

## **Children's panel recruitment**

To meet the statutory requirement for balanced panels, we encourage both men and women to become involved in this very important voluntary work by applying to become panel members.

### **What kind of people are panel members?**

If you are aged over 18, you can volunteer to become a panel member. There is no upper age limit. Applications are invited from men and women from a wide variety of backgrounds who have an understanding of children and an interest in their welfare.

Some people are likely to be excluded from membership of the Children's Panel because of potential conflicts of interest. Examples include:

- police officers and special constables
- Justices of the Peace who serve in the District Court
- social workers working with children and families in East Renfrewshire
- foster carers looking after children from East Renfrewshire
- individuals who are involved in referrals to hearings
- parents of children who are presently the subject of a supervision requirement

A criminal conviction is not necessarily a bar to membership. However, naturally, careful enquiries must be made about any past criminal convictions. As a matter of course, we make the appropriate checks through Disclosure Scotland.

### **How do I become a panel member?**

Panel member recruitment normally takes place in the autumn. When panel members are needed, we advertise in newspapers and on radio. In addition, approaches may be made to people living or working in the community, through community groups for example, to try and find out who would want to be considered for panel membership.

If you respond to the advertisements or any letter issued, you will be sent more comprehensive information about becoming a panel member including an application form. You will also be invited and encouraged to attend an information meeting. At this meeting you will be able to learn more about the Children's Hearings System, meet some of the people involved in East Renfrewshire and have an opportunity to ask questions.

If you are interested in becoming a panel member, you should complete the application form and return it as quickly as possible to the address given. Most people generally do this after they have attended the information evening.

### **How are panel members selected?**

Panel members are selected by a special body called the East Renfrewshire Children's Panel Advisory Committee (CPAC). Once you have submitted your application form, you may be invited to come to a selection meeting. If, after talking to you, hearing your views and checking your availability, the Committee decides that you would make a good panel member, and taking into account the needs of the area, the CPAC may recommend to Scottish Ministers that you should be selected for pre-service training.

### **If I am selected, what happens next?**

Panel members have to be trained for the job. Much of the training takes place in small groups led by tutors who themselves are panel members. The training is not academic, but is specially designed to help members develop the knowledge and skills necessary for the task of making decisions at hearings and in the best interests of children.

Appointment to the Children's Panel by Scottish Ministers is subject to new members undertaking a preliminary pre-service training course, which involves a number of training days and some evenings. Later in the year you will have to attend further courses one of which will be a residential weekend.

### **For what length of time would I be appointed to the panel?**

At present, panel members are usually appointed, initially, for three years. Subsequent re-appointment by Scottish Ministers (on the recommendation of the East Renfrewshire CPAC) is then normally for three years, and further three year periods thereafter.

### **How much time would I have to give to being a panel member?**

Panel members are expected to do, on average, one or two hearing sessions a month, normally during the day. However, emergency Hearings may need to be arranged at other times as necessary and may occasionally be on a Saturday morning. An applicant who can be available for both day time Hearings and occasionally at other times will be a particular asset, but in all cases some day time availability is essential. At each hearings session, the panel members may see two to three families. Each individual hearing lasts about forty to forty-five minutes, but difficult cases can take longer. The preparation for hearings can take several hours.

Panel members are also expected to have an ongoing commitment to training throughout their period of service within East Renfrewshire itself and in collaboration with Panel members from other local authority areas. This enables members to benefit from the exchange of views and experience. Visits to establishments such as children's homes are also arranged, and Panel members may have an opportunity to attend conferences or the Children's Panel National School.

### **What if I need time off work?**

Legislation allows panel members to have time off granted by their employers while attending hearings. Generally, such time is to be of a reasonable duration and of a reasonable frequency. Employers are not required to grant time off with pay. What is 'reasonable' is determined by the employer.

### **Will I be paid?**

No, panel members are not paid. However it is recognised that panel members undertake a certain sacrifice in giving their time to panel duty. While payment of expenses cannot be considered as adequate recompense, provision is made for claiming certain travelling expenses, subsistence and financial loss allowances, including loss of earnings up to a certain limit. Every effort is made to settle expenses within a short period of time.

## **What will I gain from being a panel member?**

You will gain an understanding of the problems facing children and families and you will have an opportunity to help these children. This can be a source of real satisfaction. You will learn a lot about yourself and about other people and you will be part of a system of which Scotland is rightly proud.

## **How can I find out more about becoming a Children's Panel member in East Renfrewshire and, more generally, about the Children's Hearing system?**

To find out more about becoming a member of the East Renfrewshire Children's Panel, and about the Children's Hearings System, contact any of the following:

- Linda Hutchison on 0141 577 8388 or [linda.hutchison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:linda.hutchison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)
- Ron Leitch on 0141 577 3016 or [ron.leitch@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:ron.leitch@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)
- Jennifer Graham on 0141 577 3016 or [jennifer.graham@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:jennifer.graham@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

You can also access information on the [Children's Hearings system website](#).