

Children in Scotland

Acknowledgement and Accountability Consultation
Adult Care and Support Division
Scottish Government
Area 2-East Rear St Andrew's House
Regents Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

16 January 2009

Dear Ms Hunter:

Children in Scotland welcomes this consultation and applauds the Scottish Government for moving forward with the development of the Truth and Reconciliation Forum (now renamed as the Acknowledgement and Accountability Forum) for adult survivors of child abuse – especially, but not solely, *sexual* abuse.

We agree that the Forum's emphasis should be on considering, and taking action in relation to, child abuse that occurred within institutional or community settings -- or in situations where government agencies and public officials were acting *in loco parentis* (that is, as corporate parents). The basic principles and direction of travel stated in the consultation document seem right.

Children in Scotland's broad membership from the voluntary and statutory sectors across Scotland includes organisations connected with these issues in various ways over recent decades. Since the core work of the Forum would be with adults, there are aspects of this consultation on which we have no recommendations because we have no evidence/experience base from which to respond.

However, there are two key points we would like to make.

First, our fundamental interest is in the ways in which the proposed Acknowledgement and Accountability Forum can help children today. We hope that the lessons learned through the Forum can and will contribute to ensuring that such child abuse is greatly reduced, if not entirely eliminated, across Scotland now and in the future.

We do not believe that such learning – and implementation of the lessons that should be learned from past behaviour -- will happen automatically or by accident. Thus, Children in Scotland encourages the Scottish Government to plan for and support efforts in communications and professional/workforce development that will bring the insights, experiences and advice generated by the Acknowledgement and Accountability Forum to the attention and benefit of institutions, community groups and corporate parents throughout our nation. Understanding history in a more than superficial way can help prevent it from being repeated.

Second, Children in Scotland encourages the Scottish Government to take another compatible step forward by **increasing the extent and depth at which today's children and young people in institutional or community settings – or otherwise the responsibility of corporate parents – are heard and heeded.**

It is right to seek out the views and experiences of adult survivors of child abuse – and then, to take positive action that will improve their current and future well-being. It also is right not to wait until today's children and young people who are looked after, accommodated or otherwise subject to corporate parenting become adults before they, too, can be properly listened to and assisted. More could and should be done to *meaningfully* engage, consult with and involve children and young people in the here and now.

Children in Scotland would be pleased to meet with the Scottish Government to follow-up on these comments or to help in other ways with the development of the Acknowledgement and Accountability Forum. We would be particularly keen to assist in the implementation of our two recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jonathan Sher
Director of Research, Policy and Programmes

Children in Scotland is Scotland's national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 450 members, including 90% of Scottish Local Authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and the European Union.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve:ASL, Scotland's largest independent education mediation service.