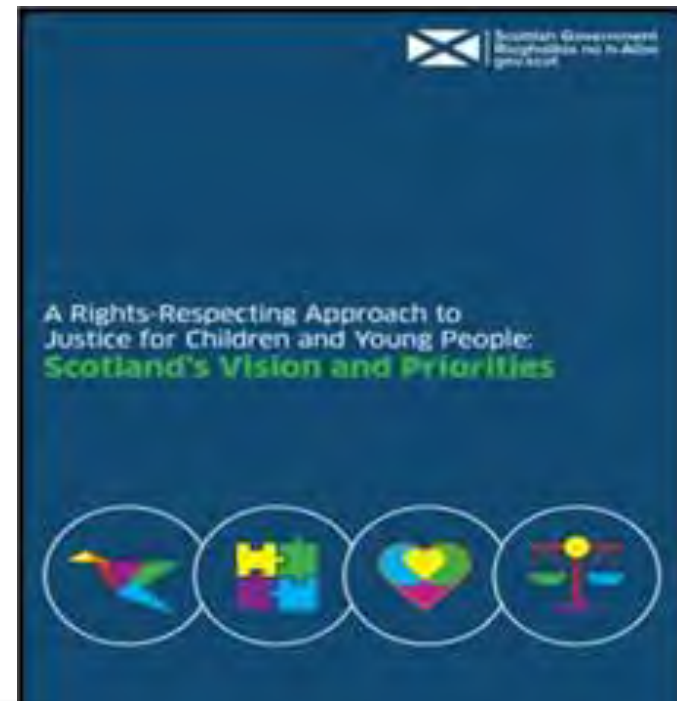
Much of our research is participatory - meaning that young people have designed, conducted and presented the research outputs alongside our team.



Scotland



Foundations



Child-Centered Justice in Scotland

GIRFEC and the
Whole Systems
Approach (WSA)

The Children's
Hearing System

Early and
Effective
Intervention

Diversion from
Prosecution

Children (Care
and Justice)
(Scotland) Act
2024

Sentencing
Guideline, Youth
Courts – Rights
in Court...

Research Evidence



Adverse childhood experiences

- Poverty and deprivation
- Trauma: neglect, abuse, loss, violence exposure
- Victims of harm
- Unattuned parenting: parental stress, mental ill health, addiction
- Insecure attachments

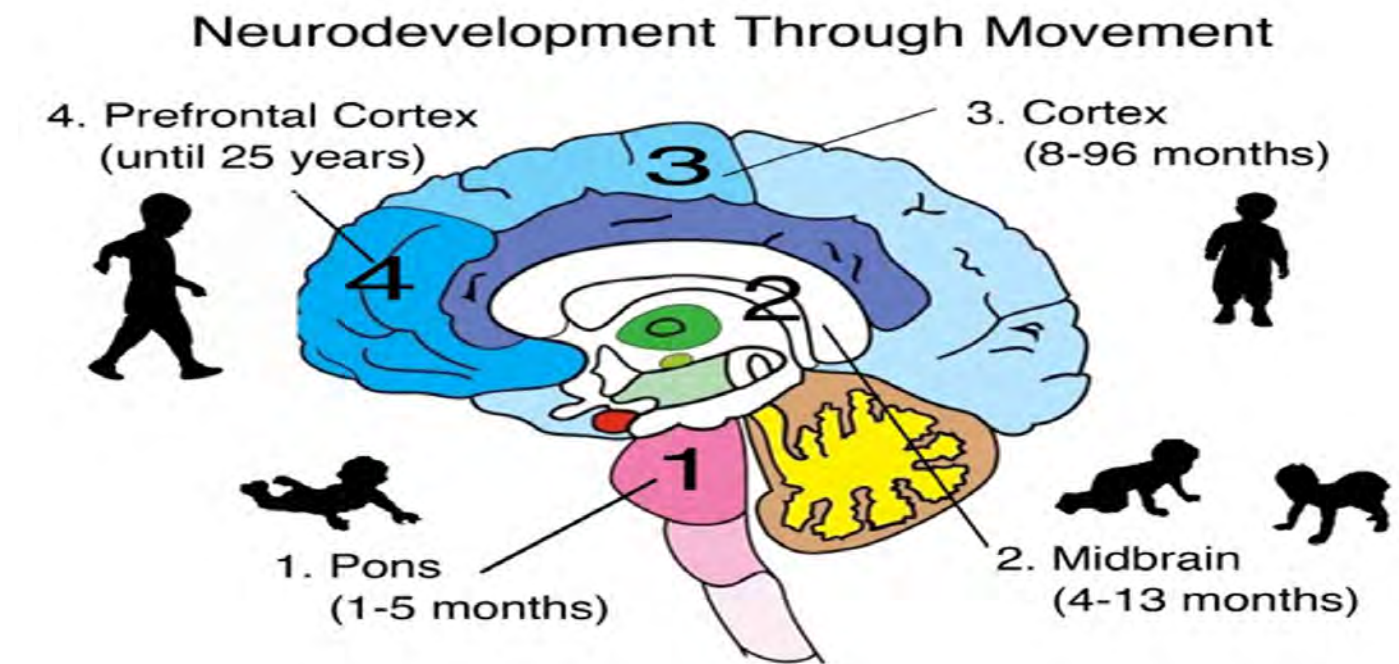


Edinburgh Study of Youth, Transitions & Crime

- Most children who offend in adolescence do not go on to offend in adulthood, and many of those engaged in serious offending are not known to justice organisations.
- Children who experienced a range of adversities (including poverty, trauma, care experience, etc.) are significantly more likely to offend in adolescence and into adulthood.
- Pathways of criminal conviction from childhood to early adulthood vary considerably depending on people's early life circumstances, and are associated with a wide range of behavioural, familial, contextual and experiential factors. However, those who come persistently into contact with the justice system over time tend to be amongst the poorest and most vulnerable people in our cohort.
- Childhood adversities increase the chances of contact with the law.
- Those who offend post age 25 have the highest instance of adverse child and adverse adult experiences
- Recent research by SCRA (2025), *"the lives of children who are referred to the Reporter for serious offending tend to be characterised by poverty, maltreatment, exclusion from education and engagement in risk taking within the community"*. They also found high correlation of mental health, neurodiversity and learning difficulties within the case sample cohort (p.4).

Additional / Resultant Issues

- Neurodiversity
- Brain Development
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Mental Health
- Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCNs)
- Learning Disability



What Works?

There is substantial evidence that punitive criminal justice responses are largely ineffective for children and young people

(Hampson & Day, 2025)

Approaches that emphasise arrest, prosecution, or custodial sentences are associated with poor long-term outcomes, including increased likelihood of reoffending

(Petrosino et al., 2010)

By contrast, interventions that adopt a child-centred approach have been found to be more effective at reducing reoffending

(Case & Browning, 2021; Case & Haines, 2015)



General Comment 24

“Children differ from adults in their physical and psychological development. Such differences constitute the basis for the recognition of lesser culpability, and for a separate system with a differentiated, individualized approach. Exposure to the criminal justice system has been demonstrated to cause harm to children, limiting their chances of becoming responsible adults.”

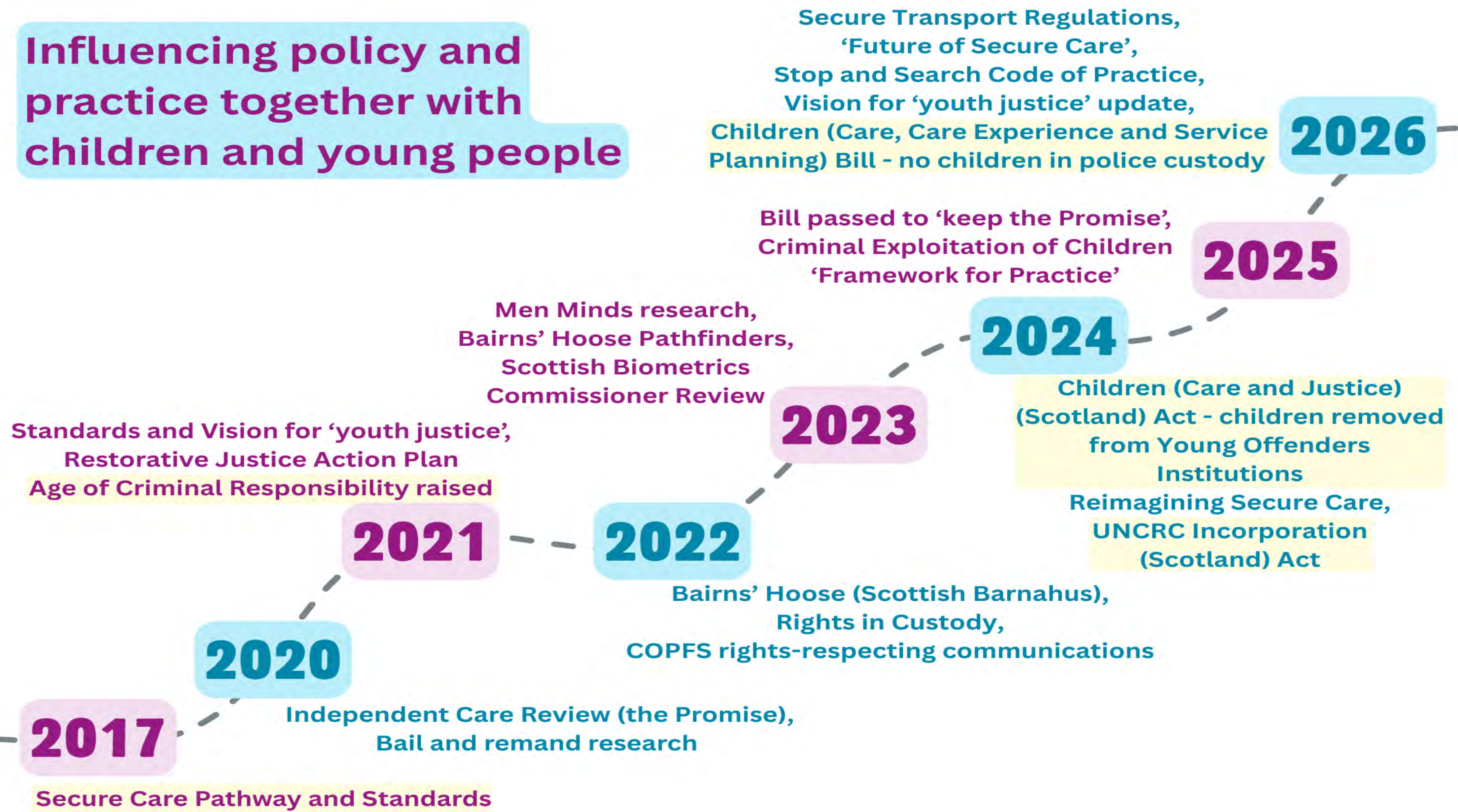
(CRC General Comment 24, 2019, p.2)



What we have achieved



Influencing policy and practice together with children and young people



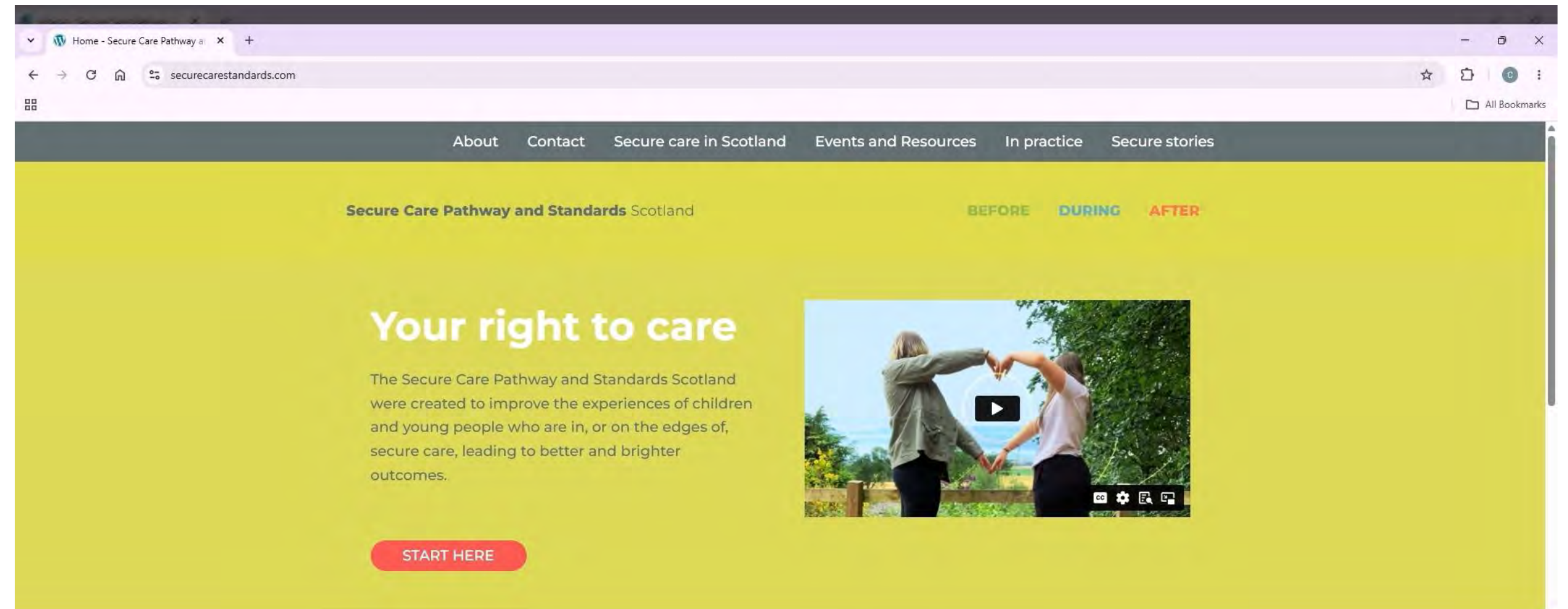
Co-producing Change



INTRODUCING THE SECURE CARE PATHWAY AND STANDARDS SCOTLAND

The first ever Secure Care Pathway and Standards Scotland set out what all children in - or on the edges of - secure care should be able to expect from the services that are there to support them.

Find out more about the Standards, and hear others share their stories, at www.securecarestandards.com



Home - Secure Care Pathway x +

securecarestandards.com

About Contact Secure care in Scotland Events and Resources In practice Secure stories

Secure Care Pathway and Standards Scotland

BEFORE DURING AFTER

Your right to care

The Secure Care Pathway and Standards Scotland were created to improve the experiences of children and young people who are in, or on the edges of, secure care, leading to better and brighter outcomes.

[START HERE](#)

Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024



- All children within the Children's Hearing System
- No YOI for children
- Single point for contact for victims
- In line with UNCRC
- Working towards keeping the promise



Removing Children from Prison



Image credit: Community Justice Scotland



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"I was crying myself to sleep, I was taking an anxiety attack and I was an emotional wreck that night. Then I was just like crying all weekend, they would come in every so often and say "are you alright?" and I'd be like "aye" but even though I was greetin' they would just walk away..."

"I hardly went to the toilet because there was a camera and pots and that and I didn't feel comfortable..."

"I couldn't see them but obviously there's people in the different cells an' that, sometimes you can [hear things going on], people drunk an' that, [made me] like paranoid, quite paranoid"

Children should be kept out of police stations

"It was my first time so I was kinda new, scared, didn't know what was gonnae happen. When am I getting oot? What time is it? When am I getting oot?"

"It was torture, torture, it was disgusting because I stunk of BO, I couldnae get a shower....it was disgusting"

"I had mental health problems for a while but they had died down for a good year or two just up until the day I went to the police station and it kicked back up again"

"With those cells everybody'd banging the cell doors, and no telly so you've got nothing to take your mind of it"

Criminal Exploitation of Children

National leadership driving recognition, understanding and responses to CEC



Children's Rights Implementation Group (CRIG)

Responding to unmet needs and rights violations

- Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCNs)
- Rights of Children and Young People in Court
- Access to health rights (ADHD and ASD pathways)
- Monitoring of Children's Rights
- Collation of legislative barriers to UNCRC incorporation
- Criminalisation of children in care
- Rights and Inclusion in Education
- Participation

A Rights-Respecting Approach to
Justice for Children and Young People:
Scotland's Vision and Priorities

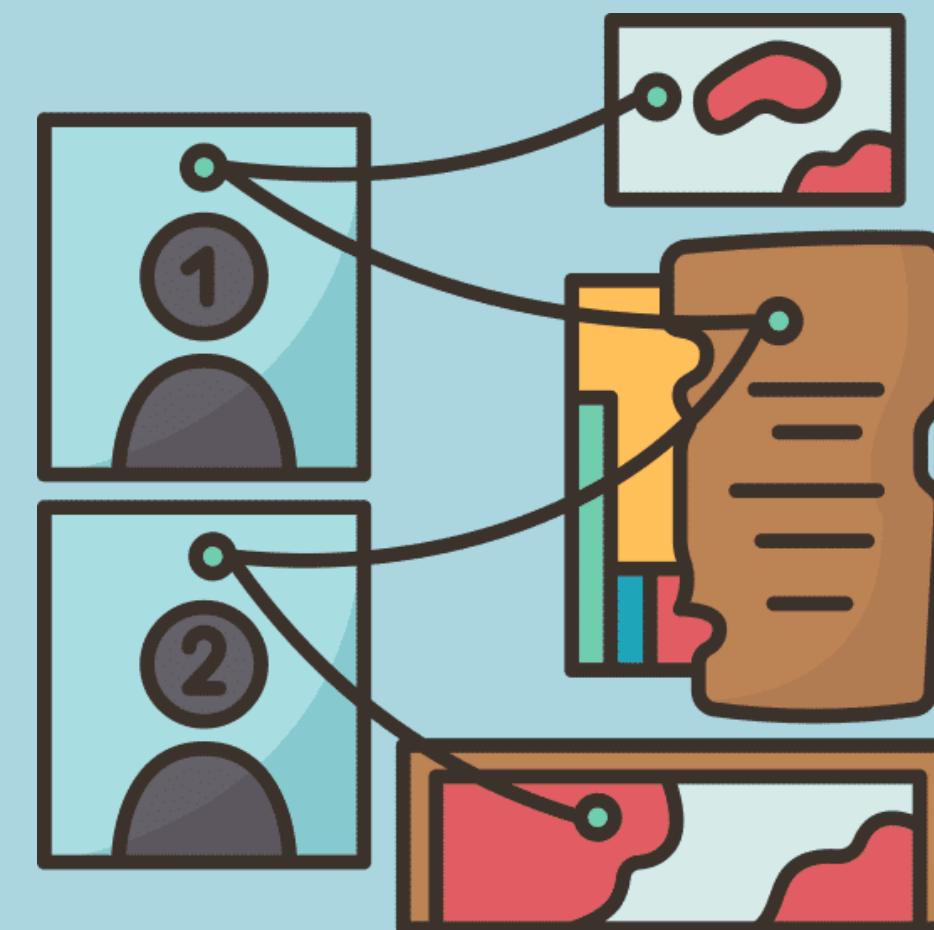


Extending the Whole System Approach

- Sentencing and penal policy commission
- Increase in Diversion from Prosecution
- EEI for young adults
- Workforce Development group
- Data group
- Police Custody group



Restorative Justice



Men-Minds



Aim

To better understand young men's mental health

To improve mental health research, policy and practice for young men

Focus

Marginalised young men aged 16-24:

- LGBTQ+
- refugee/migrants
- in conflict with the law

Approach

Young People's Forum:

- shape research design and materials
- peer research fieldwork
- analysis
- outputs and dissemination

Impacting policy and practice



Impacting themselves



What we hope to achieve



- Reimagining Secure Care
- Secure Transport Standards
- Criminal Exploitation of Children
- Contextual Safeguarding
- Increase the Age of Criminal Responsibility further



Thank You



Postgraduate Certificate Children and Young People in Conflict with the Law

"If you are currently working with children and young people in conflict with the law I consider this course essential... it will change the way you champion their rights being upheld and see the difference framing this makes in how you work with other professionals. This has completely changed my approach and I proudly see myself as a right-respecting practitioner thanks to what I have learned from this course and what I know is right for children based on the research and resources it has made available to me."

Sean, PG Certificate Children & Young People in Conflict with the Law programme graduate

January start date

12 months part-time distance learning



Contact us for more information:

cycj-pgcert@strath.ac.uk

Scan the QR code to visit the dedicated webpage





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E-Learning Platform

More info!





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