

2025 Stakeholder Survey report



May 2026

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Introduction

The CYCJ Stakeholder Survey is a biennial exercise designed to gather the views of key stakeholder groups: practitioners; children and young people; parents and carers; and communities (via community councils). The purpose is to help shape both *what* we do by informing the content of the CYCJ annual work plan, and *how* we do it, by gathering views on our modes of delivery.

For practical reasons, the survey was issued online to key stakeholder groups, with four separate surveys linked by a single access point. While acknowledging that an online approach is not ideal for everyone, the survey was designed to be accessible and encourage completion by the target audience. The aim was to capture a breadth and diversity of views rather than a more in-depth consultation with a smaller group of stakeholders.

The survey was distributed via our social media channels, e-bulletin and practitioner networks between 3rd October and 9th November 2025. It was also sent to all community councils in Scotland and organisations that either support parents or were working with existing parent/carer groups. In total, 195 responses were received, but when these were cleaned, to only include surveys where the respondent had completed at least one substantive answer, a total of 167 responses were retained.

A total of 16 children and young people participated in three in-person focus groups held with participants from CYCJ’s existing participation groups and networks. The survey questions were used as a guide for the discussion during these groups. Nine of the children and young people who took part in the focus groups also completed a paper survey and these have been included in the analysis within the report, along with information from the discussions within the groups.

The majority of respondents/participants were from community councils (90) and the workforce (63), with smaller numbers of children and young people (21 in total), or parents and carers (9).





Community Councils

There were 90 responses received from Community Councils that covered 19 different Local Authorities, with one response from outside of Scotland. In total, 13 responses were received from Fife (14%) with 11 responses received from the Scottish Borders (12%) and 10 each from East Ayrshire and Highland (11%). These response rates are disproportionate to their share of Scotland's population (16% in total across all four areas).

No responses were received from Glasgow Community Councils and significantly less were received from Edinburgh Community Councils than their representative population share (2% compared to 10%).

The biggest issue in the community

When asked what was the biggest issue facing their community, community councils listed elements of antisocial behaviour (29%) as the biggest issue they were facing, followed by a lack of resources/services (23%) and the built environment (23%).



Antisocial behaviour has overtaken a lack of resources in the community as the biggest issue for community councils. In our 2023 survey, 29% of community councils listed a lack of resources as the biggest issue they were facing.

While some respondents specifically mentioned ‘youth disorder’ or antisocial behaviour by young people, others simply listed antisocial behaviour generally, or elements of it, without specifying any further details on who may be committing this.

Resource issues often related to a lack of facilities or activities, including linked to reductions in funding. Social services, health and social care and education were areas that were mentioned, as well as services specifically relating to children and young people.

The built environment included aspects related to renewable energy and housing developments as well as issues around the traffic/road system and general infrastructure in the area.

The biggest issue facing children and young people

Children (under 18)

Similarly to the 2023 survey, the lack of amenities/services in the local area was by far the most frequently mentioned issue for children under the age of 18, with 65% (n=46) of respondents referring to this. There was noted to be a lack of youth or sports clubs, facilities and activities for this age group, as well as a lack of general meeting places. This was compounded by a lack of transport to access the amenities and activities that did exist.

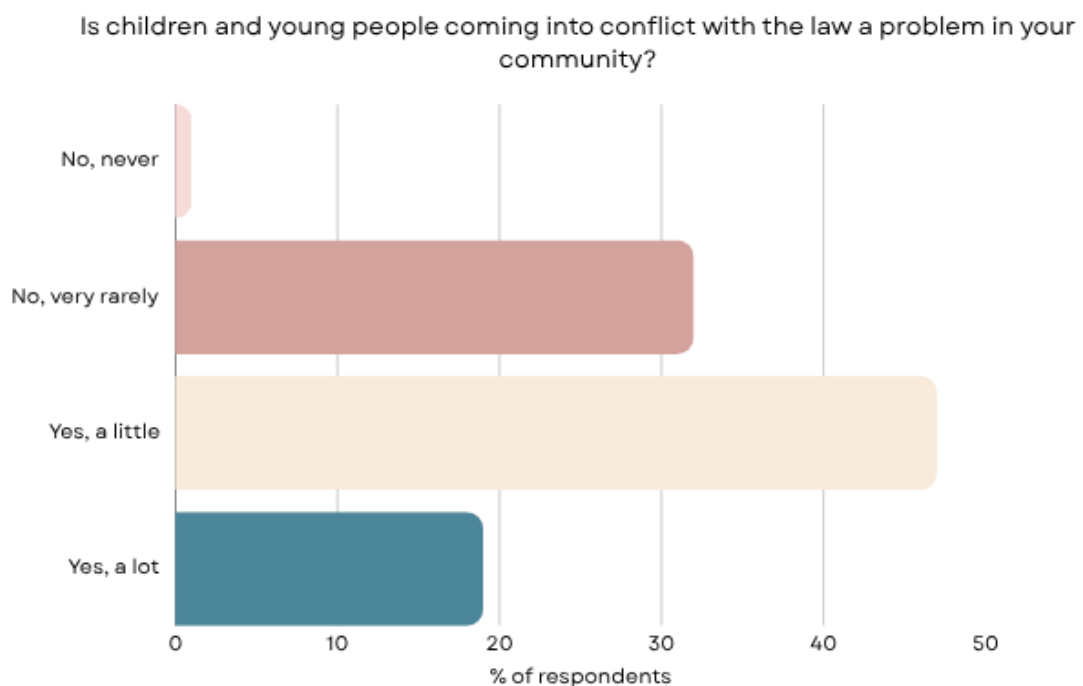
Other issues mentioned included poverty and/or parental addiction (7%, n=5), potentially impacting on the affordability of the activities and facilities that were in place for children.

Young people (18-26)

A lack of opportunities was the most frequently mentioned issue for young people aged 18 to 26 years old, with 82% (n=56) of respondents referring to this. This overlapped with the lack of amenities mentioned for children, in terms of youth clubs, facilities and activities, and general meeting places. However, a lack of opportunities in terms of employment, education or training opportunities (37%, n=25) and housing (13%, n=9) were mentioned specifically for this age group. Again, a lack of transport to access the opportunities that were in place was also referred to.

Children and young people (aged 12-26) coming into conflict with the law

For around a fifth of respondents who answered this question, children and young people coming into conflict with the law was a frequent issue in the community (19%), and for almost half (47%) it was a problem at least some of the time. For the remainder (34%) it was rarely or never a problem in their communities.



These behaviours were predominantly defined as low level, antisocial, nuisance behaviours such as vandalism, substance misuse and antisocial driving (with specific mention of electric bikes/scooters and motorbikes). There were also some instances of theft/shoplifting, and violence, albeit in very low numbers.

Preventing children from coming into conflict with the law

Reflecting the lack of amenities in local areas, the most common response (59%, n=44) by community councils on what would prevent children and young people from coming into conflict with the law was the provision of more services and activities for this group. Suggestions mostly involved providing supervised activities and clubs but more informal places for children and young people to get together were also mentioned.

A significant minority of community councils wanted to see a much firmer response to children and young people in conflict with the law including:

- Better parenting, and for parents to have more control over their children, as well as providing support and guidance for parents (12%, n=9).
- A greater police presence, with more visible community policing both on the streets and in schools (13%, n=10).

Community councils also raised the importance of children and young people feeling part of their community and having a sense of pride in both their community and in themselves (5%, n=4).

There were mixed views about what role communities could play in helping to stop children and young people coming into conflict with the law. Around a third (32%, n=21) felt that communities could provide more activities. A further 29% (n=19) highlighted the importance of working together, including with children and young people themselves, to build a good community. However, 12% (n=8) again highlighted the role of parents rather than the wider community in terms of their responsibilities and the need for parents to be held accountable.



Community Council engagement with children and young people

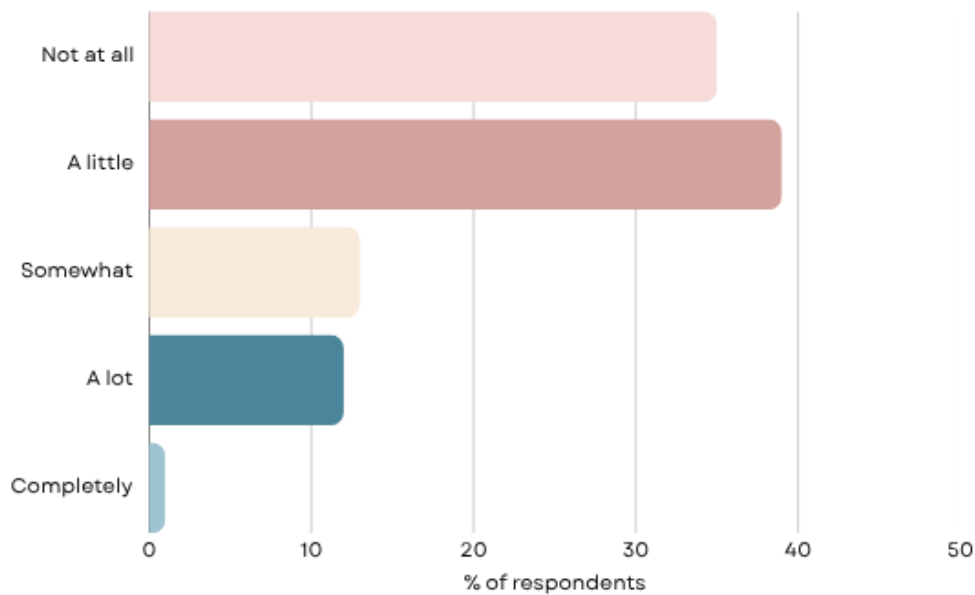
There was generally little direct engagement by community councils with children and young people.

In terms of being members of the community council, where they must be 16 or older, some respondents noted that they had tried to encourage this membership, with others stating the meeting format required by legislation was not appealing to young people. Four community councils advised they had a child or young person as a member, with one advising they had a young person as a note taker to the council.

In terms of more indirect engagement with children and young people, 23% (n=16) of respondents stated that their community council engaged with schools or other organisations in the area. A further 13% (n=9) spoke about engagement in terms of providing funding for services or community organisations.

Sixty-nine community councils provided information as to what extent children and young people influenced decisions made by the council, with the majority advising that their influence was either a little (39%, n=27) or none at all (35%, n=24).

To what extent do children and young people influence decision making?

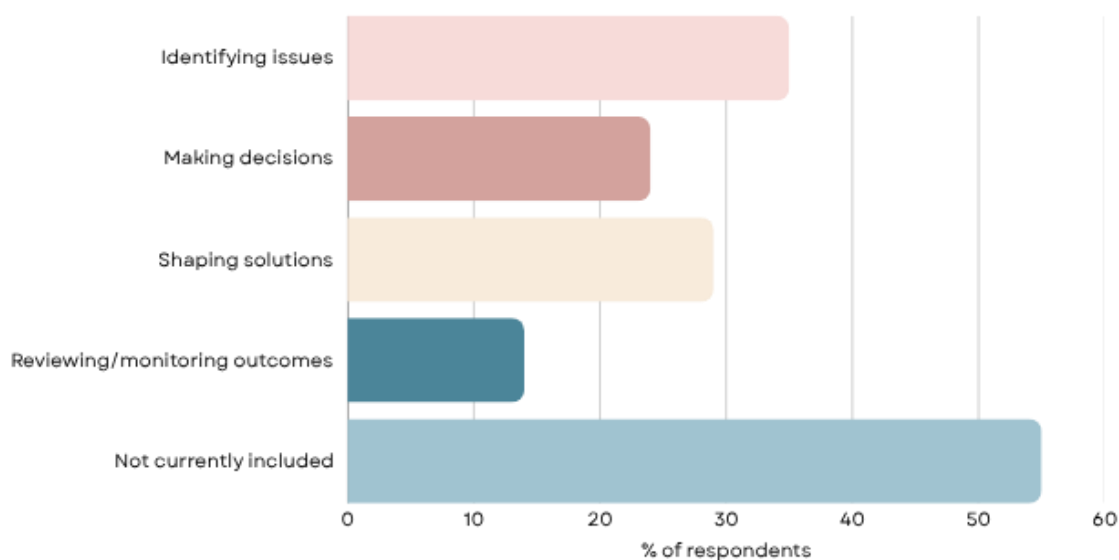


Sixty-six community councils provided information on which stages of decision-making children and young people were included, from identifying issues through to reviewing and monitoring outcomes. Over half said that children and young people were not currently included in decision-making processes at all.

A quarter (n=17) of the community council respondents highlighted the importance of partnership working, particularly with schools, as a way to improve this engagement.



What stages of decision making are children and young people included?



The Workforce

The 63 practitioners who responded to the survey worked in, or across, 22 different local authority areas, and worked mainly in social work (37%) or the third sector (37%).

Most pressing issue in youth justice

When asked what was the most pressing issue in youth justice right now, 61 professionals responded and the most common suggestions were:

- A lack of resources and inadequate funding for services (25%, n=15), with mental health support mentioned specifically.
- Crime, particularly knife crime and an increase in violence (15%, n=9).
- New legislation and its implementation, including in terms of the UNCRC and the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 (10%, n=6).
- Mental health and trauma, and unmet needs in these areas, for children and young people (8%, n=5).
- Exploitation, either criminal or general exploitation (8%, n=5).

A lack of resources and inadequate funding for services has consistently been listed as the most pressing issue including in the last two surveys (in 2021 and 2023).

When asked about any changes in the issues children and young people in conflict with the law were facing over the previous 2-3 years, a worsening of mental health and longer waiting lists were mentioned by 15% (n=7) of respondents, while the impact of Covid (including on mental health but also relating to social skills, school attendance and delays in justice processes) was also highlighted (10%, n=5).

Practice Needs

The survey asked workforce respondents to identify the three most challenging aspects of their practice. The percentages below are calculated using the number of individuals (n=46) who responded to this question. Where they identified multiple challenges in the same area this was only counted once.

The most significant issue for practitioners has remained the same as in previous years and relates to a lack of resources. This year, however, issues around staffing have overtaken those relating to bureaucracy in the system as the second most significant issue, though both are at significantly lower levels than concerns around resources and services.

- A lack of resources and services, including relating to funding (50%, n=23).
- Lack of adequate staffing, workloads and burnout, resulting in insufficient time to build relationships and engage with children and young people (15%, n=7).
- Bureaucracy, especially delays in both the adult court and children's hearings system (11%, n=5).

Knowledge Needs

The survey asked workforce respondents to identify three knowledge needs. The percentages below are calculated using the number of individuals who responded to this question (n=38). Where they identified multiple knowledge needs in the same area this was only counted once.

The workforce described their most common knowledge needs as:

- Participation, in terms of strengthening participation processes as well as looking for children and young people's views on subjects (26%, n=10).
- Legislation, including the UNCRC, children and young people's rights, education rights and the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 (24%, n=9).
- Trauma and mental health, including understanding and responding to this (21%, n=8).
- Neurodiversity, including understanding and supporting children and young people in relation to this (11%, n=4).

Supporting the Workforce

Only around 25 respondents answered this set of questions.

Remaining the key priority, as with the 2023 survey results, over the next 12 months, the workforce wanted the **CY CJ Practice Development Team** to:

- Deliver training and provide tools and resources for the workforce (35%, n=9).

Other suggested areas of focus included, mentoring, the whole system approach, restorative justice, knife crime, county lines, mental health and more engagement with families.

Over the next 12 months, and with a similar main priority as from the 2023 survey results, the workforce wanted the **CY CJ Research Team** to:

- Conduct research looking at evidence about what works, and what is the impact over the longer term of interventions and policy changes (32%, n=8).
- Ensure there is participation from a wide range of children and young people in any research (12%, n=3).
- Include and consider the views and experiences of families (8%, n=2).

Over the next 12 months, and similar to results from the previous survey in 2023, the workforce wanted the **CY CJ Policy and Participation Team** to:

- Undertake and share learning on meaningful participation, and involve children and young people, parents/carers and practitioners in this participation work (38%, n=8).

Other suggested areas of focus included, the age of criminal responsibility, employment support, rights to advocacy, contextual safeguarding and the children's hearings system.

Supporting the workforce

Thirty-one practitioners responded to the question asking them to provide three things that CYCJ could do over the next 12 months to support them. In total they provided a list of 69 things. Generally, they were looking for CYCJ to support them in the following way:

- Providing training and workforce development opportunities, including webinars, workshops and training with practice resources and toolkits (42%, n=29).

One practitioner from education and one from residential care mentioned schools. They suggested that CYCJ could connect with or go into schools, with one respondent expanding on this to say that this would enable young people to learn about and become involved in CYCJ's work.

Often this support involved work CYCJ is already delivering (for example providing webinars, workshops, resources and toolkits), however, respondents did also highlight the following which could be expanded upon:

- Making participation tools and training more accessible
- Creating more spaces for shared learning and peer connection
- Strengthening the links between policy and frontline
- In person briefings/development days
- Streamline policy and guidance
- More e-learning
- Training on contextual safeguarding
- Creating an intervention resource database



Children and young people

Five children and young people responded to the online survey and were aged 19-26 years old. A further 16 children and young people took part in three focus groups. The age range of those taking part in the focus groups was 12 to 23 years old. Nine of these children and young people also completed paper surveys during the focus groups.

Of the 14 children and young people who completed either online or paper versions of the survey, there was an average age of 19 years (range 12 to 26). Half of these respondents were aged under 16. Almost three-fifths of the respondents who completed a survey (57%) were female, 36% were male, and 7% identified as a different gender. This is disproportionate to the proportion of under-21s convicted in court, where 85% were male, and those given Recorded Police Warnings, where 77% were male, in 2023/24 (Criminal Proceedings Scotland).

Of these 14 children and young people, 86% lived in urban areas (a city or big town) and 14% said they lived 'somewhere else' (i.e. not a city, big/small town or village) but did not provide further details.

Is offending by children and young people an issue in your community?

Of the 13 children and young people who completed this question in the paper or online survey, 62% (n=8) felt that offending by children and young people was an issue in their community at least some of the time, 15% didn't know (n=2) and 23% (n=3) said that it was not an issue. Of those who said there was an issue at least some of the time, almost all lived in a city.

Offending was typically low level, for example, antisocial behaviour, vandalism, shoplifting and substance misuse, however, knife crime and violence were also mentioned.

These responses are consistent with results from previous surveys in 2021 and 2023.

Feeling safe

At school

Of the 9 children and young people who completed this question in the paper or online survey, 56% (n=5) reported that they felt 'mainly safe' at school, with 22% (n=2) feeling 'sometimes safe, sometimes unsafe', and the same number, 11% (n=1), feeling 'mainly unsafe' and 'very unsafe'.



These figures reflect a slight change from the previous survey in 2023. Where this year no one reported feeling 'very safe' at school, 23% of children had reported feeling this way in 2023.

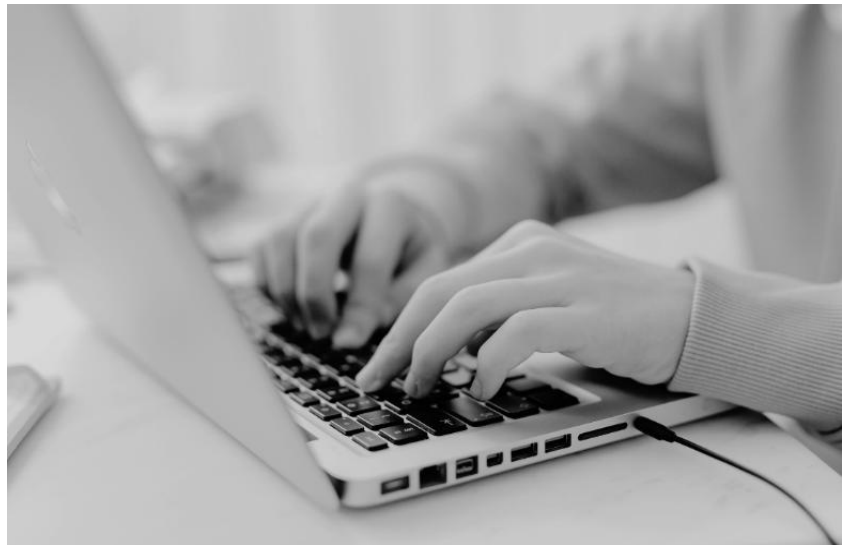
Where this topic was discussed within the focus groups or respondents provided further details in the survey, participants commented that feelings of safety came from teachers, while feelings of being unsafe could come from a lack of trauma-informed practice or the behaviour of other pupils (e.g. incidents of bullying, harassment and the use of racist terms were spoken about).

One focus group participant commented that:

“It kind of depends on if I feel safe in school who I see that day.”

Online

Of the 12 children and young people who completed this question in the paper or online survey, the majority reported that they felt 'very safe' (25%, n=3) or 'mainly safe' (58%, n=7) online. These were similar levels of safety as came through in the 2023 survey results. One respondent reported feeling 'sometimes safe, sometimes unsafe', with another reporting that they felt 'very unsafe' online.



Where this was discussed within the focus groups or respondents provided further details in the survey, participants commented that feelings of safety came from them being able to block people they didn't know and keep their account private. Where they felt unsafe, this could be due to receiving unsolicited messages and people following them, and there being too much access to their personal data, including by "criminals" and "hackers".

Positive aspects of being online were also mentioned by some focus group participants where they spoke of the fact that you could meet "good people online" and that "online spaces can be such a great place to create that, like, sense to belong in".

Community by day

Of the 12 children and young people who completed this question in the paper or online survey, the majority said that they felt 'very safe' (25%, n=3) or 'mainly safe' (42%, n=5) in their community during the day. A further 33% (n=4) said that they felt 'sometimes safe, sometimes unsafe'.

Where people felt safe this could be due to the fact it was not dark and there were people around. Although one respondent noted that "as a woman the concern is always there".

Within the focus groups, participants had mixed experiences, stating:

“I don’t feel unsafe anywhere.”

“It always depends on the area.”

The day is less safe because;

“in the day you have a lot more people cutting about”.

Community by night

Children and young people reported lower levels of feeling safe in their community at night compared to during the day. Of the 12 children and young people who completed this question in the paper or online survey, only one felt ‘very safe’ and one ‘mainly safe’. The majority (58%, n=7) reported that they felt ‘sometimes safe, sometimes unsafe’ in their community at night. A quarter (n=3) felt ‘very unsafe’.

Reasons that children and young people said that they felt unsafe included because it was dark and either that there were fewer people around or that there were risks from the people that were there, for example, there could be “drunk” or “scary” people or “too many perpetrators out looking for vulnerable people”. One respondent highlighted the specific risk as a female if they were alone at night.

Although one focus group participant did state that:

“I like walking about at night more than walking about in the day.”

However, they did not provide any further details around this.

How to increase feelings of safety

Around 9 respondents who completed either a paper or online survey, as well as members of the focus groups, made suggestions as to what would make children and young people feel safer. Suggestions were most frequently practical, e.g. better lighting to improve safety and thinking about the use of colour in communities, or welfarist, e.g. providing trauma-informed care or ensuring there were trusted people they could talk to in school.

The role of the police, particularly the need for community officers, was also mentioned in one of the focus group discussions, in particular in the context of the closure of some local police stations.

In terms of online safety, survey and focus group participants mentioned the importance of having a private account or some form of age verification to protect children from older adults online. Some also suggested children should not be allowed online or that social media platforms should be split for different age ranges (e.g. 13-16, 16-18, etc.) as well as there being a need for stricter enforcement by social media sites.

Supporting children in conflict with the law

Nine children and young people responded to the survey question about why children and young people get involved in offending. Most mentioned the influence of their peers (78%, n=7), while (56%, n=5) recognised the impact of adversity in children and young people's lives on their offending, including poverty and "tough lives". The role of boredom and children and young people having nothing to do was mentioned by 22% (n=2) of survey respondents. These were also themes that were discussed by focus group participants.

When asked what children and young people could do to avoid getting involved in offending, many of the responses were about removing the opportunity to offend, either by engaging in prosocial activities (50%, n=4), or by changing the people that they were associating with (50%, n=4) (some responses mentioned multiple aspects). These themes were also discussed by focus group participants.

Focus group participants also identified barriers to accessing these prosocial activities, mentioning the lack of activities or amenities that were available, or the lack of funding to support these. Participants also mentioned a lack of activities for teenagers and young people specifically.

A third (n=3) of the children and young people who completed this question in the survey thought that adults couldn't really do anything to help stop children and young people from offending. Some focus group participants also felt this way.

For those who did think adults could do something differently, a third (n=3) mentioned ensuring there were consequences for the child's behaviour while 44% (n=4) highlighted the importance of a trauma-informed response where adults provided a safe space, listened to and believed, supported and addressed the needs of the child or young person.

The role of parents was also mentioned within the focus groups, in terms of their influence on a child's life as well as what they could do to stop children and young people from offending. One participant said that:

“I think parents should do more things with their kid, but how to find a way to not police that kid while they're having fun.”

Parents and Carers

Nine parents/carers responded to the online survey. Where they provided the age that their child first came into contact with the criminal justice system, half (n=4) were aged 16. The children had had contact across the criminal justice system, including receiving police warnings, diversion from prosecution, referral to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, referral to the



Procurator Fiscal, attending court and being sentenced or remanded to prison or secure care.

How parents/carers felt about the experience

Two thirds of the parents/carers (n=4) who responded to the question asking them to describe how they felt about their child's contact with the criminal justice system noted the difficult nature of the experience, using words such as "distress", "sad", "worried" and "helpless". A further two parents/carers reflected on the nature of the system itself, using the words "unjustified" and "punitive" to describe the experience.

Two parents/carers also highlighted their lack of control and lack of knowledge within the system.

Impact of the experience on parents/carers

All of the six parents/carers who responded to the question asking about how their child's contact with the justice system had affected their family life reported the significant and negative impact the experience had had. They noted that it had contributed to relationship breakdowns and conflict within the family as well as impacting on the well-being of family members (parents and siblings).

When asked about the biggest strain or challenge on them as a parent/carer, the six respondents who answered this question noted issues around not being able to protect their child, a lack of information being available, people not sharing information with them and relationship strain.

Support for parents/carers

All the parents/carers who answered the question as to their understanding of what was going to happen as their child went through the justice process reported that they either had some (n=3) or very little (n=4) understanding.

Half of the six respondents who answered the question on whether they had been offered any support said that they had. Two of these respondents listed

social work and the VOW project (a programme for young people engaged in offending behaviour or on the cusp of offending behaviour) as the source of this support.

When asked about what was needed for parents/carers, either for themselves or to enable them to support their child, almost all highlighted the importance of the provision of information or effective and timely communication by organisations within the system.