

# The Commissioner



ANNUAL REPORT FOR SCOTLAND'S COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

ISSUE 2 - 2005/2006

## Ask SCCYP...

**"I want to practise a different religion to my Mum - how old do I have to be before I can decide this?"**

This year, SCCYP's Enquiries Service handled almost 400 queries - from children and young people, their families and those working closely with them, up 500% on last year.

The Commissioner may not be there to intervene in individual enquiries - but she is committed to ensuring children and young people - and the people who care about them - find the answers they need. For that reason, she created the **SCCYP Enquiries Service** and **Young Persons Freephone**.

People contacting the service so far have included young people, parents, grandparents, social workers, teachers, GPs and Children's Rights Officers.

**"I'm in residential care and the workers there searched my room last night - are they allowed to do this?"**

In most cases, SCCYP is able to provide information to help someone sort their query out by themselves. If it's more complicated, though, then SCCYP will point them in the direction of someone who can work with them to resolve their problem.

Each query is logged on a computer database so that SCCYP can build up a picture of which

problems young people are facing and where. This is useful as, if a particular problem seems to come up time and again, then this might indicate that there's something wrong with a system or a policy - and that's something the Commissioner may be able to do something about.

**"I want my Mum's new boyfriend to stop smoking around me - how do I get him to do this?"**

To contact the Enquiries Service, call the **Young Persons Freephone** on **0800 019 1179** or e-mail **inbox@sccyp.org.uk**



## SCCYP Team Appointed



Scotland's Commissioner for Children & Young People, **Kathleen Marshall**, has recruited the team who will work with her to promote and safeguard young people's rights across Scotland.

Appointed as Commissioner in April, 2004, Kathleen took on the last of her 14 staff in July 2005.

And it wasn't just Kathleen who had a say in who could be on her team - children and young people were involved right through the process - from scripting interview questions to making the final decision on who to recruit.

A third of Kathleen's overall team will now spend their time travelling around Scotland as part of her participation team.

Kathleen is keen to make sure that every child or young person in Scotland feels that their views are accurately represented.

A Research Officer will carry out in-depth research with children and young people and SCCYP's Communications Officer will handle media enquiries coming through to the office.

Alongside her participation team, Kathleen also has chosen a policy team to help take forward the issues raised by young people. They will do this in a number of ways. An Enquiries Officer and an Information Officer will handle day to day information requests and queries from children and young people, their families and professionals working with them. A Parliamentary and Legal Officer will help keep an eye on new legislation (laws) being considered by the Scottish Parliament and a Policy Development Officer will highlight what those new laws might mean to children and young people - pointing out where young people's views should be considered.

Finally, SCCYP's admin team will help make sure the office runs smoothly on a day to day basis.

Their role will be to create innovative ways for children and young people to feed through their views to Kathleen, including creating three "reference groups" of young people to input directly into the work of SCCYP (the Commissioner's office).

Two Participation Worker roles were specially created - open to young people between the ages of 16 and 21.

Kathleen hopes they will help build an accurate picture of some of the issues facing children and young people across Scotland - and that young people will find it easier to relate to them as they are closer in age.

Some children and young people do find it more difficult to have their voice heard and

# "THINGS TO DO" TOPS SCCYP POLL

Towards the end of 2005, SCCYP launched its first ever national consultation of children and young people living in Scotland.

The consultation, which ran across Scotland between September and December, aimed to identify the issues children and young people thought SCCYP should prioritise for the next two years.

After looking at previous research with children and young people and holding focus groups with a wide range of children - including those in children's homes and hospitals and through youth work projects - SCCYP was able

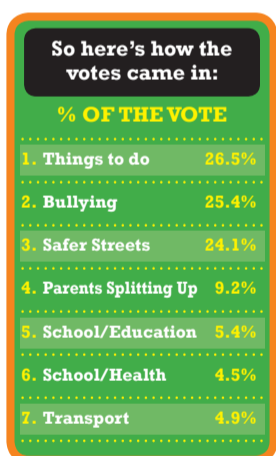
to identify seven main issues to put to the vote.

SCCYP and Young Scot worked together to invite children and young people in Scotland to vote for their top priority on a voting card, online, by text, e-mail or by phone.

A total of 15,822 votes were cast during the consultation, making it the largest national consultation with children and young people ever.

**Votes came from every area in Scotland - from young people aged from 5 up to 21.**

Some of the things children and young people said would help take the "things to do"



priority forward include: **having more say in organising their own activities, having support to carry out those activities from trusted adults** and for places like schools, community centres and sports facilities to be made more widely available to groups of children and young people, including young people with disabilities.

Over the next two years Commissioner, Kathleen Marshall, says her office's main challenges "will be to demonstrate to children and young people that we will listen and make a difference - it's all about us "Keeping Promises".

## SCCYP Launches New Look Website

**New Look for SCCYP Website**

SCCYP's website has been given a brand new look to celebrate the Commissioner's first year in office.

Changes to the design have included the introduction of an interactive message board, designed to find out young people's views on a range of topical issues and a poll, where young people can vote on issues such as when young people should be given the vote and at what age children in Scotland should start school.

There's a selection of games to play and a daily news round-up - featuring articles on children and young people's issues.

Information on young people's rights - including a full run-down of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - are now there - as well as straight forward versions of all SCCYP's publications and links to other websites for young people.

Plans for next year include the development of a SCCYP game, a multi-topic message board, "how to" guides on children's rights, competitions and the creation of a monthly e-newsletter.

## Commissioner in Profile



**In April 2004 I became Scotland's first ever Children's Commissioner.**

I was appointed by the Queen and nominated by the Scottish Parliament, and my main role is to promote and safeguard children and young people's rights here in Scotland.

It's a big task - particularly as I'm there for anyone living in Scotland up to the age of 18 (or 21 if they have ever been in the care of a local authority).

As well as making sure everyone knows what their rights are - I also have to make sure that people in power keep children very firmly in mind when they're making big decisions. So if there's a new law about to be considered by the Scottish Parliament that is likely to have an impact on children and young people - you can be certain that one of my team will be having a look at it to check that young people won't be missing out. If it turns out they might, then we'll make suggestions of what could be changed to give young people a fairer deal.

My mission is to make sure that everyone knows about children's rights - and the high profile my office receives in the media means that often young people, their families and those working closely with them will approach me for advice.

My remit means that I can't sort out individual problems or overturn decisions that have already been made (e.g. by a court) - but I will always make sure that I provide information and point people in the right direction for

help. If someone is unhappy, I will find the most appropriate route for them to make a complaint. In some circumstances, though, I can take forward an issue or a complaint on behalf of a group of children and young people.

**It's been a very busy year and the types of issue I've had a say on include:**

- **moving and handling for children with disabilities** (some children said that their carers refused to lift them, even if they were uncomfortable, because of health and safety)
- **age that young people leave care** (some young people said they felt they were forced to leave care at 16, even though they weren't ready to live on their own)
- **physical punishment of children** (I made it clear that I thought all physical punishment - including smacking - should be banned)

**It's a challenging role, but one that I love and one I hope can make a real difference to children and young people's lives across Scotland.**

## STOP PRESS...

- **SCCYP E-zine and E-newsletters** now available
- **SCCYP creates Children's Rights Impact Assessment** - a new tool to help people in power consider the likely implications of a decision on children and young people
- **SCCYP** links in to **Children's Parliament** groups
- **SCCYP** launches **Safe Active Happy** - their action plan for the next two years
- **SCCYP** recruits young people for a **Care Action Group, Health Advisory Group** and **Reference Group** to feed into SCCYP's work



For more info about SCCYP activities, visit **www.sccyp.org.uk** or e-mail **inbox@sccyp.org.uk**. Alternatively, call the Young Persons Freephone on **0800 019 1179** or write to **SCCYP at 85 Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, EH8 8AU.**