



Report

Review of Performance and Effectiveness

**Office of the Guardian for Children and Young
People**

August 2010

Introduction

CPD BIZ Consulting is pleased to present a report of the review of the Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People (GCYP) undertaken between May and August 2010.

Purpose

A review of the performance and effectiveness of GCYP has been undertaken to inform the development of the current GCYP planning cycle. The review was informed by the views of people with an interest in and/or who are affected by GCYP work. The review sought to:

1. Assess performance and impact, in terms of:
 - What GCYP set out to do in 2004
 - The extent to which that plan has been achieved
 - What impact the work has had, and on whom
2. Determine the best things GCYP can do in the future to make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people in care

Methodology

The review had four main components – research, targeted interviews, focus groups and meetings and a widely distributed survey.

1. The research was a review of the 2007 GCYP Strategic Plan and earlier GCYP planning documents to provide a sound base for dialogue with stakeholders, seeking to draw from them their experience of GCYP and analysing their input against the Key Result Areas of the GCYP Strategic Plan
2. Targeted interviews were conducted with nine key stakeholders from government and non-government sectors, including managers of key agencies and members of relevant Boards, committees and forums.

Each was asked their views about:

- The effectiveness of the GCYP
- What impact GCYP's work has had
- Whether there are any aspects of work GCYP had not undertaken which the stakeholder think GCYP should have done.

Finally, each was asked to identify what she/he thought would be the best things GCYP could do in the future to make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people in care?

3. Focus groups were convened for young people in care, alternative care providers, Families SA staff and the Information Sharing Guidelines Steering Committee. Two meetings were facilitated with the GCYP team. They all discussed the same questions that were put to the interviewees.
4. A survey with multiple choice responses and space for comments was subsequently devised to gather wider input to the review. The multiple choice responses were developed from the information gathered at interviews, focus groups and meetings. This enabled recipients to complete the survey within a few minutes. There were 95 respondents to the survey.

The survey utilized four part rating scales for many questions: for example, None, Little, Some, Significant. This approach meant that respondents chose between dissatisfaction to one or other degree (None, Little) or one of two degrees of satisfaction (Some, Significant). That is, there was no "mid point" or "Average" rating available.¹

¹ Some respondents commented that they indicated "no effect/influence" on specific areas because there was no option to select "do not know".

Findings

The review found that GCYP has achieved in all areas of its goals from 2004, and specifically its plan for 2007-10. In so doing, GCYP has had a profound "*influence for good*" - it has been a voice for children and young people in care which has been heard.

For the purpose of reporting, direct quotes from participants provided the "best" words to describe the reviewer's findings. Where used, the quotes represent the sentiments of many people consulted in the review.

Looking Back

Without exception, all participants in the review who are external to GCYP, identified that GCYP has played a positive, influential, "*unique and powerful*"² role for children and young people in care since its establishment.

GCYP is known and highly valued as an independent, fair and effective advocate, influencer and investigator for, and on behalf of, children and young people in care. GCYP takes a partnership approach, engaging positively with stakeholders to effect change. Specifically GCYP:

- Provides leadership for all those engaged with children and young people in care
 - The Guardian's office leads by example, combining a "*balanced and principled approach with being pragmatic*" and the Guardian is acknowledged for leadership characterised by a "highly professional, diligent and committed" approach
 - Staff of GCYP have initiated, collaborated and supported others to focus on and achieve better outcomes for children and young people in care.
 - The GCYP team being at the "*leading edge in their practice*", positive, "*lively, colourful, attractive*", engaging and good to be associated with.
- Raises the profile of and for children and young people in care with workers and service managers, politicians and the public
- Influences policy, practice and subsequently the services provided by staff and managers in agencies and strengthens collaboration between them, including "*connecting people and connecting influence*"
- Gives young people "a voice" as well as profile by modelling inclusion and setting expectations of inclusion of young people in decisions that affect them
- Manages with limited but highly skilled personnel to produce a range of high quality products, services and outcomes both as required by others and proactively; "GCYP punches way above its weight".

Looking Ahead

The review also found that stakeholders had consistent views about the focus they believe GCYP should consider in the future. In particular:

- Continue to be an independent voice for children and young people in care who are a vulnerable group:
 - Speak for children and young people "free from constraints" from both government and non-government sectors
 - Continue to give children and young people in care a voice
 - Keep the profile raised of children and young people in care and
 - Raise public awareness of the rights of children and young people to be "safe and protected from abuse".

² All quotes are from participants in interviews, meetings and/or surveys, excluding GCYP staff

- “Keep listening to kids”:
 - Keep on letting kids know “they are not alone, someone cares and there are others in care”
 - Take their concerns and wishes seriously
 - Provide relevant information, so that children and young people “feel supported and understood”
 - Meet and talk with children and young people in care in regional areas.
- “Advocate decisively”
 - Advocate for and monitor high and consistent standards of care “that address both needs and aspirations.” In particular:
 - Quality contact with case workers
 - Continuity of worker eg establishing teams of workers rather than one
 - Ensuring young person's voice is heard in case reviews
 - Facilitate wider sign up to and implementation of the Charter of Rights
- Focus on specific groups to:
 - Engage with children and young people in foster care
 - Continue to ensure conditions and practices “that safeguard human rights” in residential care settings
 - “Consider how well the juvenile detention system is working”, especially for very young offenders
 - Increase engagement with children and young people in regional areas
 - Increase the focus on children on remand – eg advocate on bail practices
 - Facilitate improvements in the placement of babies - “GCYP could assist in driving change around collaboration and cooperation” between agencies and Families SA
 - Focus on the care of Aboriginal children and young people “to see how the system of care services them and the wider community”
- Provide information and support for service providers
 - Continue to provide information to assist people to better meet the needs and “respond to the rights” of children and young people in care
- Monitor
 - Monitor outcomes for children and young people in care
- Engage communities
 - Facilitate better involvement with community for children and young people in care – “help the community understand how ... much support and understanding they need in order to overcome disadvantages and hurt, that they have had no control over.”
 - Develop community partnerships which build capacity in the community
 - Facilitate engagement of communities in “ways they could help and intervene.” For example:
 - Ensuring access to amenities such as internet, sport and transport
 - Providing opportunities for work experience
 - Providing employment opportunities for children and young people in and post care

- Facilitate family connections
 - “*Raise the bar*” on the efforts to connect/reconnect with family including grandparents and siblings
- Focus on children and young people leaving/transitioning from care, **preparing for independence**
 - Promote the need for work readiness, good decision making skills and financial literacy
 - Monitor and report on the experiences of young people leaving care
 - Review the opportunities for contact to continue post care, between young people and workers

Achievements against Strategic Plan

In 2007, GCYP developed a Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010, following extensive consultation with key stakeholders, with statutory functions as the Key Result Areas (KRAs). For this review and with the input from consultation participants, including the GCYP team, service providers, care providers and young people with experience of care, an analysis of achievements was made against the goals and strategies proposed in the GCYP Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010.

Achievements were identified in all areas of the work - highlights only are provided below:

Key Result Areas	Key Achievements
<p>Promote</p> <p>To promote the best interests of children under the guardianship, or in the custody, of the Minister, and in particular those in alternative care</p>	<p>Charter of Rights</p> <p>Introduction of Oog, symbol for children in care</p> <p>'Being in care' product range, including comic books, backpacks, soft toys, and contact cards</p> <p>Promotion of good information sharing for early intervention through the Information Sharing Guidelines</p> <p>Checklist for child-sensitive record-keeping</p> <p>Services Bank to promote and distribute goods and services to children</p> <p>Promotion of high quality contact between social workers and children</p> <p>Modelling participation of children and young people, as evidenced in the Youth Participation Strategy</p> <p>Communication through website and regular newsletters, bulletins, media comment and presentations</p>

Key Result Areas	Key Achievements
<p>Advocate</p> <p>To act as an advocate for the interests of children under the guardianship, or in the custody, of the Minister and, in particular, for any such child who has suffered, or is alleged to have suffered, sexual abuse.</p>	<p>Individual advocacy (141 children in 2009-10)</p> <p>Monitoring and advocacy for children who are involved in investigations of allegations of sexual abuse</p> <p>Replacement of the Magill Youth Training Centre</p> <p>Charter of Rights enshrined in legislation</p> <p>Advocacy for implementation of recommended changes following inquiries, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Prevention of sexual abuse in care o Rehabilitation programs in youth justice o Children in temporary accommodation o Children missing from residential care o Safe-keeping orders o Improving educational outcomes o Use of physical restraint in residential settings
<p>Monitor</p> <p>To monitor the circumstances of children under the guardianship, or in the custody, of the Minister.</p>	<p>Introduction of framework for reporting</p> <p>Publication of population group trend data</p> <p>Audits of annual reviews (10.8% in 2009-10)</p> <p>Visits to residential and secure care settings (79 visits in 2009-10)</p> <p>Review of safety records in secure care</p> <p>Field consultations with agencies state wide</p> <p>Report on the Wellbeing of Children and Young People in Care</p>
<p>Advise</p> <p>To provide advice to the Minister on the quality of the provision of care for children under the guardianship, or in the custody of, the Minister and on whether the children's needs are being met.</p>	<p>Advice to the Minister and others on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Prevention of sexual abuse o Good quality residential care o High quality rehabilitation services in youth justice o Use of physical restraint of children and young people o Improving educational outcomes o Alternative care planning o Physical condition of Magill Youth Training Centre o Intensive family support services o Youth justice legislative changes o Mental health services

Key Result Areas	Key Achievements
<p>Inquire</p> <p>To inquire into, and provide advice to the Minister in relation to, systemic reform necessary to improve the quality of care provided for children in alternative care.</p>	<p>Formal inquiries undertaken on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Prevention of sexual abuse of children in care o Children in motels o Children missing from residential care o Improving educational outcomes o Review of programs in the youth training centres o Safe-keeping orders o Quality contact between children and their social workers o Use of physical restraint in residential facilities
<p>Investigate</p> <p>To investigate and report to the Minister on matters referred to the Guardian by the Minister.</p>	<p>One investigation as requested by the Minister on secure therapeutic facilities and safe-keeping orders</p>

Summary of Interviews, Meetings and Groups

A positive response to the effectiveness and impact of the work of the GCYP was found throughout the consultation process.

The effectiveness was identified in particular as changing the agenda for children and young people in care with few additional resources, and the short timeframe in which GCYP has operated.

Impact was seen in the improved outcomes children and young people are experiencing, as many who have responsibility for them change their planning, practices and attitudes.

GCYP is credited by stakeholders for having raised the profile of children in care, changing the language used about them and the attitudes of service planners and providers:

- They are no longer “wards of the state – now children and young people in care”
- *“GCYP has modelled how to talk to young people”*
- Workers are listening and gaining “insight into kids that they can’t get in case files”

Children and young people are now seen as “*rights holders*”. GCYP has “*made sure that the voices of young people have been heard.*” Stakeholders cite the Charter and participation in annual reviews and reports as key examples.

These factors have influenced how the children and young people see themselves; they “*feel empowered*”:

- *“GCYP is responsible for young people feeling more like they belong”*
- *“Young people feel heard”*

The GCYP team are viewed with respect and appreciation for their partnership approach and the wide impact of their work and the valued leadership of the Guardian acknowledged:

- *“Most organisations which have been involved with children and young people will have been impacted by the GCYP”*
- There is more cooperation and connection between agencies dealing with children and young people
- With limited resources, GCYP has “*really made clear and tackled issues without causing major conflict - a great balancing act*”

Summary of Survey Findings

An online survey was conducted in conjunction with stakeholder interviews and focus groups. The survey was sent out to the GCYP subscriber group and participants had one week to complete the seven questions.

Response rate was approximately 20% with 95 responses received out of a possible 500.

The highest percentage of respondents was employees in Families SA (36.8%), employees of non-government agencies (21.1%) and health services employees (11.6%) and others as below:

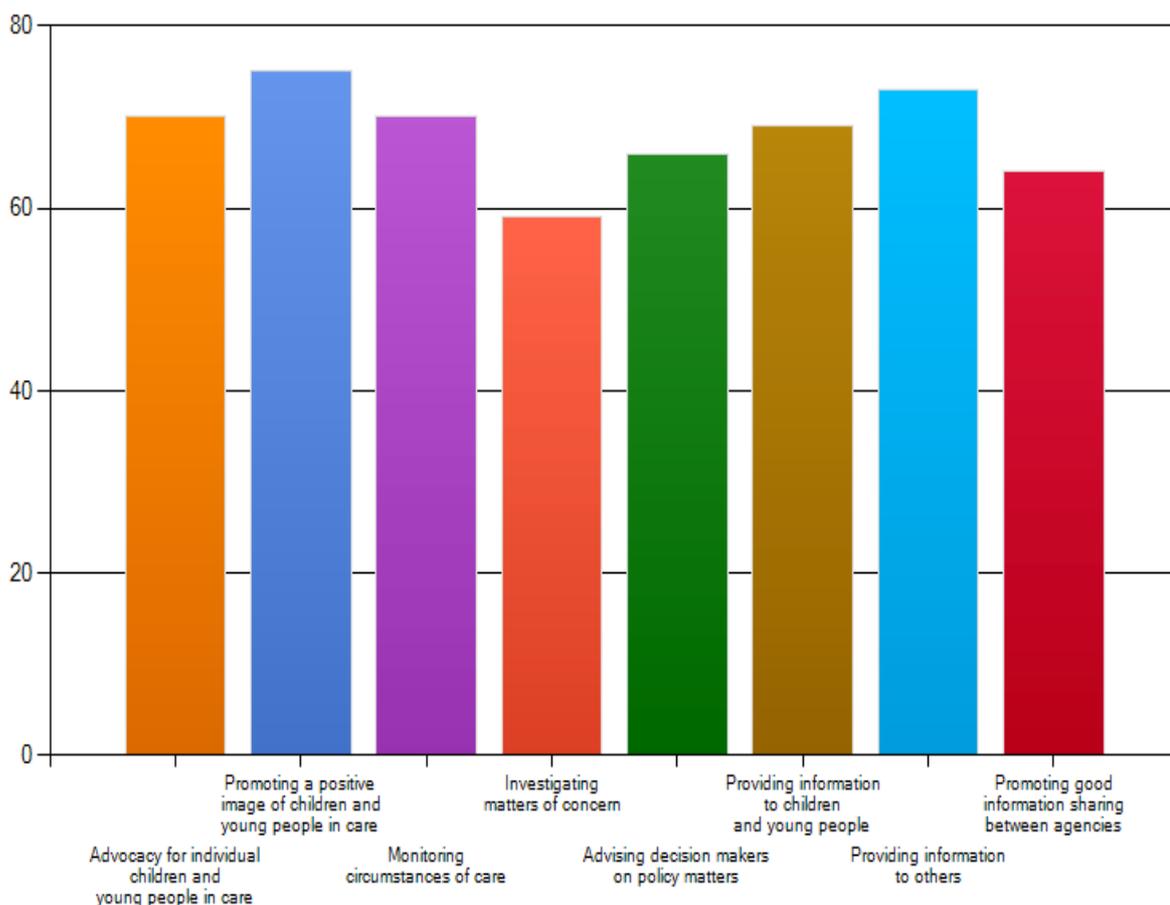
- 10.5% Education employees
- 7.4% Alternative care providers
- 3.2% Disability services employees
- 4.2% Interested members of the public
- 5.3% Other

Participants were asked to identify if they had seen **evidence of GCYP promoting and protecting** the rights of children and young people in any or all of eight specified actions.

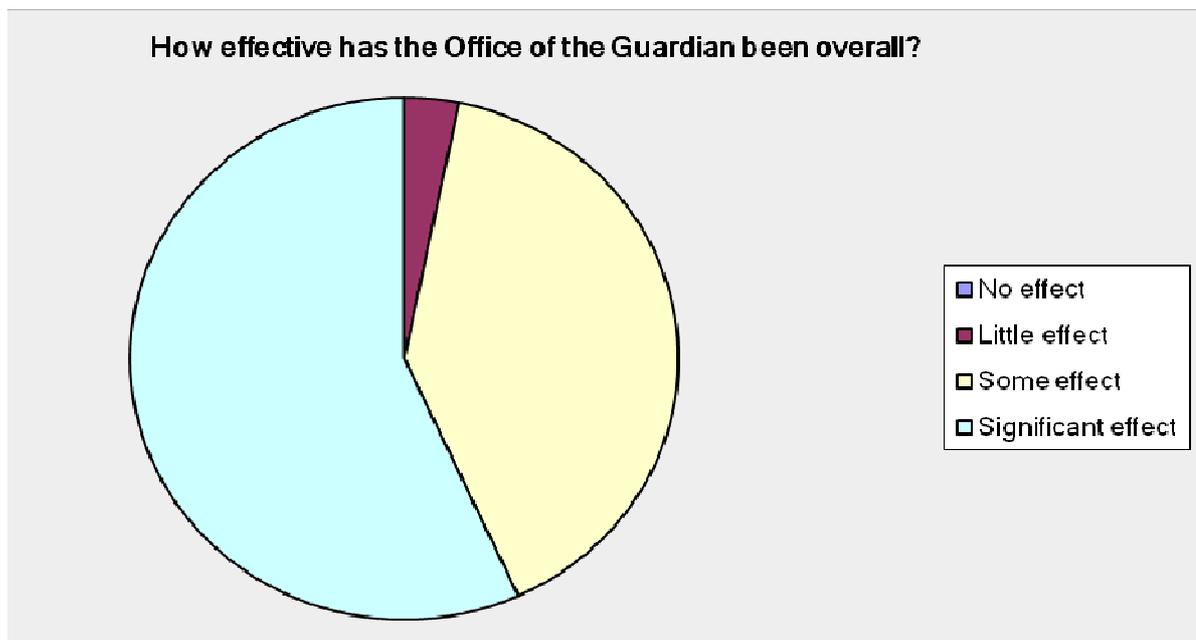
More than 60% of respondents had seen evidence of **each** action by GCYP, with significantly highest visibility by 78.9% of respondents accorded to "promoting a positive image of children and young people in care".

The role of the Office of the Guardian is to promote and protect the rights of all children and young people under the age of 18 years in alternative care.

Have you seen evidence of the Office of the Guardian doing: (tick one or more of the following)



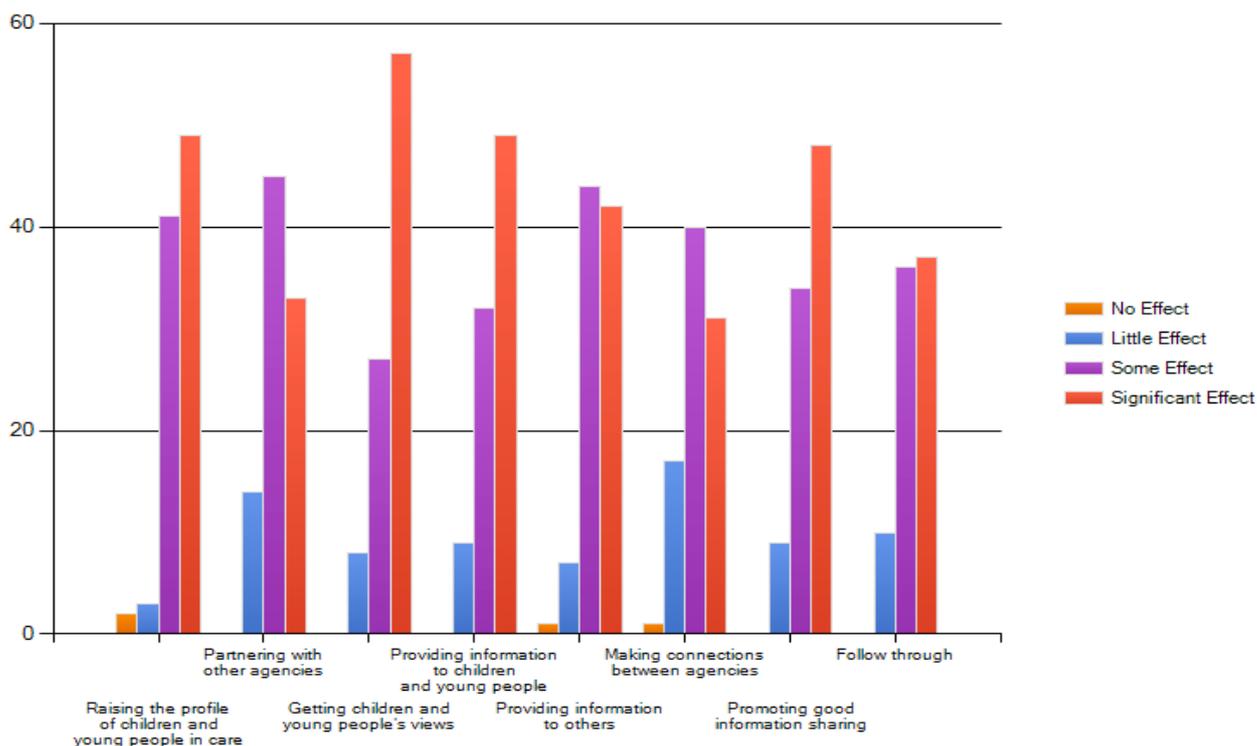
Asked to rate **effectiveness**, 96.8 % of respondents rate GCYP's overall effectiveness as having "some effect" (40%) or "significant effect"(56.8%).



More than 50 respondents rate GCYP as having significant effect on:

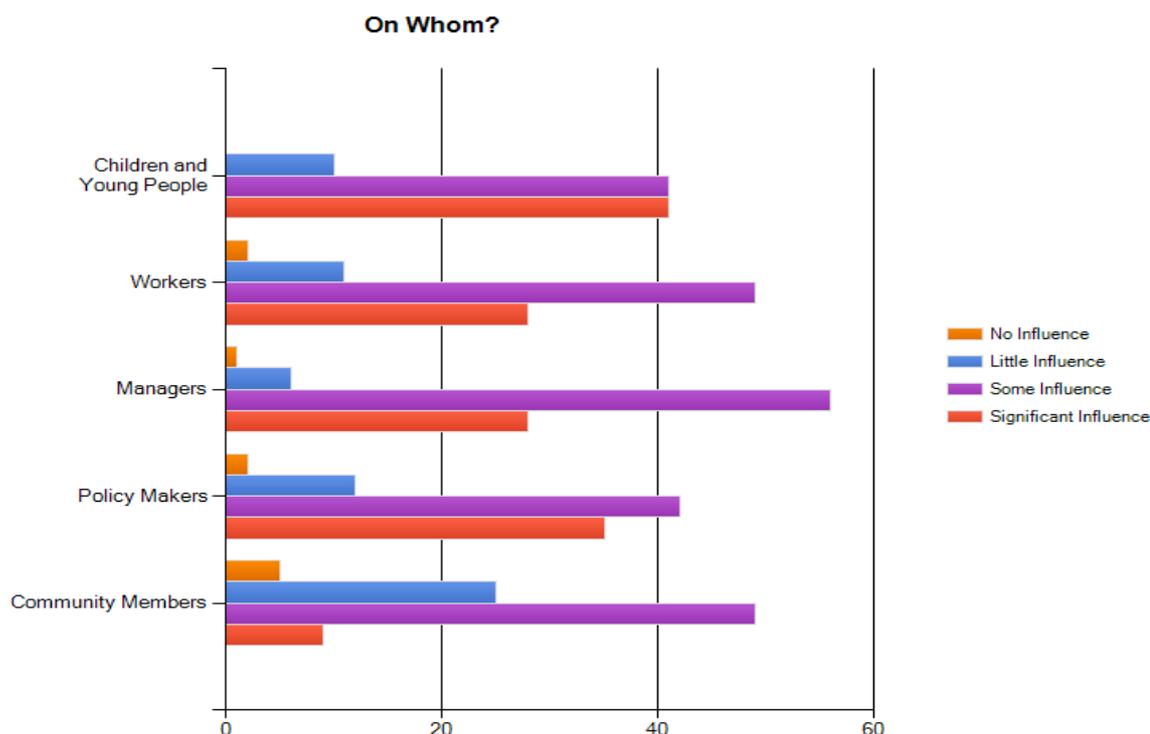
- Getting children and young people's views
- Raising the profile of children and young people in care
- Providing information to children and young people
- Promoting good information sharing

How effective has the Office of the Guardian been on the following?



Asked to rate **GCYP's influence**, 94% of respondents rated "some influence" (50.5%) or "significant influence" (43.2%). The following graph indicates (by numbers of respondents) the groups that respondents believe have been impacted by the work of the GCYP.

Please note that some respondents commented that they indicated "no effect/influence" on specific areas because there was no option to select "do not know".



Conclusion

The development of the Government's policy for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in our community, "Keeping Them Safe", set out a bold approach for change including the appointment of a Guardian for Children and Young People.

The review has found that GCYP profoundly influenced progress in the implementation of Keeping Them Safe" across Government and Non-Government organisations (NGOs). The Guardian has spoken for children and young people in care, "*free from constraints by both the Government and NGO sectors*". And the GCYP has achieved in all areas of its plan for 2007-10.

Stakeholders have provided the strongest evidence. Their assessment of the work of the GCYP over the past five years is of a strong, consistent, tenacious, positive and independent voice for children and young people in care that has been "*critical to this very vulnerable group*". GCYP's influence spans policy and practice and has changed the agenda in Government agencies in particular, with tangible outcomes for children and young people in care .

In the words of two stakeholders who represent the views of over 130 people: "We have a long way to go, but the Guardian has contributed greatly to the rights of young people in care."

"Keep representing the vulnerable children (and young people) and maintain services ... to empower them to represent themselves."