

So, Gillian Henderson, long-time member of Stand Up For Siblings, one of the originals with the research that she did with Christine Jones. She's information and research manager in the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and her research focuses on children in care and permanence. And as I said, she carried out the research with Christine Jones on the estrangement of children in care from their brothers and sisters which really set Stand Up For Siblings in motion and everything else that's coming from there. And next we have Hazel Oliver who's worked for the local authority supporting volunteer members of the children's panel for over 25 years. She's currently working with Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) as an area support and improvement partner and based within CWL (Central and West Lothian) and we all love our acronyms her role is to drive improvement and change initiatives locally and enabling national consistency.

Lorraine Lauder and Laura Campbell are long-serving and highly regarded members of the Falkirk Children's Panel with over 25 years of hearing room experience between them. They are members of the local training team which aims to ensure consistency of practice across the four locality areas which comprise Central and West Lothian they both have been part of the local Children's Scotland Acts 2020 one project team which looks to embed the new legislation into panel member practice and in addition Laura is also a facilitator for the Children's Hearings Scotland learning academy,

delivering the National Training Curriculum to panel members across Scotland.

Louise Henry is currently The Promise lead in West Lothian. Louise is seconded from her operational management post for the reviewing and children's rights service, to focus upon supporting connections and conversations between everyone who can keep The Promise. Louise is connected to infants, children, young people and their families over 20 years in a number of different statutory and third sector contexts, and Louise became a member of Stand Up For Siblings in April 2021. Shona Spence is a locality reporter manager for central locality so that's Falkirk, West Lothian, Clackmannanshire and Stirling, within Scottish Children's Reporter Administration. Shona was seconded to the looked after children unit in Scottish Government and the lead up to the Children's Scotland Act and was involved in the policy development in relation to siblings. So as you can see we've got a very experienced panel here today and I'm sure you're looking forward as much as I am to hearing everything they've got to say. So I'm going to hand over to Gillian.

Okay, thank you Kate can everyone see my slides? Nothing? Good. Okay so today I'm going to give you some of the research evidence that led to us creating Stand Up For Siblings and then be used to influence the government and to finally achieve the changes in law that came into force in July. So, until we did our research which was started in 2015, there had been no studies in Scotland on separation of brothers and sisters in care. There have been studies in England and

the evidence from those found high levels of separation, typically 70 percent of children have been separated from brother or sister in care. But we also had evidence from care experienced people who'd been raising this issue for many decades and Who Cares? Scotland had been particularly effective in raising these issues.

So the bit of the research I'm going to talk about today is the quantitative bit that was based around the case files, held by SCRA. So, to do this part of the research we selected 50 children who were not related to each other and who had at least one biological brother or sister, so these 50 index children were from seven local authority areas, but a mix of urban and rural areas. All of them had been in care and all of them had gone on to have Adoption or Permanence Orders made. For the purposes of this study we were only looking at biological siblings so not the other sibling relationships that are covered in the new legislation. So we're only looking at half and full siblings. So from these 50 children's case files we traced a total of 154 biological siblings. Our research is focused around basically 50 families and 204 children.

So what we wanted to do was to quantify the levels of separation that children experience and to do that we had to define types of siblings. To be able to do that, but we couldn't find a language anywhere and so we came up with our own definitions of siblings for the purposes of this research. So the first kind of sibling

was a familiar sibling - this is where there were some evidence that our index child has some form of relationship with this brother or sister, or at least knew that they existed, and has some level of contact with them. The second type of sibling that we came up with was a stranger sibling - so this was a brother or sister who had been mentioned in reports, but it was clear that our index child had no type of relationship whatsoever with them, had never had any contact with them and in many cases didn't even know that this brother or sister existed. And the last type of sibling are undocumented siblings - these siblings are absent from records in terms of children's hearings and are likely to exist and we particularly include paternal half siblings.

So, from these definitions we quantified the levels of estrangement that our index children experience from their brothers and sisters. So looking at our 50 index children and their 154 siblings, 76 of the siblings were familiar siblings - that is our index child has some formed relationship or contact with them, but over half - that was 78 siblings - were stranger siblings. That means that our 50 index children didn't have any contact or even know that these brothers and sisters existed. Now this really came as a surprise to us. We didn't expect to find that over half of our sample of children's brothers and sisters would be strangers.

So, of the 50 index children, more than half have at least one sibling who was a stranger to them and a fifth of the children only had stranger siblings so that means that these children didn't know that they had brothers

and sisters and it wasn't just half siblings that were stranger siblings, it included full siblings, maternal and paternal half siblings.

What we found interesting was most of these siblings - stranger siblings and familiar siblings - were looked after or had been looked after, and so were known to services and 15 of the stranger siblings lived in the same local authority area as our index child. So they could come across each other and not even know that they're a brother or sister.

So our next stage was looking at placements with brothers and sisters, and we used existing definitions of placements. So with three definitions again - first was Together so that all the children in our family are living together. Split Placements - none of the children are living together. And Splinter Placements - where some children are together and others are in separate placements. And what we found was there was again high levels of estrangement. So, of the 50 index children, over half weren't living with any of their siblings, so they were in split placements. Only 14 of the 50 children were living with all their brothers and sisters and eight were living in splintered placements, so there was some of the brothers and sisters and not with others. And around 70% of the index children have been separated from at least one of their brothers and sisters, so similar to the findings in England. Now looking at it the other way around, in terms of the siblings, only 47 of the 154 siblings were living with or

had contact with one of the indexed children. And the main reasons that we found for these levels of estrangement were, first of all, parental behaviour - so parents splitting up, forming new relationships, moving on, and also the second main cause was planning for permanence and adoption and permanence adoption orders being made.

So to kind of try and illustrate this a bit more to what it means for children. So in this slide and all the children in the slide are the 39 children who had a familiar sibling - at least one familiar sibling - so a sibling they knew about and had some sort of relationship with. The children in the box are two-thirds of these children and these are the two-thirds of children who've been separated from at least one brother or sister that they have a relationship with when they were taken into care. And breaking this down a bit more, this is again our 39 children with familiar siblings and the children in the box are the two fifths who've been separated from all their familiar siblings in care.

The next stage in our research was we wanted to find out what children's views were about having contact and living with their brothers and sisters and how this was taken into account in decision making by Children's Hearings. We basically couldn't do this part of the research because children's views on contact and their relationships with brothers and sisters were very rarely recorded in reports for hearings, very rarely recorded in child plans and consequently were very rarely

considered by Children's Hearings. Separate to our research and Robert Porter at CELCIS did some research on contact decisions in Children's Hearings and Robert looked at over 2,000 Children's Hearing decisions. Only 7% of them were related to contact with siblings. So the basis of all this evidence is what drove us to form Stand Up For Siblings, and led to the changes that we're here to hear about today. Okay, thank you. So now you're going to see a video where Sylvia Douglas talks about the impact on her life of being separated from her brothers and sisters.

Thank you.

Hi my name is Sylvia and I'd like to start by saying thank you so much for giving the most precious of gifts, which is time, to ensure the well-being and the prosperity of children, young people, infants and their families, which probably will be the at the most difficult points in their life, so thank you so much for that and thank you for providing such a safe pair of hands. And so as I said my name is Sylvia and I'm a woman in my 40s and I am going to talk to you a wee bit about siblings - brothers and sisters - and the importance of the contact and also about the loss of relationships when that's not maintained or considered at decision making times. So yeah I'm in my forties and I grew up in the care system. I was really young and I was removed through a place of safety. At that particular point I was a young carer for my three brothers and my sister. My sister was a year old and my brothers were between five and eight, but my role was about loving and caring and giving because there was a lack

of that in my home environment. So I was a young carer and I loved my brothers and my sister dearly. I spent from about 10 to 15 in and out of the care system at different points at nine years of age I was introduced to social worker and by the time I was leaving primary school, I was in the care system. So yeah I think probably, if I'm really honest with you, this is probably really difficult to have a conversation about, because it's been 30 years of my life and with lack of those particular connections and relationships. I lived in Kilmore, a tiny wee village in a place of safety, and I never seen another member of my family for probably around nine months. It was never considered that it was important that those relationships be maintained. The fact that I was a young carer and the loss and the grief that was involved in that and the processing of that. So I thought I was just a really bad child and that I wasn't loved, and that these relationships had been taken away because I was bad and so I didn't really understand and I didn't know how to process these things. Like I say I'm in my 40s now, and I haven't had relationships or connection with my brothers for around 30 years. We've touched in and out of each other's lives, but we're strangers and we don't know each other. We haven't been connected through our recovery or we haven't been connected through trials and tribulations or celebrations. And I'm a mum, I've got two daughters and they've never known their uncles and potentially their children. So I would really just ask that the consideration of those relationships at the point of decision making is really, really, really there at the forefront of your head, because it's really difficult to make decisions and sometimes to know

what the best for a child is but I know from my own situation, my own circumstances, I have missed out on so much and so much connection and so much relationship and so much love and so much joy and so much probably trials and tribulations - because I don't think sibling relationships are always that seamless anyway, no matter who you are, and what's happened in your life. But I would have really liked the opportunity to have those connections grow and for someone to just say listen, I think that these relationships are important and we need to maintain those. So I want to thank you for your time and I would ask again that as an adult in hindsight and 30 years later about the loss of those relationships and those connections and the emptiness that that has for me and for my girls, and I would just ask that those relationships are held really precious and, yeah that hindsight and something around 10 years 20 years 30 years and 40 years time is that the decisions have been made around those families and those children and those connections and those are kept. So thank you so much for listening. I'm really grateful that you're doing what you're doing and in line with The Promise and the changes to legislation. I think that we're going to definitely make differences and make changes and we need to do that we really need to do that because it's not only the cost to our communities and it's the human cost to those particular lives and not having those connections. So thank you so much for your time and take care, be bold, be brave and remember just trust. Thank you

That's a fantastic video and I'm sure you would agree with me that it's very powerful actually that this the fact that she's talking about an event that happened over 30 years ago and we're still talking about it now and it shows how much of a huge area that this is and it's an ongoing area that needs to be addressed and one of the things about Stand Up For Siblings at the moment is marking how far we've come, but also how far we've got to go and that's partly what these webinars are about this week. So I'm going to hand you over now to Hazel.

Thank you, Kate. Our collaboration with Stand Up For Siblings started in 2019 when Christine Jones came along to present the findings of their research at one of our local training events. From there we were invited to work with the organisation to look at how we could move that research into practice and finally, in 2021, we were able to embark on a test for change, the aims of which were twofold and so firstly we aim to raise awareness of the subject matter within our own panel community, and secondly to gather detailed information through the completion of a questionnaire by the panel members themselves to the barriers that were preventing discussions taking place within hearings. Over a six week period 86 surveys were completed which represented roughly about 58% of hearings that had taken place during that time so it really did provide us with a great snapshot of the challenges that panel members were facing. The findings showed that in 29% of hearings, social work reports did not advise whether the child or young person had brothers or sisters, and in 56% of hearings

the views of the child around contact had not been included in the report and in 28% of cases no discussions around contact between brother and sisters had taken place within hearings. That really was for a variety of reasons, however, clearly there was still work for us to do and as an area support type team, we took some steps to try and address those issues. So we created a multi-agency group comprising the four local authority social work team leaders, SCRA, and myself representing CHS, with a view to agreeing a consistent approach to reporting which would allow panel members to have the information they needed to enable those important discussions. Now, we are very lucky that we had agreement from the local authorities to implement a relationship mapping template, or genogram, which visually sets out the relationships pertinent to the young person which would then be submitted within the hearing papers along with a more detailed report. Our local project team designed and delivered bespoke awareness raising sessions for panel members in collaboration with SCRA and social work practitioners which was a huge success. It was really well attended by panel members, reporters and also social workers. We rolled out the CHS training module which was also shared with partner organizations and today this module has had a 90% completion rate within our own local panel community. This figure will, of course, vary across the country and we recorded some interviews with individuals who were able to share their personal and poignant stories about being separated from their brothers and sisters and the lasting impact this has had on them. One of these was a video by Sylvia Douglas which has just been shown

to you today and I'm sure you find it to be as impactful as I did when I first watched it. It certainly puts all the work we're doing into context. Now Sylvia kindly gave her permission to allow us to share the video today so I'd like to just extend my gratitude to Sylvia for doing that. So enough from me, I would now like to hand over to Laura who is a serving panel member and at the very front line and she will do a far better account of the challenges that she and our fellow panel members face than I ever could. So I'm going to hand over to Laura.

Thanks Hazel, So as mentioned there are some challenges that these panel members face, both before and after the change in legislation. So the time given to us for each hearing is 45 minutes from start to finish and often there can be more than one child whose circumstances we are required to discuss in a hearing. This is due to the larger family demographics in our area and as part of the discussion we need to discuss several factors of which contact continues to take up the most time and that's before we add in the discussion of brother and sister contact. Now whilst this is an absolutely essential discussion to have, we also need to ensure that the hearing's not dominated by this discussion and that everyone has their chance to have their say as part of the hearing. We may need to discount and consider difficult family relationships. It's very likely there will be family members and attendants that have not been in contact for some time, or it could be that there are very contentious relationships to be managed. So these discussions need to be handled

very carefully and sensitively and it may be that we are required to manage tensions and allow everyone the opportunity to speak unhindered. Now the reports we receive can vary in quality and without full information provided, it can be very difficult for the panel to have a full discussion and make a decision on the day. This could lead to hearings being deferred and to allow time to receive and digest the information. It's only fair to the child or young person in their family that the panel are fully up to speed before making any decisions and as mentioned, with only 45 minutes, a panel can't always be brought up to date on all information within that time frame. Previously we were also slightly limited in some of the family dynamics, for example, and we've had hearings where we maybe being asked if we could be given an update on a sibling's situation, but the previous legislation didn't allow for that to be obtained. But moving forward, the changes to legislation will now allow more detailed reports and the use of the genograms will be very helpful in enabling us to have a better understanding of family dynamics. Contact arrangements, you know, need to be supported - what we need to consider when making the difficult decision on contact is whether or not it's feasible and/or realistic for the child. There may be occasions where brothers and sisters cannot be placed together, based on the specific needs of each individual child. So, along with trying to determine whether it's in the best interest for the contact to proceed, we need to identify whether this can be facilitated, we need to identify where it can take place and what does the child's week look like and whether the contact requires to be supported or supervised. And finally where the

child is not in attendance at the hearing, and if the child's been excused, we need to be confident as a panel that we're capturing the child's views appropriately. We would give consideration as to whether the child has an advocate a safeguarder and whether either should be appointed and or needed or whether there are other ways in which the child's views could be obtained. However, unless we are confident the child's views are represented we would not be able to make a decision and the hearing may need to be deferred to obtain that information. So on that note of the challenges I'm going to pass you back to Hazel

Hazel you're on mute sorry

I was in full swing as well - had to happen to me. I'm just thanking Laura for her input there and we're going to move on to the opportunities that the legislation has presented us with, but I just wanted to provide you with a local perspective before that. Now as at July 2019 there were 830 children and young people looked after away from home across Central and West Lothian. Now we know from Gillian's research that 8 out of 10 of these children and young people will have a brother or sister, so that roughly equates to around 665 children. Of these 665 children, again from the research, it has been shown that 70 of these may potentially become estranged from their brothers or sisters. In reality that means that only 200 of the original 665 children and young people could potentially grow up to have an ongoing relationship with their brothers and sisters so

that's a whopping 465 children who could potentially become estranged from their brothers and sisters, which we know can impact on their short and long-term relationships, well-being and resilience. These statistics clearly demonstrate how impactful the legislation can be if we all get it right, and I'd now like to pass over to my colleague Lorraine who will take us through the opportunities that the legislation now presents.

Okay thanks for that Hazel as you've shown there's now a real opportunity to make an impact and this new legislation presents us with opportunities to change our panel practice and hopefully, make a difference in the lives of children and young people. So what are some of the areas that panel members will be more mindful of going forward? Well obviously more emphasis on keeping siblings together. The background research now available to panel members has increased awareness on the potential impact of brothers and sisters not living together and this along with the mandatory and the local training they have offered has highlighted the responsibility on panel members to explore fully the options for keeping brothers and sisters together. And so we need to look carefully at the options of keeping brothers and sisters together so panel members have long been aware of the problems related to identifying placements that would allow brothers and sisters to live together in the one household, and within our locality area in particular there is a higher number of larger family groupings. Because we are now much more aware of the impact of separation, panel members will now want to ask more

questions during a hearing and promote more discussions around other options for accommodation such as kinship care, for example, to try to increase the chances of keeping brothers and sisters together. We'll also get more consideration to sibling contact as well as parental contact, so before the changes to the act it would be fair to say that the emphasis on contact in hearings centred on parental contact, and the legislation now puts an obligation on panel members when deciding on what's in the best interests of the child and young person, to ensure that brothers and sisters are equally considered and are allowed time together as well as with their parents and there's no more opportunity to re-establish contact between brothers and sisters who do not live together so the new legislation now allows a sister or a brother, not the subject of the hearing, to communicate directly with panel members to share their views on how important it is for them to spend time with their brothers and sisters. They can do this by attending a hearing in person or submitting a statement to a panel and the panel members must consider the request and make a decision on whether a contact direction is required. This personal input will be invaluable and more meaningful to panel members than a third-party statement in a report. The change will require panel members to ask more questions in a hearing so for example asking the child or young person, in relation to their brothers and sisters, who haven't they been seeing that they would like to spend time with, how important is it to them and do they have any concerns or worries about this, and asking a sibling who has requested to see their brothers and sisters what's the

reason for the request, how they see that working and what they hope the benefits to them all will be, and also asking of social work for more information on family composition and dynamics, questions of the genograms, details of any legal orders that may affect a contact direction, any risks related to bringing the family together. So where panel members think that a contact direction is appropriate, they want to consider what type of contact is appropriate. So we all know that the pandemic has presented us with more opportunity to be creative and now we have more options open to us, contact no longer needs to be in a physical space and virtual contact is now more commonplace and young people are more familiar with virtual contact and some are more comfortable with it. Finally panel members may find that they need to have more conversations about other family members so, again prior to the new act, panel members would not routinely discuss brothers and sisters accommodated separately from the subject of the hearing however if panel members are to fully consider the effects of separation on a child and young person and to protect them from long-term estrangement, it's necessary to overcome the barriers to discussing and fully understanding long-term implications for brothers and sisters who do not live together. We can no longer be hesitant in asking questions in their hearing and seeking the views of the child and young person to ensure that we fully explore the relationships between brothers and sisters and to ensure that this is an important part of hearing room practice. An example of this would be the subject of the hearing, maybe a young baby with older brothers and sisters living

separately, previous discussions would tend to concentrate on two areas and that was keeping the child safe and protected and parental contact. But at that moment in time and however with our knowledge of the research we also now need to question what other relationships might be more important to a young child 10 or 20 years further down the line. So I would like to now hand you back to Laura who will talk a bit more about evidencing our improvements.

Thanks Lorraine, so in Central and West Lothian we're determined to evidence how the legislation is embedding into practice and we're currently working with SCRA and local authority partners in the collection of data to enable us to do this. In addition we are working with Quarriers with a view to gaining an insight from children and young persons themselves on how the legislation is working for them. So lots to be done for us. I think we may have run over our time allocation and so I'd like to bring this to an end but I hope you found our presentation to be helpful and on behalf of Hazel, Lorraine and myself I would really like to thank you all for listening.

Thank you so much to Laura and Lorraine and to Hazel for a really interesting input, and it's great to hear how Children's Hearing Scotland has been responding to the changes in the legislation. I'm going to very quickly hand over to Louise Henry from West Lothian. Thank you.

Thank you, Kate and thank you to everybody so far. I think bringing this alive is quite something. I'm going to attempt to share my screen. Hazel you made me feel more human earlier on, being on mute as we press all these buttons, so we'll see if we can share this and then you can let me know if you can see them. How does that look? Good stuff. So I'm just going to introduce us. It is me that's speaking I am going to make reference and this will become clearer, that John Traynor from Renfrewshire Council it seems that I think that's probably reflective of there'll be people in this virtual room there'll be other people that we're holding in our minds as we're kind of thinking about some of these things and other colleagues that are not necessarily here but John is one of them, and that will make more sense when we kind of get through. So partly trying to connect we thought about some of what does the research tell us and what some of the practice is happening within Children's Hearings Scotland and this was really a kind of question about how do we join the dots within a local authority context about some of the things that we're thinking about. So both in the context of The Promise which we have made reference to and also we've referred to the Children Scotland Act which came into force in July. How are we responding to that? So there are questions that are surfacing - sometimes more questions than answers - and trying to think about what some of the challenges are that are identified, what are some of the opportunities, how might we respond and there'll be some stuff and some other stuff if that sounds fair. So thinking about The Promise, this might feel very familiar to some people not so familiar to others, but

the promise was published in February 2020. We then very quickly put into the pandemic but in 31st of March this year, 2021, The Promise Scotland team published plan 21-24. And there's very clear themes that we began to think about in terms of brothers and sisters - both about what constitutes a good childhood - how do we make that real, but also thinking about the fundamentals - and that's already surfaced today in terms of thinking about some of the language. I was really interested in listening Gillian talk about actually we're trying to find a language about how to describe those relationships. Thinking about the right space stuff and that's very clearly now within legislation, as we've referred to, thinking through both about keeping brothers and sisters together when it's safe to do so, in the language of The Promise, but we also now have a legal duty and where that's not possible. However there's close proximity and how we're keeping those relationships and connections, which is some of the questions Sylvia was asking us to hold true to, and that really connects about what matters to children and families. So back to more questions - I have been very gifted anyway so then there is a huge group who have come together from all different agencies all different levels of the system, both practitioners and managers and have really formed some really good questions about what we need to be doing to make this real to both keep The Promise and support our siblings. And some of that has been about how are we really understanding relationships in terms of what's around? If you think about some of the mental models when we've been trying to understand relationships we've really focused on that parent child relationship and

that's not to say that's absolutely not relevant but it's how we see things in a wider sense and further to that when we've done assessment, we've often done it later on down the line and if we're honest probably thinking more about separation than together so if we're thinking about developmental, incremental understanding of connection, how do we do that from a really early point for our children when we know that? And further to that, relationships grow over time so actually do we get into a place where we make decisions that become fixed, or actually are we brave enough to think about different stages of childhood, so there are some of the questions that are beginning to rise along with bits of we gather together bits of information but when you actually think how we're holding that are we losing things in the middle of it all which is some of the bits Hazel and her team are connecting to, about how we're giving that information to make really good decisions and does that also reflect about what's meaningful for children. Do those align? Decision making what's meaningful to children? So there's a rights-based question lots of rights-based questions that have come up in terms of those kind of bits about how do you balance because the children might be really different stages and different things so how do we balance all those different rights within groups for children that are around and also children young people have asked really good questions of us in terms of actually I might want a different type of delay it's not always about being together there are times I might need information about what's happening or how do we get involved and that also changes over time. There's also a rights-based question about what

information and materials are we providing to children so the national guidance has come. It's how we're actually giving that to children and young people to understand what their rights are. And in positions where children haven't felt their rights are upheld what's our redress system for that? How do we respond when rights are not responded to? And if actually all siblings are to be included in decision making and it's back to what Gillian was describing about the nature of those relationships, whether there have been disconnect or separation, or not knowing of each other, how do we actually then support that to be included in any information that's given to decision making settings and that might include siblings who've not actually had any relationship with workers. So if a worker appeared, practitioner appeared, and actually the child didn't know them are they the ones who are best placed to have those conversations about what relationships they would like to have. So there's lots of questions coming up about children's rights and that's also a space question, lots of space questions in terms of what spaces do we have for brothers and sisters to be together that's come up really strongly locally what would that be around and what would that look like and how are we supporting families? So thinking in the context of The Promise the description of families as families of all nature - families of origin, kinship families, fostering families, adoptive families, how are we really putting scaffolding around families to support the relationships of the children holding the hand of those who hold the hands of our children. We need to think that through. The use of technology is interesting because that's come up and although none of us would

have ever wished for a pandemic to arrive, what is the learning from that that's taking place about what's worked? There are maybe bits that we would leave behind, there are other bits that might have worked for our children, so we need to learn from that in building those in. There's also this question about caring understanding for children we quite often talk about life story and that appears for children in their plan but when is the right moment so sometimes there can be an anxiety from adults to explain what things are going on and sometimes that's maybe easier just to leave to one side. But if we never have those conversations our children will never really understand or have a coherent sense of self or of their relationships, unless we're having those discussions. So we need to support people to have these really skilled conversations and that comes back to what space we would be creating for practitioners and managers to be able to actually explore some of those things safely, so they can do that safely with children. The other strong question that came up last month which was a really good one on many fronts was back to this bit about reunification. These two are kind of connected quite often - our children if they've not been supported through their childhood may look for their sibling later on in life, but may feel more unprepared for that and actually even that assumption that we make about, because you're a brother or a sister both together that you will know what a sibling relationship looks like. How are we really having those conversations to support that understanding when there's been different experiences before. So lots of opportunities and this is where John will start appearing in the virtual room.

Within our group we're having different kind of conversations which feels a gift. We are really thinking about what matters to children and families, so when you think about The Promise and we're really trying to think about what language are we describing for those relationships, we're really trying to act on children's rights and I know there's been a judgment this morning that we need to think about and process and some of those rights are actually already written in to the Children's Scotland Act. It's how we see that in a wider way - how are we mapping relationships for children? I mean that in two ways - partly connected to the work in terms of the children's individual maps but actually what we're trying to do is really understand our population for all our brothers and sisters and where they are at the moment and where they would like to be, and what that would look like and we're also really trying to shift this thinking about, rather than those immediate decisions that we are often in places of trying to think about safety, it's actually trying to hold in mind what are the lifelong implications? And that's been one of the themes this morning. So where was I going to, in May as I'm looking thinking, how do we make this real? Legislation's on its way, it's coming up the hill in July. How do we make The Promise real? I have a fabulous practitioner in West Lothian, she's not only got her ear to the ground she's got supersonic hearing, who sent me a message to say do you know what Renfrewshire is doing? and I said no I'd love to find out, which led to a conversation with John. John is the head of childcare and criminal justice in Renfrewshire and also the chief social work officer. And I was really struck that it had gone to a committee in

Renfrewshire in May about a policy. And the policy was keeping brothers and sisters together. It's the first policy of its kind in Scotland, so I messaged John saying could we have a conversation because I'm really curious to learn about how you got here, and John described the story about actually the champion's board had undertaken a survey with care experience young people. This was the highest priority identified, those brothers and sisters being together and you'll see that out of the young people who responded, 61% had three or more brothers and sisters, and 30% had five or more, so while 82% said that they've experienced separation 82% also said they didn't get to see their brothers and sisters as often as they'd like. So that was strong stuff and Renfrewshire then thought how are we going to do this? And what they decided was they were going to do something in terms of co-design, and that was thinking through how actually could they make a commitment about brothers and sisters being together, but also being really clear when it wasn't safe to do so or couldn't help, what this response was going to be. And therefore local authorities have designed a family time plan which would reflect how siblings would be supported and stay connected, and the bits in terms of when that doesn't happen, it would be really clear that John would be aware about that. So I think the really interesting stuff in terms of thinking about the future is about when you think about what Renfrewshire has done about what is possible and John has said he's more than willing to have a conversation with anybody who's interested. He also did a fabulous article with Marianne which is on the stand up for siblings website, and if there's any questions, I'm aware these times are

kind of short but if you would like to get in touch it's always good to have a conversation with anybody who's around. Thank you, Kate.

Thank you, Louise. As ever a fantastic presentation from yourself, and thank you so much for giving up time from another event that you're at, to pop into our event and then go back to your own. So that's much appreciated, and I'm sure lots of people have lots to say in their groups. So we'll swiftly move on to Shona.

Hi there, thanks Kate. I'll try and be as quick as I can so we can get on to some discussion groups. So, really the policy intention of the legislation was to raise the profile of the importance of sibling relationships, putting these duties into legislation with the aim of influencing and improving the practice, but fundamentally it was about ensuring that relationships were maintained for the child at the centre of the hearing. So how is it operating in practice? Well this wouldn't work without engagement from all parties would it, and we've already seen that today and there is no doubt there's a focus on this in our organization. If you ask any reporter right now apart from the COVID aspect of things they will be saying which siblings do I need to invite? Which siblings are there? And I need to look at participation individuals. And I do not apologize for that. That is a major, major achievement I think, for the legislation that that is where we're at, and that is what reporters are spending a lot of time exploring at the moment. But we must recognize the work being done by social work in meticulously preparing these genograms. I think it was

Stand Up For Siblings, actually that first of all and gave us this this map and which Hazel and her team have developed and issued across the country as well. So social work however are preparing them, or they're completing sibling contact forms across the country and that allows SCRA reporters to identify quickly who the relevant children are that should be invited to the hearing, but also it allows the panel members in their preparation to be able to identify quickly how many siblings the child has and what the interaction is between them all. But that's only a little part - that's the practicalities if you like - and really what we're actually seeing in practice is that the information coming is much more than that. We are having a richness of information about sibling relationships coming through, a real richness that comes from reports that comes from social work reports or safeguards reports. It comes from the questions by the panel members and it comes from the siblings themselves as well as the child. In relation to social work reports, what we're seeing in reports coming through more and more often, and we're only two months in remember, is a real richness of how those children react with each other and this actually might impact on where the children are placed. This might impact on the decisions of the panel. This is work that's probably always been done but it's not been captured in reports before, and so we're now having information that was not known about before that the hearings are now receiving and its allowing them to make more .. make fuller, better decisions, I think, because of that information. I think Lorraine earlier mentioned that this is also allowing more questions by panel members. I

think that's correct and certainly what we've seen so far is more questioning about the contact between children, or what time they're spending with each other, but I think panel members are not shy to be using that power that they have got to ask those questions.

If I give you an example of a case that started on the 29th of July, three days after this legislation came into force, a hearing was looking at a case of a little boy of seven who stayed with his mum, had a big sister who was in residential care, but the wee boy wanted to move to stay with his father. Now his big sister was 15 and there was a real concern from the panel that the boy might lose touch with his big sister if they moved the child to the father, so what the hearing did was they appointed a safeguarder and one of the remits of the safeguarder was to consider where the child was to live, but in addition to that what arrangement should be made for that child still to have a relationship with the big sister. Now that's new - we didn't have this before July. We didn't have those conversations those asks of a safeguard are particularly. So a few weeks later we then had the hearing, the subsequent hearing, so it's great because although it's just been two months we've managed to see the end result of this case, which was that the information that the panel had which came from social work and the safeguarder was that the seven-year-old wasn't particularly bothered about whether he saw his big sister or not, but the big sister who was able to come to the hearing as well was able to put into context what the

relationship was. So in fact what happened was that the seven-year-old then moved from his mother's house to his father's house as a place of residence, but the contact with his mother was at the very same time as his big sister would go home, but with a measure put into that supervision order to make sure that happened, because it is a half-sister so it may not have been enforced if that had not happened. Now the reports themselves didn't come up with that as a solution, but it was the panel members in considering the whole circumstances that realized that that would be the best situation for the child at the centre, but also for the other sibling. So I think that's an example of already how the system is working, by working together. The other cases that we're seeing coming through are quite tricky cases, so you've got a case where the children, the brother and sister, are quite close in age but they don't really get on so up till now they haven't really been seeing each other, but the panel members have been able to identify that there is a need for these children to get on a bit better. So, what they were asking the social work to do was come up with a plan as to how to promote the contact between those children and to make that improve. It's never straightforward is it? Because the social worker came up with a plan that involved the school and the nursery working together and they were not initially willing to do that, but because of the intervention of the panel those things will hopefully move forward and improve around that. The same applies I think for children where there is a split family and perhaps one child is not being looked after by the local authority but the hearing are keen for the looked after child to have

contact with the other sibling. Those are challenging cases and really what we're finding is that the social work department are having to go and really work out creatively how to promote that contact, by working with the other child or their parent to really highlight the importance of that sibling relationship. So those are really tricky situations but they are starting to be getting dealt with through the hearings. The other challenge I think is that parents themselves, the relevant persons for the child at centre of the hearing, are perhaps struggling a little bit when they hear that the child wants to speak to their brother and sister, was to see their brother and sister more often perhaps than they want to see their parent. So I think that's something that is going to come through thereafter. Now in addition to the reports bringing richness of information and obviously the questioning of the panel members, the siblings themselves now that those qualifying siblings that are able to come to the hearing or give their views, are really making an impact. We see the one example I can give you is of an 11 year old girl. She's one of three siblings and all the siblings were and in separate - two to them and one placement and one in another placement, but the eleven-year-old gave her views in writing into the reporter and the reporter read them and said "Oh, that's some really adult words that child's using. I'm not sure if that child has actually written those views." But the child came along to the hearing, a very articulate 11 year old, who was very able to give a sense of where she was and what her relationship was in relation to her siblings. The reporter described it as the words coming alive and the reporter was left with a real clear sense that this

child was one of a unit of three and which wasn't really evident in the same way from the reports, but that was the sense that she brought to the hearing and she was able to give a real clear identity of who her siblings were and where she fitted in amongst all of that. So all this this richness of information is really positive and certainly the initial signs of the legislation working in this way hopefully can be seen as a positive. I don't want to take up too much time because we're going into discussion groups, but what I think is also evident that the panel members are really are doing an amazing job because they're having to juggle the balance between the child at the centre but also young siblings, sometimes coming into hearings and hearing difficult asks, I suppose, but they're very much up for the challenge. I think what has really helped is that some of the younger siblings - so we have had some younger siblings coming through the hearings - they are coming with foster carers who are helping and supporting them to give their views or advocacy workers and I think we need to recognize that these siblings are children too. So it might not be their hearing but really it's an anxious time for them as well. There will be I think the next steps I think will be for perhaps the panel members to get more confident about asking probing questions, asking more probing questions about why the child or why are the children not living together, and asking more probing questions of what the plans are and to support those children. We'll see more information I think coming through from the reports about the views of siblings. It's been early days around that but I think more of them will come through in the reports. I think early indications are that

there's probably a renewed enthusiasm about what makes a good hearing, who should be there and what information they're giving and also a real developing understanding of the importance of the sibling relationship for the children.

Hazel has done a follow-up survey, actually, with panel members and I think the indications so far are that the information coming in is getting better the genograms templates and the information coming is very helpful - full of relevant detail. There's better reports coming in, there has been participation and also I suppose more importantly, I think and what she's finding is that 98% of the people that she has surveyed are indicating that the continuing work with all the organizations to promote this is really helpful for the decision makers trying to make the right decision for the child at the centre. So I'll just stop there, Kate, if that's okay.

Thank you so much Shona. It's always great to hear these examples and, as I say, that that's in the chat as well people really appreciate hearing examples of practice decisions that are going on within children's panels and bringing to life the benefits and the challenges of what's been happening since the legislation came into force actually.