

## **Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill**

### **Scottish Borders Council**

#### **1. The functions and powers of the NCF (as set out in the Bill)**

Scottish Borders Council Social Work Department welcomes this proposal to give voice to adult survivors of childhood abuse within care settings and the opportunity it gives for current care practice to learn from and benefit by the evidence of its participants. Scottish Borders Council Social Work Department fully supports measures to encourage best practice within its care provision to help avoid repetitions of unacceptable practices in institutional care under its control.

It is hoped the NCF will enhance public understanding of abuse within institutional care settings and the lifelong impact on the children affected. Scottish Borders Council Social Work Department is committed to furthering public recognition of practices in the past which should never have been tolerated and which must never be allowed to happen again; and of the ways in which young lives, which should have been protected within care settings, were blighted.

We also need to ensure that people who are currently within the system, or may be within the system in the future, have access to such a structure of assistance. Furthermore, we support the proposal that the scope of the NCF is broadened to include other care settings, such as foster care.

#### **2. Status of the NCF – housed as a sub-committee of the Mental Welfare Commission – and its independence**

Scottish Borders Council Social Work Department acknowledges the MWC as an appropriate body to host the NCF, and recognises the benefits of utilising its existing structures.

It is vital that the NCF is able to offer a confidential and non-judgemental forum allowing participants the opportunity to give testimony out with a court environment. Some concerns have been raised that the link with the MWC may portray a negative image for some participants; however this should be overcome if the NCF is properly distinguished as a separate forum. It is hoped victims and witnesses would not be put off entirely.

#### **3. Support for participants before, during and after their input**

Scottish Borders Council Social Work Department recognises the opportunities given through the establishment of the NCF to properly acknowledge and validate the evidence of victims and witnesses and to learn from the evidence of survivors of, and witnesses to, such abuses.

Scottish Borders Council Social Work Department welcomes the function of the NCF to provide suitable support, advocacy and information services to victims, witnesses and their families, and believes this will be of invaluable help to assist with their recovery.

**4. Any other aspects of the NCF**

No further comments.

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**Scottish Borders Council**

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