

Conference claims teenage homeless numbers are set to increase



Thousands of teenagers will continue to become homeless every year unless Scotland changes its ingrained attitude to the culture of conflict.

That was the message from a leading panel of experts from the worlds of health, law, homelessness charities and politicians at a major conference being held in Edinburgh this week. (Our photo shows l to r: Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, James Wolffe with CEO of Cyrenians Edinburgh, Ewan Aitken.)

Civic Scotland, politicians and the Third Sector must pool its resources with “immediate effect” if Scotland is to stop thousands of young people becoming homeless each year due to family relationship breakdown.

Cyrenians’ [Scottish Centre for Conflict Resolution](#), which has organised the high-profile conference today (Wednesday), said the event must act as a “springboard” to safeguard the life chances of Scotland’s youngsters. Cyrenians’ [Scottish Centre for Conflict Resolution](#) (SCCR) is Scotland’s first ever national mediation resource centre.

The call for action came as the Faculty of Advocates pledged its support for the work of the SCCR.

Last year, nearly 5,000 young people across Scotland became homeless due to relationship breakdown. They are the tip of the iceberg, with many Scottish households struggling behind closed doors with conflict, arguments, and fall-outs.

The major conference attracted high-profile speakers including:

Sir Harry Burns, Professor of Global Public Health at Strathclyde University,

Minister for Housing and Welfare Margaret Burgess,

Dean of the Faculty of Advocates James Wolffe, QC,

Chief Executive of The Rock Trust, Kate Polson,

Dr Duncan Morrow, University of Ulster, who was appointed as [Chairman of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Tackling Sectarianism \(2012-13\)](#),

Dr Rein Sikveland, University of Loughborough,

SCCR Patron and Chair Drew Drummond, who is Managing Director of Drummond International.

Edinburgh Cyrenians CEO Ewan Aitken, who opened the conference, said: "We cannot wait one minute longer to address the pervasive problem of conflict in Scottish society. Every year thousands of young people become homeless, their life chances left in tatters, because of family breakdown, while many other parents and young people struggle behind closed doors.

"We know one in four young people think about running away from home each month because of arguments. A third of parents argue with their teenagers weekly. We cannot afford as a nation to hide from the impact of conflict, its affects can be devastating.

"The SCCR is nearly a year old, this is our fifth national conference and over that time we've seen commitment from Government and a diverse range of organisations, however there is much to be done and we cannot do it alone. We're delighted

with the backing of the Faculty of Advocates in Scotland and hope this is the springboard to others pledging to bring about real and lasting change for Scotland's young people and families."

He added: "Conflict as a way of life has become normalised yet it is not the normal way of nurturing and growing human relationships. It happens in all our lives for a myriad of reasons, sometimes with minimal consequences but at times its impact can be devastating and debilitating, making life seem impossible and the future impenetrable."

Speaking about his backing for the Scottish Centre for Conflict Resolution, the **Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, James Wolffe QC, said:** "The vision of the SCCR is to change the culture of conflict in our society. In particular, the Centre seeks to reduce family conflict and help young people avoid homelessness because of family breakdown. That is an aim which we can all share, and which the Faculty is glad to support.

He added: "The Faculty of Advocates has been in the business of dispute resolution for over 400 years. Advocates are trained in skills which may be effectively deployed not only in the courtroom but also in other methods of dispute resolution. Mediation and other methods of alternative dispute resolution have increasing importance in our justice system – and, more broadly, in seeking to address conflict in our society – and I look forward to the Faculty playing its part in these developments."

The conference allowed high-profile speakers and delegates to gather together to look at the culture of conflict in Scottish society and the impact it has on young people, families and wider problems in the fields of homelessness, criminal justice, health.

Minister for Housing and Welfare Margaret

Burgess congratulated the Scottish Centre for Conflict Resolution on its recently announced renewed funding from the Third Sector Early Intervention Fund.

The Minister said: "Preventing homelessness among young people is a priority for the Scottish Government and we are working closely with local authorities and their partners to improve outcomes for young people facing homelessness.

"While homelessness among young people has been falling in recent years, when it does occur relationship breakdown with others has been cited as the main reason.

"That's why we're delighted to fund a national initiative like SCCR which offers early help and support to young people, their friends and families, who are in dispute and can help identify best practice amongst mediation services working to prevent homelessness across Scotland."

Ewan Aitken added: "As a national resource promoting and supporting best practice in conflict resolution and mediation, the SCCR is looking to do our part helping young people and their families seek help before it reaches crisis point. We are doing this through our new national [Stop.Talk.Listen campaign](#), [innovative series of training, seminars](#), and resource-rich [website](#)."

The SCCR's newly launched '**Stop. Talk. Listen**' campaign asks the public to upload a selfie to a specially designed [social media wall](#) – telling the SCCR 'what's been the biggest cause of arguments at home?' The aim is to get people thinking about how these can often be the tip of the iceberg and how they can **stop, talk and listen** to avoid longer term resentments and fall-outs.

The campaign aims to put conflict resolution and mediation on the agenda, similar to the changes in attitudes to mental health, and give families and practitioners working with young people the tools to help deal with arguments in the home.

The campaign has already received support from: Minister for Children and Young People Aileen Campbell; Director of Violence Reduction Unit Karyn McCluskey; Tam Baillie, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People; Chief Executive and founder of Street Soccer (Scotland) David Duke, who was homeless himself; former Big Brother winner Cameron Stout and former Big Brother winner and CEO and Founder of Dare2Lead John Loughton; Chief Executive of Young Scot Louise MacDonald; Chief Executive of Relationships Scotland Stuart Valentine; Director of Scottish Mediation Network Graham Boyack; Nick Harleigh-Bell of Homeless Action Scotland.