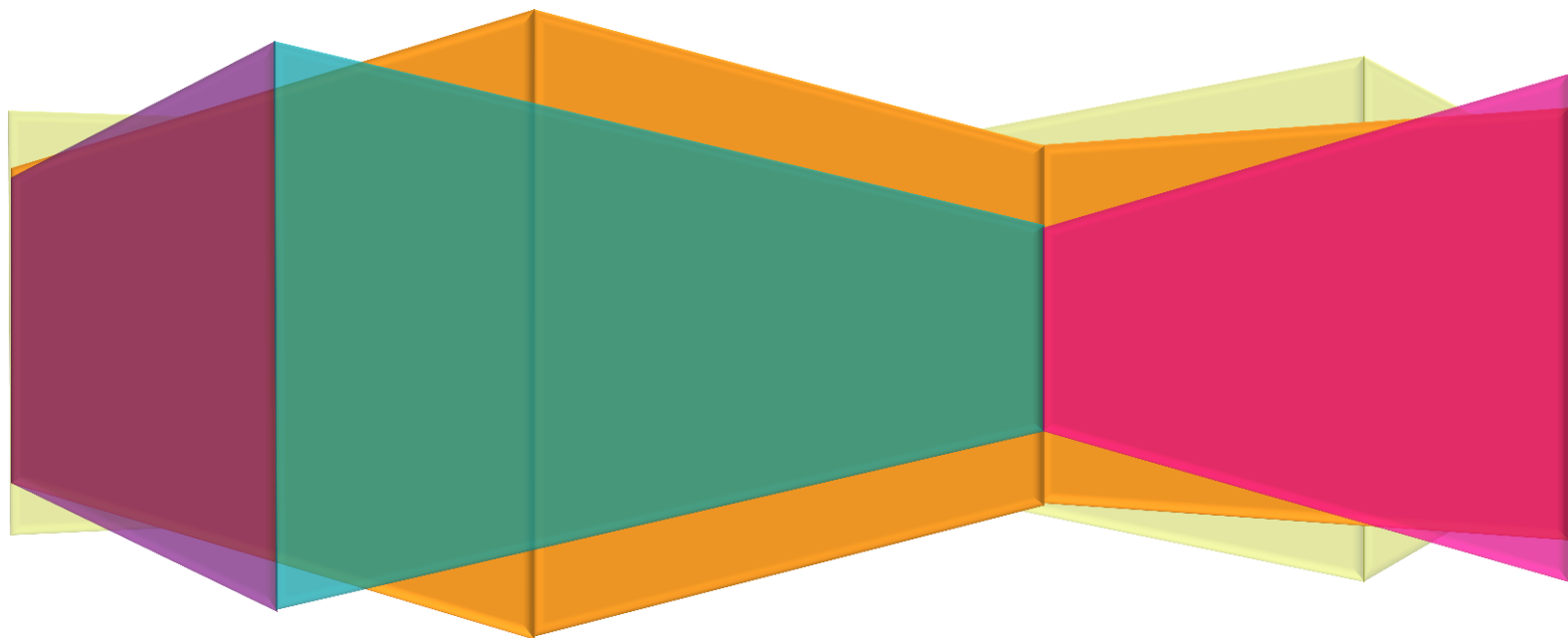


Barnardo's Children's Hearing Advocacy Service Action Research Project

**Final Report
March 2016**



Executive Summary

Barnardo's Independent Advocacy service was set up as an action research project with a view to provide advocacy for children between the age of 3 and 17 years of age who were referred by the Children's Reporter for an Initial Children's Hearing. The learning from this research project would help the Scottish Government develop suitable advocacy policy for children attending Children's Hearings as per the upcoming requirement in the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 which is still to come into force.

A steering group was established which met monthly initially and included representatives from the Scottish Government, Fife Council, Scottish Children's Reporters Administration, Children's Hearings Scotland, Who Cares? Scotland and Barnardo's along with the independent evaluators, Griesbach & Associates. The frequency of the steering group meetings changed from monthly to 6 weekly as the project progressed and there were fewer issues identified which needed to be addressed.

In April 2015 two advocacy workers were appointed to the service and in May 2015 the service started to receive referrals. In February 2016 the service ended with workers having provided advocacy to 33 children who met the criteria for the service.

Overall, the Advocacy Action Research project in Fife worked well and children who received a service benefitted from this. It was felt that children who received the service of an advocate were more likely to feel that their voice had been heard and Children's Panel members felt that they heard the voice of the child more effectively. A separate evaluation has been commissioned and will provide more detailed information on both of these aspects of the service. Learning from the action research service would suggest the following:

Good partnership relationships:

These were crucial to the developing work and success of the project. There were a number of candid discussions within the steering group and the resulting decisions, which were taken as a partnership, strengthened the ability to make changes when they arose.

Timescales:

The timescale between a date being set for a Children's Hearing and the Hearing itself is 22 days which is a short timescale for an advocate to establish a relationship with a child prior to the Children's Hearing. However on most occasions the Initial Children's Hearing sent the grounds to the sheriff for proof and this extension of time made it was easier for the workers to build a relationship with the child. A number of children reported that they felt they did not have enough time to speak to their advocates prior to the Children's Hearing or were not sure they had felt able to talk to their advocate about what was happening to them before the Children's Hearing took place.

Referral Process:

Creating the referral protocol was a lengthy process and was challenging to embed in practice due to the short term nature of the research aspect of the service. As a result referrals were slightly lower than hoped for.

Age of the Child:

Staff within the service generally felt that children over the age of 7 were more likely to understand the role of the Advocate. Children aged 3 – 6 years worked well with the advocates on a face to face level but it was more difficult to engage them in evaluating the service as they did not always understand why they were being asked about the service they had received. It was also the case that the parents of children in this age group were generally more wary of letting the advocates work with their child as they did not always appear to understand that their child had an opinion and a right to share it. Clearly this

wouldn't be a reason not to offer the service to this age group but it is a point worth thinking about for future services and how best to address it.

Understanding of role of Advocacy:

On-going work is required to help agencies understand the role of advocacy and the benefits to children and young people.

Feedback:

Gathering consistent feedback from the Children's Panel members was challenging however it was recognised that this would not be a concern if the service was embedded into local protocols.

Changing existing processes:

The different agencies processes and data sharing protocols required a great deal of discussion to work out how the organisations could pass information between them in the quickest time possible. This issue wasn't resolved completely and in the future will need further discussion but all agencies worked hard to ensure swift responses were made.

Background to Project

The Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 set out a requirement for the chairing member of the Children's Hearing to inform the child of the availability of advocacy services, although this is not yet in force. The Scottish Government wanted to carry out an action research project in Fife to evaluate the potential for developing suitable advocacy services and evaluating the impact of those services.

Following discussion between Fife Council and the Scottish Government Barnardo's were asked to examine the potential for running an action research project providing advocacy services to children and young people attending an initial grounds hearing.

The Children's Hearing Advocacy Service provided advocacy to children aged three to seventeen who were referred by the Children's Reporter for an initial Children's Hearing.

The service also provided advice, support and training as necessary to other people acting as advocates for children at Children's Hearings. This could have included family members, teachers or carers. (The advocacy service was not responsible for assessing the suitability of other advocates.)

The Project Planned

The project was originally agreed for 9 months from April 2015 to December 2015. A development phase, which involved the recruitment and training of staff, ran from January to March 2015. The project received its first referrals in May 2015.

The service employed 2 full time workers and was overseen by a Team manager who also had responsibility for Barnardo's Advocacy and Rights service in Fife. The original plan was to be taking new referrals over a 6 month period but in November 2015 it was agreed that the project would be extended so the last referrals were taken in December 2015 and closed or transferred to the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service in February 2016.

Objectives and Intended Outcomes

Service Objectives:

- Identify and promote the benefits advocacy can provide to children within the Children's Hearings System.

- Promote child-centred approaches to practice within the Children’s Hearings System in Fife.
- Establish (monitor/review) eligibility criteria that prioritises children most in need.
- Consider how advocacy can be part of a wider network of support for children and identify other potential methods of supporting a child throughout the Children’s Hearings System.
- Identify potential demand for advocacy within the Children’s Hearings System and scope out the likely long-term resources required to sustain the service.

Children who accessed the independent advocacy service were assessed against at least two of the following Barnardo’s outcomes:

1. Contribute to planning and decision making.
2. Views and opinions voiced and acted upon.
3. Increased awareness of rights.
4. Learn advocacy and associated skills.

The Children’s Hearing Advocacy Service used an internal Barnardo’s Outcomes Framework to track service user’s progress throughout their involvement with the service. Scores are based on a 1-5 numbering system, with 5 being the most serious level of need and 1 being the lowest. The discussion regarding the child’s understanding of advocacy and some analysis by the worker about their level of need is used to score the baseline. The scores are reviewed at 12 weekly intervals using evidence gained during the child’s engagement and feedback received from the Family, Social Work, Health and any other professional involved.

Progress is detailed below for both closed cases with completed work plans (29) and for cases where reviews have taken place (4). Further analysis for each outcome is provided below.

Closed Cases

Barnardo’s Outcome	Improved	Same	Deteriorated
Increased awareness of rights	22	7	
Contribute to planning and decision making	24	5	
Learn advocacy and associated skills	21	8	
Views and opinions voiced and acted on	16	13	

Open Cases

Barnardo’s Outcome	Improved	Same	Deteriorated
Increased awareness of rights	3	1	
Contribute to planning and decision making	4	0	
Learn advocacy and associated skills	3	1	
Views and opinions voiced and acted on	4	0	

Increased awareness of rights:

When the advocates assessed this outcome many of the children stated they did not recall participating in any rights activity and stated they felt they had little or no access to rights information. Several children demonstrated a lack of trust in others. 15 of the children at the point of review or closure had an awareness of rights but were not confident enough to challenge these on their own. They were happy to be supported by their advocate and for the advocate to raise issues on their behalf. At the time of closure or review, 18 of the children stated they had a good awareness and understanding of rights and with support felt able to raise issues impacting on their life, either verbally or in writing and knew where to seek further help if required.

Contribute to planning and decision making:

Most children initially reported no previous positive experience of contributing to planning and decision making and were assessed as having low confidence and self-esteem. As this was children's first experience of attending a Children's Hearing this would have been expected but it also reflected children's experience in attending previous meetings about them in various settings. They had little understanding of decision making processes and were reluctant to attend their Children's Hearing. 28 children, at the point of being reviewed or closed, reported an improvement in their confidence to attend and participate in their Children's Hearing because they had support from their advocate. The children felt they were part of the process and were aware of why the Children's Hearing had taken place and the decisions that were made. They understood the process and if not were able to ask for their advocate for clarification. The children were left with the feeling that they were now able to influence some decisions and that their views had been listened to and recorded.

"To help me understand what a hearing was. To keep me calm – I would have kicked off if there was no advocate" Child 17.

"They used big word so I had to ask what they meant" Child 2.

Learn advocacy and associated skills:

All the children stated they had no understanding of advocacy when the initial assessment was carried out and felt they would be unable to express their views in a constructive way. Many of them reported that they would not feel able to speak up or if they did they would be worried about losing their temper if they felt no one was listening to them. At the point of closure or review, 24 of the children reported they felt an improvement in their ability to advocate for themselves with support from Barnardo's. Beginning to express views and opinions and using skills such as communicating clearly to the Children's Panel members was the evidence used to measure the progress made by the child.

"So if I did not want to say it in front of hearing, Kelly would say it and ask people to leave" Child 27.

Views and opinions voiced and acted on:

At the beginning of the process most of the young people were unaware that they could express their views and opinions about decisions being taken regarding their lives, believing that it was only the adults who would do this, and most were unsure if their views would matter or be taken any notice of. Most of the children had little understanding of their right to be heard. At the point of closure or review, 19 children felt empowered to participate in their Children's Hearing either verbally or by writing down their views because they had support from their advocate. These children felt their opinions had an impact on the decisions that were made and that they were fully explored and recorded. The children reported that they had the opportunity to express views and influence the decisions that were made.

"Anne was easy to talk to. She listened to me and told people how I felt" Child 21.

"Someone listened to only me" Child 18.

Review of Project

Recruitment and Training:

Independent Advocates were recruited taking into consideration their experience of working with children and their knowledge and experience of advocacy and children's rights. Once appointed the advocates had access to Barnardo's workforce development programme which included child protection, equality and diversity and children's rights.

Training:

The service developed an advocacy training pack aimed at increasing awareness of all forms of advocacy. The pack was available for use with advocates and those potentially providing informal (or non-independent) advocacy for children within Children's Hearings.

There was information offered to the Children's Hearing Scotland (CHS) and Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA) on the role of the advocate for children and young people. This highlighted the various types of advocacy the children could choose depending on their preference.

Referral Process: Initially there were some complex process and inter agency issues to resolve and it took several meetings for the steering group to come to an agreement on how the referrals to the service should and could be made. It had initially been hoped for that the Children's Reporter would be able to contact Barnardo's directly however due to data protection concerns, this information could not be shared between the two agencies. Instead, as both agencies had a data sharing protocol with Fife Council, it was agreed that SCRA would inform Fife Council Social Work Services, as per normal protocol, and it would then be the responsibility of the individual Social Worker to speak to the family to provide a brief outline of the service available and to gain verbal agreement of their details being passed to Barnardo's.

The service went live to receive referrals in May 2015 and a process to introduce the advocacy service to families was developed by Senior Social Work managers and carried out by Social Workers.

As part of good practice, when a Social Worker was speaking to a child/family about a possible request to the reporter for a children's hearing, the Social Worker also discussed Barnardo's Advocacy Service and established whether they were willing for the Service to contact them to explain their role if a Children's Hearing was called.

Once a Children's Hearing date had been set, the Children's Reporter notified the Social Worker who in turn advised Barnardo's Advocacy service that the Hearing date had been set and that the child/family would be willing to engage with the service. This was classed as the referral being made and Barnardo's staff completed a referral form and then began the process of engaging with the family.

Engaging Families:

The Social Workers working with the families had copies of the Children's Advocacy Service leaflets and were given a form of words to use by Social Work managers with the families to explain the service in the hope this would optimise the numbers who would agree to their details being passed onto Barnardo's to receive a service. If the families agreed, the social worker then the passed on their details and Barnardo's then made direct contact and arranged an initial meeting with them.

When the Children's Reporter's office sent out the notification of the Children's Hearing to the family they included an information leaflet about Barnardo's Advocacy Service. This reinforced the communication the family had received from the Social Worker about the service and gave them another opportunity to consider this as an option for the child attending the Children's Hearing which was especially important if they had originally chosen not to engage and have their details passed on.

At this visit, the worker discussed the purpose of the service, the options for the child and family should they choose to engage further, gathered further information and ensured that appropriate consent papers were completed and signed.

The service assisted the children to identify who was best placed to advocate for them, whilst enabling access to other independent advocacy for those who request it. Children aged 12 and over (with capacity) were able to consent to using the Children's Hearing Advocacy Service. Consent was sought for children aged below 12 from the parent/legal guardian.

Supporting Others to Provide Advocacy:

Where the child indicated a preference for someone else advocating for them, the advocacy service contacted the nominated advocate and provided information and training in order to help support them and enable them to effectively carry out their role. If the advocacy service worker had assessed that the chosen advocate was not willing to carry out the role they would have gone back to the young person to discuss this with them and offer the Barnardo's service to them again. This occurred only once during the life of the service.

It was not the role of the independent advocacy service to manage the expectation, scope, role or influence of the non-professional advocate.

Case Study 1

C is a 4 year old who was living voluntarily with her maternal Grandmother due to parental substance misuse and neglect. The Barnardo's advocate met with C and Gran to explain the service however Gran felt there were too many professionals already involved with C and was concerned that because of her age C would not understand the role of the advocate and therefore would not be able to engage well. The Barnardo's advocate explained that the service was able to support another person nominated by the family, who C already had a relationship with, to be an advocate to ensure C's views were heard at the Children's Hearing and considered in the decision making process.

Gran thought C's Aunt, who lived with them in the house, had a good relationship with C and they often talked together about C's feelings and thoughts. Gran spoke with Aunt P who agreed she would like to find out more about being an advocate for C.

The Barnardo's advocate met with P on two separate occasions in the fortnight before the Children's Hearing. The Barnardo's advocate worked through the advocacy training pack with P and answered any questions she had. The advocate offered P on-going support but P felt confident about providing advocacy for C.

P made contact with the service on two occasions to ask further questions about the hearing process before the Children's Hearing took place.

The Panel members completed a feedback sheet after the Children's Hearing and stated that P had voiced C's views well. The Barnardo's advocate passed this onto P and thanked her for taking up the role and ensuring that C's views were heard.

C was placed on an Interim Compulsory Supervision Order as the Grounds were sent to the Sheriff for proof which meant there would be further Children's Hearings every 22 days. The Barnardo's advocate attempted to contact P on a regular basis to ensure everything was going well and she was still confident in her role as the advocate. P did not respond to any text messages or phone calls. After several weeks without any contact the service wrote to P and sent an evaluation form to establish how beneficial the training had been and if it had supplied her with enough information to carry out the role. Despite various attempts to contact P by phone and letter, she did not return the evaluation form or get back in contact with the service and therefore the case was closed without being able to gain feedback.

Evaluation:

Barnardo's Children's Hearing Advocacy Service developed two feedback forms in order to gain information about the advocacy that had been provided within an initial Children's Hearing: one for the children who had worked directly with a Barnardo's advocate and the

other for Panel members and Children's Reporters to establish how well the child's views had been advocated to the panel.

22 of the 33 children completed an evaluation after their initial Children's Hearing. There were no evaluations completed for 3 children whose parent disengaged from the service after the initial Children's Hearing or for another child who disengaged after the initial Children's Hearing. There were two sets of parents who thought their children were too young to complete an evaluation. Another child who was initially allocated but disengaged from the service before the initial Children's Hearing did not complete one. One child who was supported to attend their initial Children's Hearing was already engaged with the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service and the worker was not aware of the need to have an evaluation completed and the child whose aunt advocated did not have a completed evaluation. There are also 2 outstanding evaluations which have not been completed as staff were off sick at the time of the Children's Hearing.

The evidence collected from the 22 children who did complete an evaluation form was that they felt the service had been beneficial however what is known from speaking with them is they would have liked the service to have been available earlier so they felt more comfortable with talking to their advocate and time was allowed for the levels of trust to be built up. The result for the majority of the children who attended a Children's Hearing for the first time was that the grounds were referred to the Sheriff for proof. This allowed more time for the worker to develop a relationship with the child which meant at subsequent Children's Hearings their voices became a more robust element of the decision making process.

An 'Advocacy Support Form' was available for Panel members to complete after a Pre Hearing Panel or Children's Hearing had taken place. It was a challenge to get consistent feedback from panel members as there were often discrepancies in their feedback forms – sometimes just on the time of the Hearing which made it difficult to know which Hearings they were referring to and who the advocate for the child had been, if any. There were some difficulties in embedding into panel member's protocols and despite attending 3 briefing sessions for panel members there were a number who only received information about the action research by email not allowing them the opportunity to ask questions to help them to understand what was going to be different in the actual Hearing.

The independent evaluation of the Children's Hearing Action Research project will provide detailed information regarding the Children's Panel members and Children's Reporters feedback.

Challenges and Learning

PDSA Cycle Implementation

Detailed information regarding the changes that were identified and acted on to improve the service was presented and discussed each month at the steering group. At the start of the service the following issues were highlighted as PDSA Cycle Implementation areas:

Testing the process of a swift robust referral process.

This proved to be an on-going issue throughout the length of the service as ultimately all children and young people who were eligible for a service were not referred. There were a number of different reasons for this which included

- The number of newly appointed social workers over the period of the pilot (hard to ensure they knew the pilot and its processes)
- Views of some social workers, e.g. child too young for the pilot; too many workers involved already without adding one more; changes in the allocated social worker.

The short term nature of the Pilot and the focus on Grounds Hearings, which occur intermittently and sporadically, meant that it was a challenge to embed the process of referring to the Pilot into everyday practice for social workers. The capacity of children and Families teams to manage a short term intervention within the number of tasks expected of them was also a factor in some cases.

Referral rates did respond positively to reminders being sent to teams, which suggested that were the process to be applied to all Hearings and become a regular part of practice these issues could be addressed successfully.

Testing the process for Children's Panel members and Children's Reporters to feedback on the impact of an Advocate at the Children's Hearing.

This also required work to gain a level of consistency. Various attempts were made to engage with Children's Panel members to return feedback forms on a consistent basis and are highlighted in greater detail in Appendix 4. It was agreed however that again due to the short term nature of the Advocacy Research project that being able to address this issue was a difficult challenge. Children's Panel members sit on a large number of Children's Panels and have a range of processes to follow before, during and after a Children's Hearing. At times this felt like a request too much for members to remember to do consistently as it was not being asked for after every Children's Hearing.

Testing the process for consent for evaluators to interview service users who did not agree to a service from the Advocacy Research Service.

After a few months it became increasingly clear that this was an issue which was going to be difficult to address and make happen. As a result it was agreed that it would not be pursued.

Testing the process for service users to feedback on the service they received.

The format of the feedback form was adapted to allow a child friendly version for younger children or children who had difficulty understanding the form. This was not required to be used. It had been agreed that the feedback forms would be given to every child after every Children's Hearings but it became apparent that this was not practical and was difficult for children to complete every 3 weeks. It was therefore agreed that these would be completed after the first hearing and at the closing of a case. The feedback forms would suggest that children benefitted from having an advocate and found the service useful.

Potential Improvements Identified but not Implemented

Gaps in Referrals:

The gaps in referrals being made by Social Workers to the Children's Hearing Advocacy Service were addressed by the Service and Social Work Services throughout the life of the action research project which resulted in fluctuations in referral rates throughout. It was not possible for the Children's Advocacy Service to visit all Social Work teams before the launch of the project and communication was led by one of the Senior Social Work Managers. The timescale between the steering group agreeing the referral process and the project starting was another factor which made it impossible to undertake such a task across 12 Social Work Teams in Fife. Were the initiative to be implemented across the Children and Families teams more comprehensively, it would be helpful to engage in wider preparation and publicity beforehand, allowing more discussion at social work team level about the issue of advocacy and the mechanics of referral. The short term nature of the service caused a degree of difficulty in relation to social work systems as there is a form which is completed by social workers which lists the agencies and supports for the children who are to be invited and included in the case. As this was always designed to be a short term piece of research, it was not possible to add the Advocacy research project to this which meant it was an option that was sometimes overlooked. There were a number of changes in Social Workers within the local authority which meant new workers were not always aware of the requirement to inform the service until it was too late for the service to be able to make meaningful contact with a

child in advance of the Children’s Hearing. Some Social Workers believed there were already too many people involved in the child’s life and therefore were not willing to have another professional involved. In some cases it was evident that social workers felt that they were advocating on behalf of the child as part of their role and therefore didn’t see the need to refer for an advocate. There was some confusion around the age criteria at times with workers not being aware the service could work with children from 3 years old. These issues would all have been addressed had we had longer to implement the service and it was known it was going to be a permanent offer of support to children.

Timescales for Engagement:

The timescales for engaging with the young people have been acknowledged throughout the process as being very short with a maximum of 3 weeks’ notice from the date of a Children’s Hearing being set to the event itself. Any delay in the information being passed to the service has time management implications for the advocacy workers as they need to be able to see the child as often as possible to ensure they are able to provide the best service possible to them. It was also the case for some families that even after they agreed the Social Worker could pass their details on to the service, when the advocates tried to make contact with these families, they were unavailable or not contactable which had a knock on effect on the time available to build relationships with the young person. This was also particularly relevant to children aged 12 and over who may have wanted to consent to a service but as this was arranged via the parent the advocacy workers were not able to make contact with them directly.

Service Levels Achieved against Plan

No. of children expected to attend an initial children’s hearing and access advocacy in a 6 month period:	40
No. of Children’s Hearing Arranged:	88
No. of Referrals to Barnardo’s:	49
No. allocated Barnardo’s Advocate:	33
No. advocated by another professional:	0
No. advocated by self/family member/friend:	1
No. advocated by another professional advocacy service:	0
No. not allocated	15
- Did not consent to Service	5
- Consent not gained in time	1
- Child withdrew after initial allocation	1
- Insufficient Notice	2
- Unable to contact parent	6

The feedback forms from the Children’s Reporter and the Panel members were discussed frequently throughout the process and despite there being steps taken by the Children’s Reporters Office to address this there continued to be inconsistent or incomplete information returned to the Children’s Hearing Advocacy Service. Feedback forms were not returned to the service for all 33 of the Children who attended a Children’s Hearings.

In total there were 88 eligible Children’s Hearings held during the existence of the action research project. The Children’s Hearing Advocacy Service received 46 referrals and was able to allocate 33 of these. There was one other child who received advocacy provision from the service via a family member being supported to be the advocate.

There were two significant reasons for children who had been referred by their social workers not receiving advocacy support which were either that the family did not respond to the Barnardo's worker when they attempted to make contact to arrange to visit or the family told the Barnardo's worker they did not want the children to have an advocate. These reasons accounted for 11 children. There were 2 children whom the service received late notification one from a social worker who was new in post and had not known about the process and another who social work did not refer however the mother contacted the service but there was only 2 days' notice and both advocates had prior appointments and could not manage to visit.

Case Study 2

One of the children who did not receive a service was the oldest of a family of 4. When the advocate went to the initial visit he was not in the house. Consent was gained for his siblings however he chose not to engage in any of the meetings before the initial Children's Hearing took place. On the day of the Children's Hearing he was present in the waiting room when the advocate was talking to his siblings, this was the first time they had met. He was very interested in the discussions that were taking place however still chose not to engage stating he was happy to speak for himself, which he did, however it was clear from his body language when being questioned by the Panel that he was not always comfortable in having to give answers, particularly in front of his mother. The advocate asked that he and his siblings spoke to the Panel alone which was granted and he found it easier to talk in this environment. The decision of the Panel was to send the grounds to the Sheriff for proof however an Interim Compulsory Supervision Order was not granted as the Panel were assured by mum that the family would engage on a voluntary basis. After the Children's Hearing the child stated he would like to engage with the advocate and said he would be present the next time the advocate visited the family home. The advocate made several attempts to contact the mother afterwards to arrange more meetings however she did not respond to the phone calls. The social worker was also not having any success in engaging with the family and at one point there was a concern they had fled from their accommodation however this was not the case and the social worker did manage to make contact with them. It took 3 months for the grounds to be heard in court because the mother had not been attending the court. The advocate tried again to contact the mother once the grounds had been established but without success. Social Work and the advocate agreed that the family's lack of engagement meant there was little merit in pursuing them any further and therefore the case was closed.

Actual Expenditure and Resource Usage against Budget

	Income	Expenditure
Initial Funding	£60,428	
2 Months Extension Funding	£10,259	
Salaries		£59,364
Admin support, travel, stationery etc.		£7,127
Management Charge		£4, 196
Total Income / Expenditure	£70,687	£70,687

The Children's Hearing Advocacy Service employed 2 FT Project Workers. The first came into post on 1 April 2015 and the other on 20 April 2015. Both posts were originally due to end on 31 December 2015. However after discussion at the steering group in September, when it became clear that the service would need to stop taking referrals in order to allow the research to come to an end, it was agreed the service should be extended until the end of February 2016 as there had only been 22 children who had been allocated an advocate at this stage. Most of the children who were referred during this period lived in Fife however there

was one child who lived in Dumfries and therefore there were increased travel costs and time associated with this referral.

The service was also supported by the Barnardo's Children's Rights and Advocacy Team Manager and the Children's Service Manager for the Fife Locality.

Evaluation of Project against Objectives and intended Outcomes

Identify and promote the benefits advocacy can provide to children within the Children's Hearings System:

The Children's Hearing Advocacy Service produced a leaflet which explained advocacy and the service on offer to children who were attending an initial Children's Hearing. The leaflet was sent out with the papers for the Children's Hearing by the Children's Reporter and was also given to Social Workers to assist them when providing information to families when gaining verbal consent for their details to be passed onto the service. The service attempted to visit all 12 Children and Family Social Work Teams; however timescales made this task difficult to achieve. Social workers were all sent a copy of the leaflet along with information about the referral process. The Social Work Service Manager who led this also included a suggested form of words to use with families so to try to ensure that there was parity and impartiality in the offer of an advocate for the children and so that parents would recognise that it was an independent service even though the recommendation was coming from the social worker.

Promote child-centred approaches to practice within the Children's Hearings System in Fife:

The Children's Hearing Advocacy Service attended a training session with the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration representatives in Glasgow to ensure that the advocates were aware of their role and responsibilities within the Children's Hearing. Useful information was gathered by the advocates in relation the legislation of The Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011 and the requirement of the Children's Hearing Chairperson to ensure the child/ren had been offered an advocacy service to assist them within the Children Hearing.

The Children's Hearing Advocacy Service attended three briefing sessions organised by Children's Hearing Scotland for panel members and provided information about the action research and what it would mean on a local level and what panel members could expect and how it varied from the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service which was already in operation. At the final session was a joint meeting with the Children's Reporter's present which allowed them to hear the same information as had been shared with the panel members. The Convener of the Fife Area Support Team of Children's Hearings Scotland sent out email information to all panel members about the action research and encouraging them to support the initiative.

The Scottish Children's Reporters Administration identified the young people who were eligible for the service and placed a project sticker on the file to identify them. This ensured that the panel members knew that the offer of an advocate should have been made to the child and meant that there was a form for them to complete after the hearing had been completed to allow them to make comment on the advocacy that had been provided for the child during the hearing.

Establish (monitor/review) eligibility criteria that prioritises children most in need:

The following were considered the primary groups to be prioritised for the service:

- Children with disabilities
- Children subject to emergency child protection orders (at 8 day Hearing).
- Children with no other appropriate sources of advocacy support.
- Children who have no previous experience of the Children's Hearings System.

- Children attending a Secure Panel with no previous Children's Hearings System experience.

As there were fewer children referred than the service had capacity for there was no need to prioritise them and all children received a service.

Of the 49 children who were referred to the Children's Hearing's Advocacy Project 40 of them had no previous experience of the Children's Hearing system and therefore it could be assumed they would not know what to expect in relation to the process. 8 children had a previous experience of the Children's Hearing System however and had been re-referred to the Children's Reporter on new grounds. There was only one child referred who had a disability and that this was the reason for them choosing to have an independent advocate. During the action research period there were no referrals made for children who had a Child Protection Order (CPO). The service is aware however that there were children who attended an Initial Children's Hearing because a CPO had been granted however no referral was submitted for the 8 day hearing. There were also no children that the service is aware of who had an initial children's Hearing because they had been secured on an emergency basis and were not already part of the Children's Hearing System.

Consider how advocacy can be part of a wider network of support for children and identify other potential methods of supporting a child throughout the Children's Hearings System:

The Children Hearing's Advocacy Service provided advocacy support to other people who were identified by children or families as their preferred choice of advocate as way of developing a wider network of support for children attending initial Children's Hearings.

The opportunity to robustly test this out was not available as there was only one family who requested advocacy be provided by someone other than the Barnardo's service.

Identify potential demand for advocacy within the Children's Hearings System and scope out the likely long-term resources required to sustain the service:

It was anticipated that over a six month period approximately 66 children over the age of 3 would have been subject to an initial children's hearing in Fife. During the life of the project 88 children's hearings were held in the 7.5 months which indicates that the estimated figures were on target. The Children's Hearing Advocacy Service was tasked to provide advocacy to a minimum of 40 children during a 6 month period of research, only taking referrals for the initial 6 months so to allow for closure or progression to another service during the final 3 months. There were 49 children who were referred to the service of whom, 33 received advocacy support directly from Barnardo's and one other child was supported by another family member who received support from Barnardo's.

These figures indicate there is a demand for the service which potentially would have been greater if it was a service which was always available as it has been recognised that the short term nature of the action research did mean there were occasions when Social Workers did not refer.

Options for the Future, including risks, opportunities and challenges

The Children's Hearing Advocacy Service has provided an additional 34 children with an advocacy service, either directly or by assisting another independent advocate, when attending an initial Children's Hearing over the past 9 months.

This service would not have been available had it not been for the opportunity for Barnardo's to extend the current service provision of the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service by participating in action research on behalf of the Scottish Government and supported by Fife Council.

The opportunity to expand the current provision to work with children who are entering the Children's Hearing System, from the evidence collated by the service, indicates that the children who have participated have benefited from the support of an independent advocate to share their views and have them voiced within the Children's Hearing in a way that the child is confident about.

Barnardo's Fife would welcome the opportunity to explore further the continuing provision of advocacy at an initial Children's Hearing. As was recognised throughout the process, the earlier an advocacy relationship can be developed, the greater the opportunity there is for a child to build a trusting relationship with their advocate. As a result, children are more likely to feel that their views have been shared and heard with, and by, the Children's Panel members.

Moving Forward

There were some significant wider issues that arose though the action research which in the long term will require further consideration and discussion when the Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011 is implemented. The questions that this piece of action research has not been able to test out and explore are:

- Should families/young people be made aware of the advocacy service by the Children's Hearing system rather than by Social Work Services to keep the process independent?
- Does the passing of information between services raise issues of confidentiality and consent again?
- What happens if parents do not give consent for the service to be used and the child is under 12 and indicating they would like to engage with the service?
- Do the attitudes and values of different agencies/workers within the systems influence outcome of offering advocacy?

Barnardo's Fife Children's Rights and Advocacy Service would welcome the opportunity to consider these questions if advocacy services for children attending an initial children's hearing continue to be explored.

Appendix 1 - Service User's Supported Summary

ID	Age	Gender	Date SW Notified by Reporter	Date Referred to Barnardo's	Date of Hearing	Date of first Visit	Advocacy Provided By	No. of visits Pre Hearing	Hearing Decision	Current Status	Other Info
1	4	F	26/5/15	28/5/15	25/06/15	01/06/15	Barnardos	3	CSO	Closed	Kinship Care - Gran
2	12	M	26/05/15	02/06/15	18/06/15	04/06/15	Barnardos	3	CSO	Closed	Kinship Care - Gran
3	5	F	26/05/15	02/06/15	18/06/15	04/06/15	Barnardos	2	CSO	Closed	Kinship Care - Gran
4	3	F	26/05/15	02/06/15	18/06/15	04/06/15	Barnardos	2	CSO	Closed	Kinship Care - Gran
5	9	M	02/06/15	03/06/15	25/06/15	09/06/15	Barnardos	3	CSO	Closed	Foster Care
6	7	M	02/06/15	03/06/15	25/06/15	09/06/15	Barnardos	3	CSO	Closed	Foster Care
7	6	M	02/06/15	03/06/15	25/06/15	09/06/15	Barnardos	2	CSO	Closed	Foster Care
8	6	F	02/06/15	03/06/15	25/06/15	09/06/15	Barnardos	3	CSO	Closed	Foster Care
9	12	M	03/06/15	17/06/15	03/07/15	23/06/15	Barnardo's	3	CSO	Closed	Kinship Care - Gran
10	3	F	19/06/15	23/06/15	21/07/15	08/07/15	Family Member	N/A	Outcome unknown	Closed	Advocate disengaged
11	4	F	03/06/15	26/06/15	09/07/15	02/07/15	Barnardo's	2	Outcome unknown	Closed	Mother disengaged
12	3	F	03/06/15	26/06/15	09/07/15	02/07/15	Barnardo's	2	Outcome unknown	Closed	Mother disengaged
13	10	F	03/06/15	26/06/15	09/07/15	02/07/15	Barnardo's	2	Outcome unknown	Closed	Mother disengaged
14	9	F	17/06/15	02/07/15	23/07/15	02/07/15	Barnardos	4	CSO	Closed	Residential
15	15	F	25/06/15	07/07/15	23/07/15	09/07/15	Barnardos Self Advocated	1	Outcome unknown	Closed	Closed prior to Hearing
16	9	M	29/07/15	30/07/15	26/08/15	05/08/15	Barnardos	9	CSO	Closed	Foster Care
17	16	M	30/07/15	03/08/15	27/08/15	07/08/15	Barnardos	5	CSO	Closed	Residential

ID	Age	Gender	Date SW Notified by Reporter	Date Referred to Barnardo's	Date of Hearing	Date of first Visit	Advocacy Provided By	No. of visits Pre Hearing	Hearing Decision	Current Status	Other Info
18	14	M	30/07/15	04/08/15	27/08/15	07/08/15	Barnardos	3	CSO	Closed	Kinship Care - Gran
19	6	F	16/09/15	17/09/15	07/10/15	24/09/15	Barnardos	8	CSO	Closed	At Home
20	14	F	22/09/15	22/09/15	07/10/15	24/09/15	Barnardos	2	CSO	Closed	At Home
21	13	F	22/09/15	22/09/15	07/10/15	24/09/15	Barnardos	2	CSO	Closed	At Home
22	7	M	TBC	24/09/15	24/09/15	22/09/15	Barnardos	0	CSO	Closed	Kinship Care - Gran
23	4	M	24/09/15	25/09/15	30/10/15	06/10/15	Barnardos	7	CSO	Closed	Kinship Care - Aunt
24	13	F	01/10/15	01/10/15	19/10/15	06/10/15	Barnardos	2	CSO	Closed	Kinship Care - Gran
25	7	F	01/10/15	01/10/15	19/10/15	06/10/15	Barnardos	2	CSO	Closed	Kinship Care - Gran
26	13	M	19/10/15	21/10/15	11/11/15	30/10/15	Barnardos	2	CSO	Ongoing	Foster Care
27	11	F	19/10/15	21/10/15	11/11/15	30/10/15	Barnardos	3	CSO	Ongoing	Foster Care
28	10	M	19/10/15	21/10/15	11/11/15	30/10/15	Barnardos	3	CSO	Closed	Child disengaged
29	7	F	19/10/15	21/10/15	11/11/15	30/10/15	Barnardos	3	CSO	Ongoing	Foster Care
30	6	M	19/10/15	21/10/15	11/11/15	30/10/15	Barnardos	4	ICSO	Closed	Child disengaged
31	9	F	23/11/15	23/11/15	16/12/15	09/12/15	Barnardos	2	Outcome unknown	Closed	Parent disengaged
32	9	M	23/11/15	23/11/15	16/12/15	09/12/15	Barnardos	2	Outcome unknown	Closed	Parent disengaged
33	8	F	18/11/15	30/11/15	11/12/15	04/12/15	Barnardos	4	CSO	Ongoing	At home
34	15	F	03/12/15	09/12/15	18/12/15	15/12/15	Barnardos	2	CSO	Closed	At Home