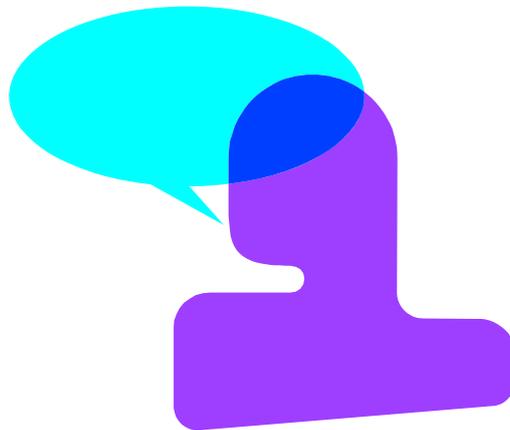


**UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE  
RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

**CONSULTATION WITH  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**



**DEENA HAYDON**

**on behalf of**

**the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister**

## **CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

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**Deena Haydon**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### CONSULTATION

- 132 children and young people - 63 female, 69 male - aged 4-25, were consulted in Armagh, Belfast and Derry/Londonderry.
- They included children/ young people with special educational needs; young people in conflict with the law; children/ young people with disabilities; lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or trans-sexual young people; children/ young people from minority ethnic communities; Travellers; care leavers; young parents; young people in an alternative education project.
- Each group was involved in two meetings. First, to discuss what rights they thought children/ young people here should have and whether these are being promoted and protected. Second, to share their views and messages for Government with civil servants.

### KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE UNCRC

- A few groups were aware of the UNCRC and had been active in lobbying for the implementation of children's/ young people's rights. But most had little knowledge about children's rights or international standards.

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Equal treatment was a key issue. They noted *discrimination* based on: age, gender (being a boy or girl), sexuality (being gay, lesbian or bi-sexual), disability and being in trouble with the law.
- Some who had experienced being in care thought that professionals did not always act in the *best interests of the child*.
- The right to healthy *food, water and shelter* was considered important in discussion about survival and development. While most felt they had access to food, poverty was recognised as a barrier for others. They also noted the importance of a *clean environment*.
- Young people raised the risk of self harm or suicide among peers when considering the *right to life*.
- They noted the impact of *negative assumptions* about all children/ young people as the result of the actions of a few.
- They did not believe that children and young people were *treated with respect* or *listened to* by adults, despite this being particularly important in protecting them from harm.
- *Not being involved in decisions* was a major issue (eg in courts, in the development of legislation, in decisions by social workers or health professionals, and in school).
- Young people felt excluded through not having *voting rights* and suggested a lower voting age, in line with other social responsibilities.

## CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

- Most children and young people considered they had the right to *freedom of expression* in terms of dress and how they presented themselves.
- They defined *freedom of speech* as the right 'to speak your mind' - a right not experienced by children and young people.
- Although many young people felt able to practise their own *religion or culture*, others did not. Sectarianism, racism and being defined as 'non-Christian' were concerns.
- Some argued that the right of *peaceful assembly* was not enjoyed by specific groups, including: gay and lesbian young people; Travellers; and groups of young people on the streets. Restrictions were placed on young people who had been in trouble with the law (eg curfews).
- Young people were aware that *access to information* is affected by literacy, knowing where to find information, and how information is provided.
- They thought that *information about drugs, pregnancy and alcohol* should be provided in primary schools and outside school (eg in clubs and youth centres).
- *Lack of privacy* was an issue for young people in care and for care leavers living in hostels. Those who had been in police custody described being observed but thought this was acceptable to prevent injury or suicide. Young people who had been in child or youth custody (eg in the Juvenile Justice Centre or Young Offenders Centre) described lack of privacy throughout the day and night, and during visiting.

## FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

- Children considered *having a family* to be an important right. They recognised that not everyone has this right (eg those who are looked after or homeless).
- Some of those who had experienced *being in care* talked about sudden removal and separation from their parents and siblings.
- Those who had been in care thought *foster care* was preferable to residential care, because it offered a more stable 'family' environment.
- *Residential care* was generally criticised, especially the harsh responses by some care staff to young people's actions or behaviour (including police involvement for behaviour that would be dealt with by parents in a family home).
- Appropriate *accommodation for care leavers* was a problem. Young people suggested that housing associations should have a better points system for accommodating young people who have been in care.
- '*Being safe*' and '*Protection from harm*' were noted as important rights by many children. Young people mentioned the difficulties some might have in disclosing experiences of harm or abuse, and finding the right person to tell.

- *Support for young people* was an important issue. Young people believed that 14-16 year olds were likely to be involved in risky behaviour (eg., joy-riding, staying out all night, taking drugs) and needed support. Those whose families were not supportive required help (eg youth workers or Educational Resource Centres where teachers are less formal).
- The effects of *physical punishment* by parents or carers were noted. Suggested responses included parenting courses and counselling.
- Young people were aware that some parents needed extra support (eg., parents of young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transsexual; parents who are substance users or experiencing domestic violence; parents of young people in trouble with the law; parents of children and young people with disabilities).

### EDUCATION, PLAY AND LEISURE

- Children and young people considered *education for all* to be important.
- *School exclusion* and '*dropping-out*' were significant issues for some young people. Those excluded from school felt they were unable to enjoy their right to education.
- A number of *young people in conflict with the law* had not attended school for some time. Their reasons included: frustration, illiteracy, lack of support, not liking school routine.
- Many young people did not know how to find out about *training and vocational education* or employment opportunities, especially after leaving school. Provision for 16-18 year olds was a common issue. Access to vocational training and employment was particularly difficult for young people with disabilities who considered that mainstream training should be adapted, with early assessment of their needs and support requirements to ensure they had opportunities to achieve meaningful qualifications.
- Although young people have the right to *higher education*, some were aware that many cannot afford to go to college or university.
- Young people considered that education should be *relevant*, including: citizenship, financial issues, sex education, drug awareness, life skills, Irish/ Northern Irish history.
- Developing each child/ young person to their fullest potential was not thought to be achieved by schools because they were not *meeting individual needs*.
- Young people suggested that schools should have *specialist teachers* to support children with special needs and to provide counselling. All schools should give *additional support* to children and young people requiring help with reading, writing or other work.
- Some children and young people did not think their schools had enough *resources* (eg things to do in the playground, equipment, furniture).
- *Approaches to teaching and learning* were mentioned by children and young people, including: making learning 'fun' and exciting, having lessons outside, learning through practical activities, school trips.

- Young people discussed *sex and relationship education (SRE)*. They were concerned that sexuality was not openly discussed in schools and that sexual health information was restricted, particularly for lesbian and gay young people who were not able to access relevant websites from schools or libraries.
- *Bullying* in school was an issue raised by half the groups consulted. Anti-bullying policies were not considered to work well in practice – teachers did not take reports of bullying seriously. Homophobia needs to be explicitly included in school anti-bullying policies.
- The emphasis in *Religious Education (RE)* was on Christianity, with limited study of other religions. Those who were not Christian felt singled out and defined as marginal.
- The need for more *integrated schools* was raised by some young people who noted sectarianism as an issue in school. Suggested responses included educating parents and changing attitudes from a young age.
- The importance of *play and leisure* was noted by children and young people. For Travellers, playing outside was especially important.
- Most children and young people believed that they did not enjoy the right to *safe play* in their communities. There were few places to play and paramilitaries stopped them from hanging around in streets or parks.
- Many wanted *more youth clubs* (open after 10.30pm, at weekends, during holidays and providing activities for 17-25 year olds), *more parks and open spaces* and *community-based activities* (eg trips to cinemas, bowling, outdoor activities, skate-parks or drop-ins).
- Children and young people wanted *places to go with friends* and *having fun* was particularly important for children.
- *Inclusive activities* for disabled children and young people were rare. Those with disabilities were dependent on parents or friends to take them out or to social events. Children and other young people were aware of the marginalisation experienced by those with disabilities, arguing for greater inclusion at leisure facilities and in school or community activities.

## **BASIC HEALTH AND WELFARE**

- Children recognised the importance of *being healthy*.
- Most, including children and young people with disabilities, felt they had *access to health care* if they were under 18 (eg., health checks in school, injections, access to doctors).
- But some young people did not know how to *access* the health care they knew was available.
- *Access to mental health care* was identified as a problem - particularly long waiting lists.
- Although a few felt confident about seeking *sexual health information*, most did not. Young people noted the stigma associated with seeking information and advice about sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- There was considerable discussion about the need for *counselling and support* for young people. Although this could be offered in school, young

people were critical of existing school-based provision. Concerns focused on lack of confidentiality and teachers' suitability as counsellors.

Alternatives included access to support outside school (eg confidential services, outreach work in clubs, youth workers).

- *Information and support for LGBT young people* was a specific issue – they felt unable to approach school counsellors because they feared being 'outed' to their parents. Teachers perceived 'being gay' as a category of 'risk' or 'harm' requiring reporting. It was not uncommon for LGBT young people to be referred to a psychiatrist.
- The *health care or special care and assistance received by disabled young people* often depended on their family's ability to provide the support required and on where they lived. They believed that support should be available during the years of transition from being a young person to being an 'adult' - up to age 25.
- *Being independent* is an issue for all young people, including those with disabilities. They recognised that their parents can be over-protective, but appreciated their parents' concern and understood that parents are trying to do what they think is appropriate for their son or daughter.
- Children and young people acknowledged that not everyone has a good *standard of living*. Half of those consulted discussed the problems of not having enough money and the difficulties involved in living on benefits.

### **SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES**

- Some young people had studied *child soldiers* in other countries as part of their lessons.
- The impact of *the conflict* in Northern Ireland was evident in discussions about the continuing presence of paramilitaries or vigilante groups in communities.
- Young people acknowledged that children and young people in developing countries need *protection from harmful work* (eg in 'sweatshops' or mines to cheaply produce goods for wealthy countries).
- A few recognised that some young people here do not receive *fair pay* for employment (eg under-16s doing a paper round may not receive the minimum wage). Employment opportunities for young people with disabilities were limited and generally low paid or low status.
- Young people regularly out on the streets with friends reported a negative *experience of the police*, with a number raising issues of police brutality and sectarianism. They stated that they had no faith in the complaints system as they believed the police would always be believed before young people.
- Young people expressed concerns about *treatment when arrested*, overnight detention in police cells and their *representation in court*.
- Conditions for those *detained* in police custody were described as poor.

## **UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international human rights treaty that recognises and protects the human rights of children. It was unanimously adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and is the most widely ratified international human rights instrument. The UNCRC was signed by the UK in 1990, ratified in late 1991 and came into force on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1992. The Convention requires all States parties to report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child their progress against the Convention.

The UK's first report was submitted to the UN Committee in 1994, and was followed by the Second Report submitted in 1999 and updated in 2002. The most recent UK report was sent to the Committee in July 2007.

The UNCRC defines a child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years" (unless the laws of a country state that a young person becomes an adult and can vote at an earlier age).

The UNCRC has 54 Articles, each explaining one right and how the Government or adults working with children/ young people should make sure that this right is part of their work. The Articles have been combined under clusters of rights:

- General Measures of Implementation
- Definition of a Child
- General Principles
- Civil Rights and Freedoms
- Education, Leisure and Cultural Activities
- Family Environment and Alternative Care
- Basic Health and Welfare
- Special Protection Measures, including the administration of youth justice.

## NORTHERN IRELAND REPORT

A Northern Ireland report has been written to show how the UNCRC is being implemented here, including information from Government departments about what they are doing to promote and protect children's/ young people's rights.

The Children and Young People's Unit (OFMDFM) wanted to find out what children and young people think about their rights and their key messages for Government. They commissioned an independent researcher to consult with children and young people. During February 2007, consultation meetings were held with 132 children and young people, aged 4-25, across the region (See Appendix 1). They discussed:

- what rights they felt children/ young people should have
- whether or not they actually have these rights, and reasons if not
- which cluster of rights each child/ young person thought was most important
- their messages for Government.

This report lets you know what the children (mainly 10-14) and young people (mainly 15-25) said. Each section is based on a cluster of CLC rights. Under **specific articles**, the **main issues** are noted and *quotes* illustrate individual's views or experiences. Some issues were discussed in a number of different groups, while others were based on a particular experience or situation (eg being a young parent or care leaver) (See Appendix 2). Every child or young person's *message for Government* has been included under the relevant cluster of rights. Appendix 3 summarises which cluster of rights was most important in different groups.

As well as informing the UK Government's next report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the report will increase awareness about their rights amongst children and young people themselves. It will also help the adults working with them understand what needs to be done to make sure that children's/ young people rights are promoted and protected in Northern Ireland.

## WHAT ARE 'RIGHTS'?

When asked “**What are ‘rights’?**” children and young people gave the following definitions:

- Something you're entitled to.
- Expectations about what people should do for other people.
- Universal – a fundamental rule of law, applied to everybody.
- Mechanisms in place to ensure health and safety; no danger; well-being – laws or social conventions.
- The right to do something - be educated; be included in your community; have your say in a way that suits you; have support and care to live a full and independent life; have the services you need.
- Things you're entitled to – what you're allowed to do or have.
- Something you're allowed to do.
- A law.
- Something that gives you a place in society.
- A promise to you.
- A contract.

## GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Although a few groups knew about the UNCRC, had worked with the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland or were involved in lobbying about children's/ young people's rights, many were not aware of their rights or the UNCRC:

*“Children and young people don't have information about their rights.”*

The only young person who thought that 'Implementing the UNCRC' was the most important cluster of rights felt that if these rights were put in place, all the other rights in the UNCRC were more likely to be met. A few children in the Share group chose 'Knowing about the UNCRC' as the most important rights for the following reasons:

*“They can get treated better.”*

*“So you get help.”*

*“To share, have fun and read.”*

Discussion in the groups did not generally focus on implementation of the UNCRC. However, some messages for Government focused on making sure that children's/ young people's rights are promoted and protected by the Government:

## **Messages for Government**

- *“For everybody to have a better life and to be happy.”*
- *“Help children.”*
- *“Give us more help.”*
- *“Proper facilities. Funding.”*
- *“Instead of talking about what you are going to do DO IT!”*
- *“Make sure that all the rights are followed through.”*
- *“There should be more information for young people about their rights and let them have their say and actually listen to them and treat thy neighbour as you yourself would want to be treated. Children today are adults for the future so everyone should have the same respect.”*
- *“Do your promises and tell the truth. Treat us with respect. We’re human beings not elephants, aliens or sharks.”*
- *“Get services right for children and young people – health, education, employment, family support.”*
- *“Improve services for disabled children and young people, especially those in rural areas.”*

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES

### NON-DISCRIMINATION [ARTICLE 2]

**'Being treated equally'** was a right noted by a number of groups, perhaps best explained by two quotes from the Troy group:

*"Blind, deaf, different colour, different religion, from a different country – everybody should be treated the same."*

*"It's important that everybody is treated the same because you don't know when something might happen to you to make you different."*

Some young people felt that they were treated equally, but others did not:

*"Young people should have the same rights as adults."*

A number of children and young people talked about being treated differently because of their **age**:

*"Young people aren't respected in shops... Security assume anyone in school uniform carrying bags will steal, so they ask you to leave your bags outside."*

*"Shops discriminate against children"... "Young people are told to get out of a shop"... "The shop door is locked when you want to get in."*

*"Young people shouldn't be treated like kids, they shouldn't be humiliated – people make you feel stupid."*

While they wanted to be treated with the same respect as adults, some young people did not want to be expected to take on the responsibilities of being an adult too early:

*"We're not being allowed to be young people in our own right."*

*"We want to be able to act our age, not be told to 'Grow up' all the time."*

Although they acknowledged that there are children and young people who already have significant responsibilities:

*"Some children are carers."*

**Gender** discrimination occurs in all aspects of children and young people's lives, and is reflected in their experiences:

*"Some teachers pick girls to do messages. Boys are told they can't because they're 'too irresponsible!'"*

*“Some teachers say ‘This work is too hard for girls’.”*

*“Some people think men are better at doing some jobs, like driving.”*

*“Shops think wee lads are more likely to steal.”*

*“In court – the Judge says ‘You’re the only wee girl causing so much trouble’ and he gave me an ASBO.” [for behaviour that would probably not have received such a response if carried out by a young man].*

**Sexuality** was an issue raised by young people, who felt that not everyone had the right to *“be whatever sex you want to be – gay, lesbian, bi-sexual.”*:

*“The phrase ‘You’re gay’ is used pejoratively in schools and on the streets.”*

Young people in GLYNI considered that gay and lesbian young people are discriminated against as a result of:

*“Homophobic/ anti-gay ethos of schools, churches, youth services, neighbourhoods.”*

Discrimination on the basis of **disability** was clearly a major problem recognised by children and young people in a few groups:

*“There’s loads of things they [disabled young people] can’t do that others can – they don’t have wheelchair access, they can only go to special schools.”*

*“They’re excluded”*

*“They’re treated like they’re invisible.”*

Wheelchair using young people were severely affected by inaccessible public transport. Door to door transport for disabled young people in rural areas depends on their postcode – it is mainly available in towns. This means that they are reliant on use of wheelchair accessible taxis from nearby towns. Some towns do not have a taxi company which provides accessible cars, and some taxi companies charge extra for wheelchair use. Access to buildings was also a problem for wheelchair users – many buildings have steps up to the door, no lift, or toilets which are inaccessible/ upstairs. But the main form of discrimination experienced by young people with disabilities was attitudinal:

*“People assume you can’t do something.”*

**Having a criminal record**, or being in trouble with the law, can lead to discriminatory responses:

*“People treat you unfairly because you’ve been in trouble, because of the reputation you have where you live.”*

*“If you’re looking for part-time jobs and you’ve got a criminal record, you won’t get one. That’s happened to me 3 or 4 times.”*

### **BEST INTERESTS [ARTICLE 3]**

Some care experienced young people did not feel that professionals acted in the **best interests of the child**:

*“Social workers make the quickest choice – whatever’s easiest for them.”*

### **LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT [ARTICLE 6]**

The right to **food, water and shelter** was noted by both children and young people:

*“The right to have food and water.”*

*“Children should have a right to have a shelter and clean water and food.”*

*“Children have a right to good food and clean water.”*

When talking about the rights children should have, many younger children noted healthy food:

*“Food should be healthy.”*

*“Children have a right to nutritious food and clean water.”*

*“Eat fruit.”*

*“Vegetables and fruit to make you healthy.”*

*“Eat and drink... fruit... vegetables...”*

*“Healthy diet.”*

While most believed that they had access to food, some suggested that this was “Not [a right] for everyone”, particularly in families experiencing poverty.

The food available in school was generally regarded as unhealthy by children and young people:

*“If you’re vegetarian, you have no options in school - there are just different forms of potatoes.”*

*“School dinners are not up to standards.”*

*“School food is not healthy, and there’s no variety.”*

*“School doesn’t let you out to the shops, you’re not allowed to bring food into school so you have to eat what’s there.”*

Children also noted the importance of a **clean environment**.

*“To have a clean, healthy environment – no litter.”*

*“Right to have... fresh air.”*

*“Clean environment.”*

*“Healthy, clean streets.”*

In discussing the **right to life**, young people were very aware of the risk of self harm or suicide amongst their peers:

*“There’s a lot of suicide – if everyone had their rights there wouldn’t be as much suicide.”*

*“Some people harm or take their own lives because of abuse or not being able to talk because they think they won’t be heard.”*

The Youth@CLC group discussed the **impact of sexual abuse**, recognising that this was likely to affect people’s lives and development in a number of ways, including:

*“Mental harm.”*

*“Affect them having relationships.”*

*“Make them afraid to go out.”*

*“Affect them into their adult life.”*

*“Risk of suicide.”*

## **PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS AND RESPECT FOR THE VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE [ARTICLE 12]**

Many groups mentioned the fact that **negative assumptions** are made **about all children/ young people** as the result of the actions of a few:

*“If you’re walking around, older people have negative perceptions of young people – they see one group act in a certain way and assume that all young people are like that.”*

*“No adults treat us [young people] with respect – I wear a hood, I am a hood.”*

Young people did not consider that they were **being treated with respect**.

*“No-one listens just because they are kids/ [Not] respected.”*

*“At school, teachers treat you as if you’re a child, or as if you’ve always done something wrong.”*

*“Respecting their judgement – mostly people are making decisions for them.”*

**Being listened to** was an important right for both children and young people. When asked what rights children should have, children expressed this in a range of ways:

*“To take part.”*

*“The rights to be listened to.”*

*“Teachers and adults listen to children.”*

*“People listen.”*

*“Let the little man have a voice – adults don’t listen to children.”*

For children, this right was particularly important in terms of protection from harm:

*“If adults don’t listen, you can’t get help.”*

*“They’ve got to listen to be safe, in case something bad happens.”*

*“If you’re being bullied and nobody listens, who will you tell? If you can’t tell anybody, you might do harmful things to yourself.”*

Both children and young people in 7 of the 12 groups resented not being listened to by adults:

*“Nobody listens.”*

*“They’re treated as if they have nothing to say because they are too young.”*

*“Adults don’t act on what we say.”*

*“Some adults don’t think kids or young people have anything worth saying.”*

*“They are not asked.”*

*“They are regarded as ill-informed in general.”*

*“Because they’re young people no-one wants to listen to them eg government, mum and dad – guardians, politicians, teachers.”*

*“Adults don’t listen to children. They think they’re right.”*

*“Adults think kids should be seen and not heard”... “They should be seen and heard, but you have to be seen first to be heard!”*

Not **being involved in decisions** occurred in every aspect of children and young people’s lives. For example in courts:

*“Kids should be allowed to say what they want to in court, not through a Guardian Ad Litem, whatever their age... You’re not allowed to go to Court if you’re under 10. But the Guardian Ad Litem didn’t say the full story of all I was saying... Even if this is to protect children, they should be able to say what they want to say” [in Family Law, when decisions are being made about who should have custody of children or care placements].*

*“When your parents get divorced, you don’t have a say.”*

When legislation is being developed:

*“If ever they’re making laws, they don’t ask young people.”*

When decisions are being made by social workers:

*“Social workers don’t give you choices – they make choices for you.” [eg where you want to live, where you want to be]*

or health professionals:

*“Doctors should talk to you, not your parent - you might want your parent with you, but the doctor should still talk to you and then maybe to your parent to clarify things.”*

*“Health professionals don’t listen to what you say.”*

This was particularly the case for young people with disabilities, sometimes with potentially dangerous consequences (eg concerning allergies) or leading to a loss of dignity (eg ignoring what a young person says about their personal care needs).

At school young people did not generally feel involved in decision-making, whether this related to involvement in decisions about school policy:

*“School Councils are ineffective – teachers are there and they shoot down ideas they don’t like. They don’t consider serious suggestions. The head teacher is given the final veto, so there’s no real power or democratic structure.”*

or to decisions about school meals:

*“Pupils have no say in what appears on the menu.”*

Some young people felt that:

*“Young people don’t have any rights.”*

They recognised that there is no formal mechanism by which children/ young people, as a group, can make their views heard:

*“Young people can’t vote.”*

The suggested response was lowering the age at which people can vote, in line with other social responsibilities:

*“Young people should be able to vote from when they understand” [eg around 15-16]*

The disabled young people in the 6<sup>th</sup> Sense group felt that their right to have a say was respected through their involvement in the group and the way the group worked. They noted that:

*“It is important for [disabled] young people to be:*

- *informed about how services are planned and delivered*
- *trained how to be advocates for other disabled children and young people*
- *supported to express themselves in ways that suit their needs (such as using assistive technology)*
- *supported to report the views of other young people about service provision*
- *supported to make links with people that can make change happen.”*

This requires the appointment of more Participation Workers across Northern Ireland, who have the following skills:

*“Good listeners.*

*Know about disability issues.*

*Be able to identify the individual’s participative support needs.*

*Be able to explain things simply and in a way that will inform the young person.*

*Be able to facilitate the young peoples’ contact with professionals.*

*Be able to identify opportunities for the young people to influence change.*

*Be able to make meetings fun.*

*Be able to speak the same language as young people.*

*Be able to train professionals to listen to and communicate with disabled children and young people.*

*Be able to increase the young person’s confidence and ability to have their say.”*

The SAM (School-Aged Mothers) group believed that:

*“A young mum should be treated with the same respect as a 29 year old mother.”*

Young parents should be able to:

*“Make our own decisions, or be involved in making decisions.”*

This was particularly significant for young parents who were under 16 – for them, decisions were made by their parents rather than by the young mother herself (eg claiming for her child, whether the child was in a crèche, taking the child for injections). If the young women were below the legal age of consent when they became pregnant, their parents were asked whether they wanted to press charges against the young mother’s boyfriend – charging him with rape. While this may be necessary to protect young women, the young mothers felt they should have been involved in these discussions about their boyfriends. When her pregnancy was confirmed, one young mother’s parent was asked by the doctor whether she wanted her daughter to have an abortion – this *“puts pressure on [young women], puts words into their heads”*.

For young people in conflict with the law, not being listened to or involved in decision-making was a key issue which affected every area of their lives:

*“They should let us make our own decisions. Social workers are breathing down your neck.”*

*“Teachers should listen to what you have to say.”... “Teachers treat you like you’re nothing and they’re something.”*

*“The police never respect young people, and people don’t respect them.”*

*“The cops... if you try to do something right, they don’t see it. They just see the bad stuff you’ve done, or they assume you’ve done.”*

*“When you’re in front of the Judge, you’re being called a scumbag – is that being treated with dignity and respect?”*

### **Messages for Government**

- *“Allow gays and lesbians to do everything the same as straight people.”*
- *“I’d like to see a lot more done in schools and communities to discuss and educate on the issues surrounding homosexuality, including from a health and safety point of view. The same groups should also do more to discourage and prevent discrimination and homophobia within their environment.”*
- *“Help us to change society’s attitude towards lesbians, gays and bisexuals. More education and understanding.”*
- *“I ask that you take into consideration that people exist with different lifestyles (eg homosexuals, foreign religions, different cultures, etc)... and try to reach out into every branch of society to and then where it is needed. Thanks!!!”*
- *“Provide a wide range of accessible transport.”*
- *“Everyone has enough food.”*
- *“Eat fruit and vegetables.”*
- *“Can you ensure that pupils receive a healthy diet that is suited to each individual?”*
- *“Young people should be asked their opinions on more issues, more often. Just consulting with young people to tick a box is not enough. One night once every so often is not good enough.”*
- *“I want to see more young people speaking up.”*
- *“Start listening.”*
- *“Get people to listen to young people!”*
- *“Listen to young people and treat them the same as you would adults.”*
- *“Listen to young people. Let them have their say. Take on board and do something about it.”*
- *“Listen to children and young people about all services.”*
- *“Make sure people are heard.”*
- *“To get more respect and more money for our family.”*
- *“Treat young parents with the same respect as adults.”*
- *“Provide more opportunities for disabled children and young people to participate.”*

## CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

### IDENTITY AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION [ARTICLE 13]

Most young people believed that they did have the right to **freedom of expression** - *"To be yourself"* - particularly in terms of how they dressed and presented themselves.

A few children discussed freedom of expression in terms of **involvement in decisions within the family**:

*"Freedom to do your own thing and make your own decisions – where to go, how late you stay out."*

They defined **freedom of speech** as the right:

*"To speak your mind."*

However, this was a right not enjoyed by children or young people:

*"Young people are not listened to and told to shut up by teachers, parents, clergy."*

One group commented that this right *"Depends on whether it is socially acceptable"* to encourage children/ young people to say what they think. In our society, at the moment, it is not!

### FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION [ARTICLE 14]

Although some young people considered that they were **able to practise** their **own religion or culture**, others disagreed. A number of groups referred to sectarianism:

*"In Northern Ireland the religious stuff is difficult."*

*"People can be attacked because of their religion..." "Like Catholics and Protestants."*

*"Especially in Northern Ireland – sectarianism – Protestants here, and Catholics here."*

Residential care homes are generally mixed:

*"You're living with Protestants and Catholics in care homes."*

While one young person who had been 'looked after' said:

*"I've been in mixed situations all the time and never had a problem",*

another stated:

*"I felt intimidated going to Mass because I was the only Catholic in the care home. I ended up getting beat for it" [when aged 12]*

The Generation Y group included young people from minority ethnic communities, who talked about the difficulties of being defined as 'non-Christian'. This was recognised by other groups:

*"It's not just Protestants and Catholics – it's any religion."*

*"Racism for those who pray to Allah."*

One child felt that everyone should:

*"Have the right of your own country and culture. [But] you can't speak Irish in the streets."*

## **FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY [ARTICLE 15]**

Young people argued that the right of **peaceful assembly** was not enjoyed **by specific groups**. For example, gay and lesbian young people:

*"Young gay people can't 'exhibit' their sexuality."*

or Travellers:

*"Travellers are not able to gather freely."*

Some felt that groups of young people are not tolerated on the streets:

*"If you're in large groups, you're told to separate."*

*"You're prevented from standing on the streets. If the cops come by, they know the young people and start going at them."*

Restrictions were placed on young people who had been in trouble with the law:

*"When I was put on curfew I had to be in at 5pm every night [aged 15]. I wasn't allowed to see my mates, even before 5pm."*

*"My bail conditions meant I had to stay away from my best mate. If I was seen near her, I'd be put back into Rathgael. And my ASBO stopped me meeting certain young people."*

One young person had been stopped from joining an organisation when she was in care:

*"I wasn't allowed to join Amnesty International when I was in the children's home – they didn't think it was right for my needs!"*

## **ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE INFORMATION [ARTICLE 17]**

**Access to information about drugs, sexual health, pregnancy**, etc is obviously affected by literacy. One young person stated:

*"I want to know how to do things myself. But I can't read."*

Others did not know where to find information:

*"I wouldn't know where to get information about drugs, drink, etc."*

*"There are support services for young people, but young people don't know about them."*

*"The only reason I found out about them [services] was because my social worker went out and looked for them [eg a speech therapist]."*

*"Young people don't know it's there [mental health provision] because it's not advertised."*

A few young people commented that access to information was about how information is provided:

*"They have the right but not the access – they have libraries, but these don't provide information in the way that young people need it. You wouldn't know where to look for information."*

*"I tend to use the internet, but not everyone has access to this."*

While some believed that:

*"Information about drugs, pregnancy, drink etc should be provided in primary as well as high school",*

others argued that such information should be available outside school:

*"not in school... if you ask teachers, they tell your parents and then you get into trouble at home."*

The **role of the media** was mentioned in some groups. Young people believed that media reports reinforced negative stereotypes about children and young people:

*“The media don’t have to add to it. They could say ‘a group of young people’ – it’s not all young people.”*

*“Adverts on TV (eg mobile phones, burglars being young people) demonise young people – as if all young people are hoods or stand around drinking... not all young people behave like that.”*

*“... they [the media] play a big part in this. There was an example where the BBC News bemoaned anyone wearing hoods [in shopping centres] – they didn’t show 2 sides of the argument. It was all negative opinions [of adults].”*

The GLYNI group recognised that while the media can be a powerful means of challenging prejudice, it can also reinforce homophobic stereotypes and prejudice:

*“Being gay is talked about more – in the media, language, lobbying – forcing people to talk more about what a gay person is, how to handle homophobia, what laws there should be regarding same sex parents, sex as a way of having fun [not just to reproduce]. But it makes gay people more vulnerable to stereotyping and prejudice.”*

## **PRIVACY [ARTICLE 16]**

Not having privacy was an issue for **young people in care**:

*“They’d go into your rooms an’ all when you were in school.”*

and for **care leavers living in hostels**:

*“When I was 16 I was living in a hostel and I just got told ‘Your room’s been changed because there’s a new person coming in.’ They took all my stuff out and put it into a different room, just on the floor - all my personal stuff - without even telling me or asking me.”*

Those who had been in **police custody** described police station cells with:

*“a circle on the ceiling or a box in the corner that they watch you through – to make sure you don’t top yourself [commit suicide].”*

The young people considered this to be “OK – because it’s there for the right reasons... to make sure you don’t do anything stupid.”

One young person described how she was assessed before being taken to the police station:

*“They rang the children’s home to see if I was low, or medium, or high vulnerable”.*

Another stated:

*“The cops abuse your rights to privacy. They sit and watch people.”*

Young people who had been in **youth custody** (eg in the Juvenile Justice Centre or Young Offenders Centre) recounted:

*“When you’re in custody, they’re always lifting the flaps to watch you at night.”*

*“You have no privacy in Rathgael [Juvenile Justice Centre]. Staff are at the door 24 hours.”*

They recognised that this was for child protection reasons. However, one young person questioned the need for this level of observation:

*“Are you really going to harm yourself in the middle of the night? They take away anything harmful.”*

Young people in custody had no privacy when being visited:

*“On visits one person stays in the room – doesn’t say f\*\*\*- all, just sits there.”*

### **Messages for Government**

- *“We have the right to meet who we want.”*
- *“Knowing about civil rights and good health care.”*
- *“Free to do what we think is important (eg where to go, how late you stay out).”*
- *“I would like to see religions coming together (eg cross-community work).”*
- *“So everyone can express their culture.”*
- *“Being gay is not our choice, we would not choose to be treated as bad as some of you treat us at any age... we exist, respect that. We don’t want to be tolerated, just accepted as people with the right to full, equal and undeniable citizenship...”*
- *“Young people deserve the right to information. Without knowledge they cannot be empowered or capable to help themselves.”*
- *“More information on STDs (sexually transmitted diseases).”*

## FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

### CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF THEIR FAMILY ENVIRONMENT - PROTECTION AND SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE [ARTICLE 20]

For children, **having a family** was an important right:

*“Everyone needs a family to care for them.”*

When asked what rights children should have, their responses often included ‘a family’ or particular family members:

*“Rights to have a family.”*

*“The right to stay with your family and be protected.”*

*“Right to belong.”*

*“You need to be with your family.”*

*“To have a good family life and care.”*

*“It is important because we have cousins.”*

*“Have a mammy.... playing with me brother.”*

*“Loving mum and dad.”*

A few groups acknowledged that not all children enjoy this right:

*“Some people’s family don’t want them.”*

*“Children who live in care homes don’t have the right to a mum and dad.”*

When thinking about **having a home**, one group of young people stated:

*“You have to distinguish between a ‘house’ and a ‘home’ (where you belong).”*

*“If there are problems in the family – always arguing or abuse – it may not feel like it’s right (home) to you, so you spend time out of the house.”*

A number of young people recognised that:

*“Not every young person has the right to a home.”...“Some [young people] don’t have this right – they go to the Simon Community centre for young people.”*

*“There’s some out on the streets.”...“They need support to find a place to live.”... “If they’re alcoholics, they need help to deal with their alcoholism.”*

Those with experience of **being ‘looked after’** honestly talked about their experiences. The process of being taken into care was sudden for some young people:

*“I was taken into care [aged 9]. They just said to my ma they were taking me away.”*

*“The door was busted, some children were taken in one car and some in another car, not being able to say goodbye to my mammy or each other.”*

Foster care was considered to be better than residential care by those who had been looked after:

*“Foster placements are ok. It’s not a routine. At least there are two people there, not different people every day. At least someone trusted you.”*

However, it was one young person’s view that:

*“They don’t assess foster families right. It’s not just about how much money they’ve got. It should be about how they care for you... I knew a family who were on the brew [benefits] who cared for their children better than the foster family cared for me, even though they had less money.”*

Residential care was generally criticised by those who had experienced it:

*“Care homes are crap. You go out worse. It’s like living in a regiment in the army.”*

*“If you do one thing wrong they phone the peelers [police] – it’s supposed to be a home, where you live. If you were living with your mum and dad they wouldn’t phone the police when you broke a cup!... [Care] staff call the police too quickly.” [eg for smashing cups – “I was done for criminal damage. They could have just made me pay it back.”]*

The Care Leavers group agreed that:

*“People make assumptions, especially when you’ve been in care – they assume you’ve done something wrong.”*

Professional’s responses to care leavers were at times judgemental:

*“Doctors won’t come out on call to hostels – they look down on you.”*

Finding appropriate **accommodation** was a problem **for care leavers**:

*“You can’t get a house where you want to.”*

*“There’s no choice once you reach 18. No options for safe accommodation.”*

*“They keep you on the list and don’t tell you that there’s no accommodation available.”*

*“I was living in a hostel for 3 months and went down the Housing Executive every week to see where I was up to on the list. I picked the right place, but the wrong street and when I got a flat I was harassed (sectarianism).”*

The suggested solution was:

*“Housing Associations should have a better points system if young people have been in care.”*

## **PROTECTION FROM ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE, INJURY, ABUSE, NEGLECT AND EXPLOITATION IN FAMILY OR ALTERNATIVE CARE ENVIRONMENTS [ARTICLE 19]**

**‘Being safe’ or ‘Protection from harm’** was an issue raised by many children when asked what rights children should have:

*“To be cared for and protected.”*

*“Not to be bullied.”*

*“Looking after children.”*

*“Being safe.”*

*“Taking care of children.”*

*“To be in a place where you’re not abused.”*

Young people understood the difficulty faced by some in disclosing experiences of harm or abuse:

*“They’re scared to tell people of their abuse.”*

*“They think people won’t listen to them.”*

*“They wouldn’t want to tell someone in case they tell the parent or person who’s beating them, or whatever, and they get it worse.”*

They noted that it was sometimes difficult finding the right person to tell:

*“I wouldn’t tell a counsellor.”*

*“You wouldn’t feel right telling a teacher – they know you, and some of them take grudges on you.”*

**Support for young people** was an issue raised by a number of groups. Young people generally believed that:

*“14-16 year olds are going to do things like joyride, stay out all night, take drugs, drink, get suspended from school”*

*“They just do these things because of their age, no matter how much support they have.”*

The SAM group suggested that young people whose families are not supportive need more youth workers to support them through this time. Or teachers at youth centres like Educational Resource Centres *“who don’t shout at them for not doing their homework, aren’t strict – where they have less hassle and do things that are useful to them. Not youth clubs, but education centres set up for them.”*

Although they personally felt supported by their family, friends or boyfriend’s family, the young mothers in the SAM group were aware that:

*“some 16-18 year olds leave home because of abuse or because they don’t get on with their parents but they don’t have anywhere else to go so end up living on the streets.”*

These young people need support:

*“If they were just given a house, they’d probably carry on having parties and getting drunk, so they need to have hostels where there are people to give them support and guidance (eg you have to be in by a certain time and are only allowed two people in to visit you).”*

The Youth@CLC group raised the issue of **physical punishment**, stating that children and young people do not have the right to protection from physical violence by their parents or carers. When asked what could be done to stop parents physically punishing their children, they suggested:

*“Remind them what it was like to be a child.”*

*“Courses for adults – to show there’s different ways of dealing with children.”*

*“Courses for children – at Tech, in the evenings.”*

*“Counsellors.”*

## **PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES, ASSISTED BY THE GOVERNMENT [ARTICLE 18]**

When considering family life, one of the Troy group emphasised that:

*“It’s important for adults to spend happy time with children.”*

The GLYNI group believed that **parents of young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or trans-sexual (LGBT)** may require support as some find it difficult to deal with their child’s sexuality when they come ‘out’. This can lead to young people’s homelessness:

*“They [parents] can’t accept it”.*

*“They say things like ‘How could you do this to me?’”*

Some young people recognised that there may be times when **parents who are substance users or experiencing domestic violence** need additional support:

*“parents can’t look after themselves or their children because they’re alcoholics or druggies, or are being beaten up by their husband.”*

They felt that these parents *“need help, but might be scared of asking for it”*. They also appreciated that some parents *“might not want help”* or *“might not use it if they were offered it.”*

Some argued that **parents of young people in trouble with the law** needed support:

*“I think my ma needs a lot of help. She sits in the house worried about me every day. She needs someone, she needs help.”*

Young people in the 6<sup>th</sup> Sense group stated that the **parents of children and young people with disabilities** don’t have enough support:

*“They [parents of disabled children/ young people] need support above the level of other parents to cope at different times.”*

*“Parents go to their partners for support, and their own brothers and sisters – social services are not helpful.”*

### **Messages for Government**

- *“The Government could build more facilities for children who have lost their families.”*
- *“Protect children. Help them survive.”*
- *“Make children safe.”*

- *“Being safe.”*
- *“To keep us safe and out of trouble – rules at home and at school.”*
- *“Keep everyone safe.”*
- *“Stop kids getting abused – get kids out of communities that are bad for them, where they’re abused.”*
- *“To protect against abuse.”*
- *“Young people need help – more support with education, jobs, general things.”*
- *“More support for people – who do not get enough support from friends or family members.”*
- *“How can you be sure that young people have the support that they need (eg to help them deal with family and personal problems)?”*
- *“Children should have parents that could look after them.”*
- *“Parents should get help to cope with their children”*

## EDUCATION, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

### RIGHT TO EDUCATION [ARTICLE 28]

**Education for all** was important when groups considered what rights children and young people should have:

*“Children have the right to education.”*

*“Everybody can go to school, no matter what. Teachers have to help children.”*

*“The right to a good education.”*

The GLYNI group discussed the need for schools to be safe places for all pupils, including those who are gay or lesbian:

*“You should have a right to safe education - at all ages - that is appropriate or relevant to people’s needs.”*

Youth@CLC stated that some young people do not receive the education they are entitled to:

*“They don’t if they’re Travellers, homeless, or in the justice system.”*

**Exclusion and ‘dropping-out’** were issues for some young people. Those who had been excluded from school felt that they were not able to enjoy their right to education:

*“Thrown out of school/ Might not have a school to go to/ Rejected.”*

As one young person explained, this was not always an explicit process:

*“They don’t necessarily expel you. They send you to the Alternative Education Project so you’re out of school.”*

A number of young people in trouble with the law had not been attending school for some time. They gave various reasons:

*“I found it [school] frustrating.”*

*“I can’t read or write. Teachers used to make me read out things in front of the class. Made a [fool] out of you.”*

*“I left school at 14. They never gave me any support so I just left.”*

*“I was at [Educational Resource Centre]. There was a blue room with f\*\*\* all in it – the ‘time out’ room – it just made me angry.”*

*“It’s all routine. Kids don’t like routine. It messes them up. Kids are rebellious. They don’t like looking the same, that’s why they don’t like wearing uniform.”*

Many young people did not know how to find out about **training and vocational education** or employment opportunities, especially after leaving school. Provision for 16-18 year olds was an issue raised by a number of groups. The young people in the Care Leavers group agreed that the school leaving age should be raised:

*“16 is too young to be leaving school – they should stay on until 18.”*

*“People can finish 5<sup>th</sup> year at 15 and drop out.”*

*“At 16 you don’t know what you want to do.”*

They described how, once they had left school, their options were limited:

*“To go on a course you need qualifications or A levels. If you don’t have these, you can’t go to Tech.”*

*“There’s only 20 places for a course so you can’t get on.”...“I applied to do GCSEs but couldn’t get a place – too many people trying to get on [the course].”*

The group suggested that:

*“Young people aged 18-20 should be paid more money to stay in education or training.”... “This would encourage them to get qualifications.”*

Access to vocational training and employment are particularly difficult for young people with disabilities:

*“You’re told all you can do is sit in an office when you leave school.”*

*“They throw disabled young people into admin., but they don’t give us a chance to demonstrate our potential.”*

The Care Leavers group believed that every young person had the right to **Higher Education** but *“Lots of people aren’t able to afford it.”* They argued that University should be free for those whose parents cannot afford to pay. Poverty was not the only issue affecting access to Higher Education. The group recognised that self-esteem and confidence were also vital:

*“Some people don’t have the belief in themselves that they could go.”*

The UNCRC emphasises that all young people have the right to an education, including specific groups such as **young parents**. The young mothers in the

SAM Project (an educational project with opportunities for sessions including; child development, cookery, fitness, beauty and massage) felt that they were able to access education before and after their pregnancy. Although one considered that she was put under pressure not to be in school because she was pregnant, most believed that their school did not treat them differently once they were pregnant and had been flexible (eg one young mother was able to leave class early when she was pregnant because the corridors got too busy to manage easily). The teachers usually kept notes for them when they were out of school. Some stated that their school had been *“brilliant”*. One *“hated school”* and another felt that: *“You’re treated like a child.”* One young mother talked about losing her EMA (Educational Maintenance Allowance - £30/ week to remain in education) for the week if she was late for 6<sup>th</sup> Form. This is discretionary, and dependant on the school. A couple of the young mothers argued that schools *“should understand that we [young mothers] have to look after a child now too”*. To accommodate appointments at the doctor’s or clinic *“we should be let out early a couple of days a week.”*

The young mothers were at school 4 days a week and spent 1 day a week at the SAM Project in an Educational Resource Centre. They also received home tuition for 2 ½ hours 2 days a week when they were out of school (before and after their baby was born). They did not feel that they missed too much schooling while at the Project – they could *“catch up”*, *“not go to the Project for a day”*, or *“do work while at the Project - there are the same computers at the Educational Resource Centre as at school.”*

They valued being able to attend the SAM Project:

*“[It] gives you something to do.”*

*“It’s a break”.*

*“It’s good being with people who’ve experienced the same things as you.”*

The young mothers stated that they *“just get on with it [being pregnant and a young parent] – people make too much of it”*. But they agreed that they were well-supported by family and friends and may feel differently if this was not the case.

**Young people with disabilities** require skills-based support in vocational training. The experience of one physically disabled young person attending FE was typical. A vocational placement was not arranged for her. When she organised her own placement, the 3 days per week were reduced to 1 day a week because the staff felt they could not meet her care support needs:

*“They said I wasn’t working hard enough, or fast enough, and needed too much help. They wouldn’t let me answer the phone, take money..., or do anything except fill envelopes.”*

Another disabled young person was told he could not do a placement “because of Health and Safety reasons”. As he stated:

*“I can do as much as anybody else. They’re under-estimating me... there are always barriers, something in the way.”*

When they leave school, the transition services are generally not helpful to young people with disabilities:

*“They do the job they think needs to be done, not what the person wants. They make decisions for the person. They should get the young person more involved.”*

The qualifications offered to many young people with disabilities are of limited use to them. They often feel “pushed into” administrative jobs despite their interests or abilities in other areas. Although projects such as VOTE (Vocational Opportunities in Training and Employment) have been set up to provide social skills training in some Health and Social Services Trusts, disabled young people believed they did not achieve meaningful qualifications. Mainstream training should be adapted to meet their support needs. This requires assessment of their needs and support requirements at an early stage.

## **AIMS OF EDUCATION [ARTICLE 29]**

As a child from the Traveller group stated:

*“School gives you an education – helps you learn your ABCs.”*

A number of young people argued that:

*“Education should be **relevant**.”*

Relevance included a range of subjects:

*“Citizenship is part of the curriculum, but has little effect even though we’ve complained that it’s not being done right.”*

*“Especially financial issues, at an earlier age. You learn about stereotypes, discrimination and stuff like that at 15, but not about financial situations.”*

*“Why do you have to learn French/ another language?”*

*“Schools should teach sex education, drug awareness, life skills.”*

*“You should learn history – about the troubles”... “your history – Irish history, about Northern Ireland.”*

**Developing each child/ young person to their fullest potential** was not thought to be achieved by schools. Some considered that this was because schools were not **meeting individual needs**:

*“Education is made for the majority, not each individual... It’s not focused on individual needs, learning styles or interests.”*

A few young people had special needs that had not been diagnosed while they were at school:

*“I was told I was stupid, I was thick an’ all. I never found out I was dyslexic ‘til I came here” [to the Young Voices Project, at 16]*

*“I didn’t find out [about dyslexia] until I was in Rathgael [Juvenile Justice Centre]” [at 18]*

One group suggested the need for **specialist teachers** to support children with special needs or to provide counselling. Another group argued that all schools should provide **additional support** for children and young people who need help with reading, writing or any work – either after or in school.

Some children and young people did not think their schools were sufficiently equipped with **resources**:

*“There’s nothing to do in the playground – could put in football nets, basketball, playing with your own football.”*

*“Better playground – there’s nothing in it, only football.”*

*“Better equipment – chairs and furniture.”*

*“Our resources are really old books and there is no equipment.”*

Two young people raised the issue of ‘voluntary payments’ in Grammar schools:

*“Sometimes you’re expected to pay for things and then don’t get to keep them (eg we have to pay £55/ year for books and stationary + extra for books for the curriculum)... They say it’s not compulsory, but whenever families can’t afford it, the Principal sends a letter saying ‘We need this funding’. It’s not voluntary, and it puts pressure on some families.”*

**Approaches to teaching** and learning were mentioned by both children:

*“[Teachers] need to make learning fun.”*

*“Work should be not too hard and not too easy.”*

*“We could have lessons outside (eg measuring things).”*

*“We could learn English and Maths in different ways – practical.”*

*“... more exciting ways of teaching instead of just talking.”*

*“Better education – it’s too dull... Should make it more easy, make it more exciting – show things in different ways, the way kids look at it (especially at secondary school because there are more subjects).”*

and young people:

*“Education is education, not just learning. You’re taught through education to learn a certain way, not your own way.”*

*“Education is too classroom-focused. You should do Science in and outside.”*

*“Health and Safety issues mean teachers won’t organise school trips because they have to do risk assessments – it’s getting ridiculous.”*

When considering education, a number of young people discussed **sex and relationship education** (SRE). Sexuality is not openly discussed in schools:

*“Schools don’t accept that kids of 13/14 year olds have a sexuality. They leave it [SRE] until they’re about 16 and then say ‘Now that you’re sexual, this is what these feelings are about, what the law says, how you can negotiate relationships’.”*

*“There’s no appropriate sex education – it’s just about reproduction, pregnancy, having a baby.”*

Homosexuality was believed to still be a taboo subject:

*“Equality and sexuality are discussed in jobs and at FE/HE but not in schools – teachers think if you find out about sexuality at an early age you may ‘turn that way!’”*

*“There’s a fear of actually promoting homosexuality.”*

*“There are gay rights in the workplace. Young people in schools should have gay rights.”*

*“If we have civil partnerships now, and homosexuality is recognised as a way of life, why is this not recognised in schools?”*

Sexual health information is restricted:

*“There’s Brook, but only 50/50 know about them”*

*“They need to be advertised more.”*

This is particularly the case for lesbian and gay young people:

*“If you put in the GLYNI [Gay and Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland] website at school or in libraries for information about sex or relationships, access is blocked so young people can’t get that information.”*

Education to develop tolerance, respect and friendship among people is one of the aims of education according to the UNCRC. But **bullying** in school was an issue raised by children and young people in half of the groups consulted:

*“Schools should take bullying and racism very seriously.”*

Some children/ young people are bullied because of the way they present themselves:

*“You get pushed around because you’re different – you look different, wear different clothes, like different music. You’re treated like an outcast. School has an anti-bullying policy, but don’t see it as bullying – being pushed around is part of life, hitting and kicking is bullying.”*

Or their assumed sexuality:

*“I got bullied because I was a girl with my hair cut short wearing a skirt”*

*“I didn’t give others any ammunition to bully me – they started rumours because I was in the choir.” [male]*

*“... because I did Irish dancing.” [male]*

While schools may have anti-bullying policies, these were not considered to work well in practice:

*“Teachers are trained for dealing with bullying, but they are not effective – they don’t do anything about it.”*

*“People don’t listen when you tell them you’re being bullied.”*

*“People don’t take you seriously.”*

*“They [teachers] don’t stick up for people being bullied.”*

*“They don’t take it seriously – they just tell you ‘They’re having a laugh’.”*

*“Some children are scared to tell the teacher, in case it makes it worse. It normally does.”*

*“Schools don’t deal with bullies – they suspend them and that’s just giving them a holiday.”*

*“Teachers are scared of the pupils.”*

*“If you’re bullied and hit back, you are the one who gets suspended – you are seen as the problem.... You are seen as provoking situations, as if you’ve brought it on yourself if you react.”*

One young person made the point that:

*“Teachers can actually be bullies as well.”*

And a child noted that children should have the right:

*“Not to be bullied or treated differently by the teachers or the Principal – not having favourites.”*

The GLYNI group argued that homophobia needs to be explicitly included in school anti-bullying policies:

*“Teachers know when a young person picks on another young person because of who they are. If it’s because they’re gay, the teacher ignores it. If it’s because they’re black, the teacher sees it as racism.”*

*“Young people need to know that all bullying will be taken seriously, including racism and homophobia. And that there are different ways of dealing with specific issues.”*

*“It’s important to have it in writing.”*

*“Policies need to include how they will deal with the repercussions of bullying.”*

*“Teachers don’t know how to deal with it [homophobic bullying]. They say things like ‘You just have to have a thick skin’. They don’t understand your feelings.”... “I was told to ‘Get into football more’.”*

Young people generally considered that responses to those bullying were inadequate:

*“They’re sent to the ‘time out’ room... or to the Principal’s office.”*

*“You just sit and copy out pages from books.”*

As well as taking reports of bullying seriously, and responding to the needs of those being bullied, young people suggested that:

*“The bully needs help to find out why they’re bullying.”*

Homosexuality is not addressed in **Religious Education** (RE) lessons:

*“In RE we had to read about abortion but couldn’t mention homosexuality.”*

*“In RE teachers say there is a strict syllabus they have to address, so they won’t discuss homosexuality. In class, someone asked a teacher ‘Does God hate gays?’, knowing I was gay, and the teacher wouldn’t say anything. By saying nothing they imply ‘Yes’. They don’t say ‘God loves everyone, whoever and whatever they are’.”*

In RE, emphasis is placed on Christianity:

*“RE doesn’t respect other religions.”*

*“RE should be about different religions. But it is about Christianity only, unless you study it at A level and then you learn about other religions.”*

Those who were not Christian felt singled out and defined as marginal:

*“Teachers talk about ‘non-Christians’ – they are targeted, and expected to know about the bible, and how to pray.”*

*“The teacher always looks at our side of the room when mentioning ‘non-Christians’.”*

This happened in both the way that lessons were organised:

*“If they don’t do RE, young people have to sit outside the class, go to the Library, or sit in the classroom doing their own thing while the rest of the class does RE.”*

and in public situations:

*“When they say the Lord’s Prayer, I don’t feel right saying it because it’s not my religion.”*

*“In Assembly, when you’re asked to pray you get dirty looks if you don’t.”*

The need for more **Integrated schools** was raised by young people in the Care Leavers group. They noted that, in Northern Ireland, “Sectarianism is a big issue” - in school, as much as outside. One young person asked: “What can the Government do about it? It’s the way people have been raised.” Discussion included responses such as:

*“Parents need to be educated as well.”*

*"It's about changing attitudes from a young age."*

*"Catholics and Protestants – separate schools – that isolates the two parts."*

*"I thought the Government was going to mix schools but the Protestants protested. They should start off young and work their way up (ie integrate from P1 through primary and then into secondary school) so that children are raised mixed."*

### **Messages for Government**

- *"I [Traveller] would like to be in school more often."*
- *"Every child can learn."*
- *"It is important every child learns how to read and write."*
- *"How can we be sure to get the proper resources for our school subjects such as art, technology or PE?"*
- *"Is there anything that can be done to the education young people receive so that it focuses less on the majority and offers a more individual curriculum?"*
- *"Employment and training for young people."*
- *"Provide training and employment opportunities for disabled children and young people."*
- *"There need to be opportunities for disabled young people to gain qualifications. There should be catering employment opportunities for disabled young people"*
- *"Proper funding for alternative education."*
- *"Look at the individual's needs."*
- *"Discussing diversity in schools, and breaking stereotypes and taboos from a young age. Open discussions on issues such as GLBT issues."*
- *"More education to cover all and different groups of young people rather than focusing on heterosexual lifestyle."*
- *"Young people need proper sex education relevant to them. This includes gays, lesbians, bisexuals and trans-gendered young people. Schools need to be a safe place for all young people, and unless information is provided for and about LGBT young people this won't be the case."*
- *"Being protected from people bullying me."*
- *"Stamp out bullies. Stop drugs."*
- *"I feel that there should be more policies against homophobic bullying. A lot more needs to be done to protect children and young people in schools."*

## **RIGHT TO PLAY AND LEISURE [ARTICLE 31]**

One of the children in the Traveller group stated:

*"It's important for children to play."*

Playing outside was particularly significant to these children:

*"We can play because we are not stable [settled]."*

*"I love playing with my friends. We always play outside."*

Children in other groups mentioned the various places where they played:

*"I like to play in my living room."*

*"I like to play in my bedroom and my back yard."*

*"Like to play in the garden."*

*"I like to play in places that are safe."*

The benefits of play were recognised by children in the Share project:

*"Exercise. Keeping fit. Fun. Concentrating. Learning skills. Team work. Falling safely. Stretching muscles. Relaxing. Stop going mad because we have no stress."*

*"Exercise. It gives you time to relax and play with your friends. It's fun. It makes you smile. It gives you energy. It keeps you active."*

This group had a number of suggestions for improving play facilities in school:

*"Better equipment and things to do (eg snakes and ladders on the playground with a giant dice)."*

*"Running track."*

*"Building our own pieces of equipment."*

*"Having mediators to sort out fights in the playground."*

Most of the children and young people believed that **having safe places to play** in their communities was a right they did not enjoy:

*"There are not enough places to play."*

*"[Children need] bigger playgrounds, where everyone shares and there are different things to do."*

*"Paramilitaries stop kids being in the streets and parks. Some areas don't have parks or youth clubs/ No play area."*

*"There's no after school activities and places to play."*

*"There's no ball games... nothing to do but stand and drink, sniff glue."*

*"There's f\*\*\*-all to do. That's why kids are out on the streets."*

Many argued that there should be **more youth clubs**:

*"There aren't enough facilities – youth clubs."*

*"There should be more youth clubs.... There is one, but it's crap."*

Specific problems relating to youth clubs included:

*"They're for younger kids."*

*"They close at 10.30pm and aren't open at the weekends."*

*"There's nothing for girls or for 17-25 year olds."*

Young people talked about being banned for life from youth clubs for 'cussing' or 'spitting gum'. This meant that they were not able to participate in any activities provided by the club. Because they were banned, their friends would not go to the club which often meant a group of young people 'hanging around' on the streets.

Leisure centres were generally thought to be too far away and expensive:

*"You have to travel to them [leisure centres] – then you have to pay for travel, to get in, for food while you're there... it's too expensive."*

*"People don't have money to go to leisure centres. They'd have to travel to them, and pay for that too."*

In addition to **more parks and open spaces**:

*"Having open space."*

*"More parks."*

*"There's not enough space – a field where you can go and play football and stuff."*

*“You should be allowed to play football, hurling, on the field at the top of the street. Somewhere you can go and do whatever.”*

when asked what play and leisure facilities they would like, a range of **community-based activities** were described:

*“More clubs.”*

*“Going to the cinema.”*

*“Football, somewhere with a snooker table.”*

*“There should be things in the community.” [eg trips organised to the cinema, bowling, outdoor activities]*

*“Should be more drop-ins.”*

*“Need facilities for teenagers (12-15s), which are open at weekends and in the holidays.”*

*“[Young people] should be able to skate in the street, or make a skate-park.”*

Having **places to go with mates** was an issue raised by both children and young people:

*“A place to meet people and your friends.”*

*“Just places to go with your mates.”*

*“Be in a place where we are not hassled by police – groups hanging around get hassled.”*

**Having fun** was an important aspect of play and leisure for children:

*“Children have a right to be happy – play, do fun stuff, have friends.”*

*“They should be allowed to have time to play and have fun.”*

*“Right to have fun.”*

*“Should have more space and fun – not enough space for kids. To make their own decisions and have their own fun.”*

**Inclusive activities for disabled children and young people** were rare:

*“Leisure is often according to what your parents allow you to do. You rely on your parents.”*

*“Going on the computer, to café’s – you’re dependent on parents/ someone you know or your friends.”*

Children and other young people were aware of the marginalisation experienced by those with disabilities. One young person described how a disabled peer in primary school:

*“was... seen as stupid and pushed aside, put in a different group for people who were ‘disabled’, not allowed to join the choir.”*

Children in the Share and Troy groups recognised that play and leisure facilities are not currently inclusive:

*“We have this right [to play] but disabled people should be able to do the things they want to – activities should be inclusive.”*

*“Get lifts to lift disabled people into the swimming pool.”*

The 6<sup>th</sup> Sense group believed that play and leisure is a topic the Government should prioritise. The group suggested that:

- recreational service providers are educated to change their negative ‘can’t do’ attitudes to disabled people.
- accessible, affordable transport is provided to increase the independence of disabled children and young people, particularly in rural areas.
- befriending schemes are set up to support disabled young people’s involvement in social and recreational activities. This could be facilitated through direct payments (although not all families access direct payments).

### **Messages for Government**

- *“Every child can go out to play.”*
- *“It’s important for children to have places to play.”*
- *“Good exercise, playing nice, let people join in, to express yourself, that everyone can play what they want.”*
- *“Play football, learning Chinese, watch English TV, eat dinner.”*
- *“Plat football and Gaelic.”*
- *“Exercise.”*
- *“Make more playgrounds.”*
- *“Make a big youth club for everyone to go to no matter colour, religion, or if they have needs or not.”*
- *“More parks for children to play in.”*
- *“Better football facilities for me.”*
- *“I would like to teach everyone how to dance.”*
- *“More facilities for young people.”*
- *“More leisure centres and youth clubs – open Friday and Saturday, where young people can meet without drink, drugs, etc.”*
- *“Make sure disabled people can join in sports.”*

## BASIC HEALTH AND WELFARE

### RIGHT TO HEALTH [ARTICLE 24]

Children in the Share group recognised the importance of **children being healthy**:

*"We need to be healthy."*

*"We should be taken care of if we need medical attention."*

*"The human race will stop if the children die, if we didn't have health."*

Most of the children and young people felt that they and their peers had **access to health care** if they were under 18:

*"Everyone does have access to health care."*

*"You get health services free."*

*"You have this until you reach 18 and leave school."*

*"Children are healthy - they get their health checks in school, injections, see the doctor at the health centre if they're not feeling well."*

This includes children and young people with disabilities, who also receive health care such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy. However, some young people did not know how to access the health care that they knew was available:

*"Loads don't know who their doctor is."*

*"I haven't got a clue!"*

*"There's good access, but I wouldn't know what to do – me ma gets me into all this shit. I'm seeing loads of people – psychiatrists and all sorts."*

Others were aware that:

*"You don't get free health care after 18... You have to pay high prices for something that's natural [eg gum disease], that you can't do anything about."*

One young person stated:

*"There's not enough resources, help, support for wee girls who get pregnant."*

Access to mental health care was a particular problem:

*“You’re always on the waiting list.”*

*“Young people need mental health care, especially if their parents split up... They suffer in silence.”*

There is a stigma attached to young people who seek **information** and advice **about sexually transmitted diseases** (STDs). Although a few young people felt confident about seeking information about sexual health: “I’d go to Brook”, many did not. They suggested that more accessible information was needed in places frequented by young people:

*“You could have more leaflets at the Doctors, in youth clubs, libraries.”*

A number of groups talked about the need for **counselling and support** for children/ young people. Some argued that this should be identified in school:

*“Teachers need to recognise if young people are unhappy.”*

*“Teachers should be able to pick up things.” [eg when things are not going well for children/ young people]*

However, while schools may be the obvious place for advice, support, or counselling young people were critical of current school-based provision:

*“You have to sign up to see them and everyone can see who has signed up so the other kids and staff know.”*

*“People shouldn’t be called out during class time.”*

*“There is counselling in schools. There are cards – ‘Need to Talk’ – but you’d be wary that school will know about it, that it’ll be spread around.”*

*“You have to sign up – there’s a piece of paper that you put in a box, or the teacher proposes that you go.”*

*“There’s an interview room – people know who goes and might make a big deal about it.”*

They commented that teachers were not the right people to be providing counselling:

*“You don’t talk to a teacher unless you know them and get on well with them.”*

*“Some schools have them [counsellors], but they’re teachers so you wouldn’t go. Teachers share their business in the staffroom.”*

*“Youth workers in schools – teachers are all as if they’re too smart for you. Youth workers would understand more.”*

Access to advice outside school was important:

*“They could advertise confidential services.”... “You could use a phone number or text to make appointments.”*

*“They need outreach work – at night, in clubs.”*

*“Youth workers – more casual, comfortable, easier to tell... teachers are less confidential, they may have to pass it on.”*

*“Teachers don’t respect confidentiality. They talk in the staffroom.”*

Young people in the GLYNI group were aware that assumptions can be made about who needs support, and why:

*“People assume you’re bullied, or you self-harm, because you’re gay. They make assumptions about homosexuality. It may be other things going on in your life – bereavement, tensions with parents...”*

**Information and support for LGBT young people** was a specific issue raised by them. Gay or lesbian young people did not feel able to approach counsellors in school because of the risk of ‘outing’ themselves. They feared that if they spoke with teachers or counsellors, they would be ‘outed’ to their parents. This had been the experience of a number of young people in the GLYNI group. Teachers did not respect confidentiality – they perceived ‘being gay’ as an element of ‘risk’ or ‘harm’ which needed to be reported. It was not uncommon for young people to be referred to a psychiatrist when they came out:

*“Being gay is seen as a mental illness. That’s how we’re treated.”*

*“[We’re referred] because of being gay, not because of the feelings, emotions, experiences we’re going through because of the treatment we receive. That’s the actual problem.”*

## **HEALTH CARE AND SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES [ARTICLE 23]**

The amount of **health care or special care and assistance** received by disabled young people often depends on their family’s ability to provide the support required. It also depends on where they live - domiciliary care is very hard to access in rural areas because staff are unwilling to travel. In addition to receiving a limited package of care (eg only 5 mornings and 2 evenings a week, rather than twice a day throughout the week), this can impact on a young person’s ability to socialise because they have to go to bed whenever it suits the domiciliary worker. This could be at 7pm!

When a disabled young person leaves school, the services they received while at school (eg physiotherapy) end. The 6<sup>th</sup> Sense group believed that the transition age for young people with disabilities should be raised to 25, so that greater support is available during the years of transition from being a young person to being an 'adult'. They feel that young people are "cut off at 18". This often means receiving services, such as respite care, with older people rather than with others of a similar age.

**Being independent** is an issue for all young people, but young people with disabilities rarely have any choice in what happens to them after school. If profoundly disabled, they tend to just go to a day centre. Disabled young people might receive a mobility allowance, but this impinges on their independence if their parents have to take them to places, leave them, and pick them up. They often have to rely on their parents to take them to appointments. If wheelchair accessible taxis are available, these have to be pre-booked which means that "you can't make last-minute decisions".

Like other young people, disabled young people want to be independent:

*"I want to do things myself and this causes friction." [with parents]*

*"I have to be home at a certain time, because my mum cares about me. But I want to get my own freedom."*

Young people with disabilities recognised that their parents can be over-protective. But they also appreciated their parent's concern and recognised that parents are trying to do what they think is appropriate for their son or daughter:

*"My mum was over-protective but has realised that, now I'm 18, I want my own independence (within reason!). She's doing her best for me."*

## **RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING [ARTICLE 27]**

Children and young people acknowledged that some people don't have an **adequate standard of living**:

*"Not everyone is looked after – homeless people aren't."*

*"Poor people don't have quality of life."*

Half of the groups discussed the problem of **not having enough money**, especially if dependant on benefits:

*"You couldn't live on the brew [benefits]."*

This was also an issue for young people with disabilities:

*“... might be entitled to money, but their parents manage it for them”.*

*“There’s not enough money.”*

*“If we had the money, there would be no reason not to have what we need.”*

Young care leavers were living on £45/week, which just covered the basics:

*“It’s not enough for going out, going to Tech., travelling – to have a life.”*

Young people receiving benefits described how difficult it was to manage:

*“The brew’s [benefits] just £80 every 2 weeks. It’s not enough to live on.”*

*“You have £80 every two weeks to cover food, heating, electric, clothes, visiting family, having a social life.”*

*“If you have a baby, you get your £80 every 2 weeks + £17/week benefit to pay for all your bills, shopping, nappies, etc”*

In addition to the struggle of ‘making ends meet’, not having enough money was perceived to have an impact on mental health:

*“It’s the shortage of money that leads to kids being taken into care. The social see you’re not giving your child what they need. And it adds stress, which makes you depressed – it’s a vicious circle.”*

There is a disincentive to work more than 16 hours/ week because this affects young peoples’ Housing Benefit:

*“You can’t get a job if it’s more than 16 hours a week because this will affect your housing benefit.”*

*“If you’re paying £60/week rent and £45 for bills, food, clothes, transport and a social life you need to be earning at least £105/week.”*

Many young people work casual hours, so cannot depend on a certain amount of money each week. The benefits system does not allow for this:

*“You need your pay slips for each week, and it’s easy to lose them – and there’s always a delay before you get your money. But you still have to pay your rent and eat.”*

**Advice about benefits and allowances** was raised as an issue by the young mothers in the SAM Project, whose parents were usually the ones claiming benefits on their daughter’s behalf. Although most were happy for their mothers

to take on this role, they stated that they would like more information about their entitlements.

### **Messages for Government**

- *“Work with people to help me.”*
- *“Everybody in the world should have shelter.”*
- *“People in Africa get clean water for children”.*
- *“Dear Government, I think you should put more money into developing a cure for cancer to save the many people that die from it every year.”*
- *“Rich people should give half of their money to poor children that need it.”*
- *“The price of everything goes down.”*
- *“Why can’t young people earn money to enjoy themselves.”*
- *“To be provided with enough money and education as we need! – free for everybody.”*
- *“Reasonable amount of money for children and young people leaving care!”*
- *“More money for poor people.”*
- *“To have information about claiming benefits.”*
- *“[Being able to] claim for your child... money way and your choice if the child goes into a crèche.”*

## SPECIAL PROTECTIONS MEASURES

### PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICT [ARTICLE 38]

The New Start group talked about studying **child soldiers** in other countries as part of their lessons.

The UNCRC includes protection and care of **children affected by armed conflict**. The impact of 'the troubles' in Northern Ireland was evident in discussions about the continuing presence of paramilitaries or vigilante groups in communities:

*"[Young people] get punishment beatings... for f\*\*\*ing about, stealing cars, house burglaries."*

*"Some young people are forced to do stuff. They're pushed to the edge, and have to do stuff."*

Involvement in joy-riding was mentioned as a particular problem, with reasons given including:

*"because they have f\*\*\*-all to do*

*"because there are too many rules about driving"*

*"there's not enough to do, so young people steal cars".*

However, young people did not feel that responses within communities were appropriate:

*"But they shouldn't get knee-capped for doing that, or put out of the country" [by paramilitaries]*

### PROTECTION FROM ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION [ARTICLE 32]

Young people believed that they enjoyed this right, but some acknowledged that others in the world needed **protection from harmful work** (eg children working in 'sweatshops' or mines to cheaply produce goods for wealthy countries).

A couple of groups recognised that some young people in Northern Ireland do not receive **fair pay** for employment:

*"There's no minimum wage for under-16s (eg doing a paper round)."*

Employment opportunities for young people with disabilities are limited. If they are employed, it is usually in low paid and low status jobs:

*“They need real money for real work.”*

#### **ADMINISTRATION OF JUVENILE JUSTICE [ARTICLE 40]**

Young people in some groups commented that the UNCRC general principles (non-discrimination, best interests, respect for views and involvement in decision-making) were not implemented by those involved in the criminal justice system. Young people who were regularly out on the streets with friends generally had a negative **experience of the police**:

*“When you’re on the streets they [police] shout at you.”*

*“PSNI – don’t treat kids with respect.”*

*“They lift you and put you in the back of the jeep, take you to the station and don’t tell your ma.”*

While one young person stated: *“There are some good cops out there”*, a number raised issues of police brutality and sectarianism:

*“The PSNI can be abusive and sectarian.”*

*“The police hit young people.”*

Some young people stated that they were goaded by police officers. When they reacted, they believe the police responded punitively:

*“The cops started slagging me about Sinn Fein – ‘You’ll be in the PSNI soon’.”*

*“One wee man who tried to kill himself, the cops were shouting ‘Where’s the grave?’”*

*“They try to entice you to lose your temper – tell you you’re worthless, say things about your family to make you lose it.”*

*“They provoke you until you hit them. Then they can restrain you or hit you back.”*

Asked if they had ever complained about treatment by the police, the young people responded negatively:

*“No. The judge believes the cops all the time.”*

*“They wouldn’t listen to young people.”*

*“Got no faith in the system.”*

When asked why young people get involved in crime, one young person responded:

*“They do it because they’re poor and have f\*\*\* all to do. They get a buzz from driving. People wouldn’t do crime if they could get stuff [drugs] more easily. It’s [crime] still going on. The police do nothing. What do they do about it? They don’t care. Unless they have a chance to catch someone so it looks like they’re doing a good job.”*

Suggestions about **prevention of offending** included:

*“Open more community centres for young people, drop-ins, places to play pool, where everyone can get the craic going”.*

The Youth@CLC group discussed the introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (**ASBOs**), with one young person stating:

*“They’re a disgrace.”*

The group suggested alternative responses to young people behaving badly:

*“They should be helped.”*

*“Instead of spending money on ASBOs, you could spend the money on policing in communities.”*

Discussing their **treatment when arrested**, one young person talked about being held in a police cell overnight having been arrested for shoplifting when they were 15. They were released without charge the following day. Another described how they were:

*“kept in [police cells] over the weekend, even though you shouldn’t be held for more than 48 hours if you’re under 18.”*

A third young person stated:

*“When I got lifted [arrested], I got a kicking.”*

**Representation in Court** for children/ young people was generally perceived to be limited:

*“Representation is very poor.”*

*“Sometimes you get a crap attorney who doesn’t care.”*

*“No rights – you’re just expected to go and answer whatever questions you’re asked.”*

*“Lots of young people don’t understand what’s being said in court.”*

## **DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY [ARTICLE 37]**

Conditions in **police custody** were poor:

*“The cells smell like piss, they’re dirty, they have brown mattresses and blankets.”*

Although young people are supposed to be separated from adults while in **youth custody**, one young woman stated:

*“I’ve been in prison with adult women.”*

Another young person described life in the Juvenile Justice Centre:

*“You’re woken at 5 in the morning. All you do is go to the gym. It gets boring. It’s all routines and I hate routines.”*

### **Messages for Government**

- *“Why is it that the little countries get attacked like Poland, Ireland and Belgium, and how did the big countries get that right. In war children get the worst, like no food or water. It’s just not fair.”*
- *“Legalise weed [cannabis] – it will calm everyone down and lower the crime rate and bring other people off the underground market.”*
- *“Things put in place to protect young people from police brutality.”*
- *“To be treated properly when arrested.”*
- *“Making sure that young people’s rights are being heard, especially young people in custody.”*

## APPENDIX 1: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CONSULTED

In total, 132 children and young people were consulted. 63 were female, 69 were male. Their ages ranged from 4 to 25. Five groups involved children, mainly 10-14 years of age (Total: 68; Female:28, Male:40); seven groups involved young people, mainly 15-25 year olds (Total: 64; Female:35, Male:29). The groups were based in Belfast (8), Armagh (1) and Derry/Londonderry (3).

The children and young people were contacted through organisations working with specific groups, including: children; children with special educational needs; Travellers; care leavers; children/ young people with disabilities; young people in conflict with the law; lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transsexual (LGBT) young people; children/ young people from minority ethnic communities; young parents; young people in alternative education projects. Some groups included children/ young people whose identities or experiences combined a number of these categories.

Following initial telephone contact, 9 organisations were sent information about the consultation process. Having discussed this with colleagues and children/ young people, and agreed to take part, each organisation was sent an information pack containing:

- a letter from the Head of the Children and Young People's Unit, OFMDFM
- an Information Sheet for children/ young people explaining why the consultation was being carried out and what their involvement would mean
- a summary of the reporting process to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and sources of further information
- a copy of the *Getting It Right* Report (Children's Law Centre/ Save the Children, 1999)
- copies of the children's version, the young people's version and the full report: *Children's Rights in Northern Ireland* (NICCY, 2004).

Telephone and email contact were then used to negotiate and agree times, venues and activities for the consultation meetings. Each group was asked to participate in two meetings. At the first they discussed what rights they felt children/ young people in Northern Ireland should have; whether or not they actually have these, and reasons if not; which cluster of rights each child/ young person thought was most important; and their messages for Government. At the second meeting, the children/ young people shared their views and messages with relevant civil servants.

Organisation and Group	Ages	Meeting 1		Meeting 2		Total no. consulted	Total no. of F	Total no. of M
		F	M	F	M			
Derry Children's Commission Share Project – Oakgrove Integrated Primary + Foyle View Special School [Share]	10-11	12 4	15 4	12 4	15 4	35	16	19
Derry Children's Commission Troy College – Belmont House Special School [Troy]	11-13	2	9	3 (+1)	9	12	3	9
Derry Children's Commission Traveller After School Club [Travellers]	4-11	4	6	4	6	10	4	6
Chinese Welfare Association Generation Y Club 10-14s [Gen. Y 10-14s]	10-14	2	4	1	4	6	2	4
Children's Law Centre Youth@CLC [Youth@CLC]	13-15	3	2	3	2	5	3	2
New Start Alternative Education Project [New Start]	14-16	8	4	6	5 (+1)	13	8	5
Belfast School-Aged Mothers project [SAM]	15-18	5	0	4 (+2)	0	7	7	0
Chinese Welfare Association Generation Y Club 15-19s [Gen. Y 15-19s]	15-19	2	2	2	1	4	2	2
Include Youth Young Voices Project [Young Voices]	16-21	2	4	1	5 (+2)	8	2	6
Barnardo's Disabled Ch'n & YP's Participation [6 <sup>th</sup> Sense]	16-24	6	2	6 (+1)	3 (+1)	10	7	3
Gay and Lesbian Youth NI [GLYNI]	16-25	3	8	4 (+2)	10 (+4)	17	5	12
Barnardo's Leaving Care Project [Care Leavers]	18-23	4	1	4	1	5	4	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>57</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>69</b>

**APPENDIX 2: NUMBER OF GROUPS RAISING EACH ISSUE WITHIN UNCRC  
CLUSTERS OF RIGHTS**

**GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

Issue	10-14s (out of 5 groups )	15-25s (out of 7 groups)	Total (out of 12 groups)
<b>Non-discrimination</b>			
<i>Being treated equally</i>	3	1	4
<i>Age</i>	1	2	3
<i>Gender</i>	1	1	2
<i>Sexuality</i>		2	2
<i>Disability</i>	2	2	4
<i>Criminal record</i>		1	1
<b>Best interests</b>			
<i>Professionals acting in the child's best interests</i>		1	1
<b>Life, survival and development</b>			
<i>Food, water and shelter</i>	4	4	8
<i>Clean environment</i>	2		2
<i>Right to life</i>	2	2	4
<b>Participation</b>			
<i>Negative assumptions about young people</i>	1	2	3
<i>Being treated with respect</i>	2	5	7
<i>Being listened to</i>	4	3	7
<i>Being involved in decisions</i>	3	5	8

**CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS**

Issue	10-14s (out of 5 groups )	15-25s (out of 7 groups)	Total (out of 12 groups)
<b>Freedom of expression</b>			
<i>Involvement in decisions in the family</i>	1		1
<i>Freedom of speech</i>	2	2	4
<b>Freedom of thought, conscience and religion</b>			
<i>Being able to practise own religion/ culture</i>	2	5	7
<b>Freedom of association and peaceful assembly</b>			
<i>Peaceful assembly of specific groups (Gay and Lesbian, Travellers, groups of young people on the streets, young people in conflict with the law)</i>		2	2
<b>Access to appropriate information</b>			
<i>Information about drugs, sexual health, pregnancy</i>	1	4	5
<i>Role of the media</i>	1	2	3
<b>Right to privacy</b>			
<i>Privacy while in care or hostels</i>		1	1
<i>Privacy in police and youth custody</i>		1	1

## FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

Issue	10-14s (out of 5 groups )	15-25s (out of 7 groups)	Total (out of 12 groups)
<b>Children deprived of their family environment</b>			
<i>Having a home</i>	2	2	4
<i>Having a family</i>	3	1	4
<i>Being 'looked after' (in care)</i>		2	2
<i>Accommodation for care leavers</i>		2	2
<b>Protection from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect</b>			
<i>Protection from abuse/ being safe</i>	3	3	6
<i>Support for young people (about family and personal problems)</i>	1	4	5
<i>Corporal punishment</i>	1		1
<b>Parental responsibilities, assisted by the Government</b>			
<i>Support for parents of young people who identify as LGBT</i>		1	1
<i>Support for parents who are substance users or experiencing domestic violence</i>		1	1
<i>Support for parents of children in trouble</i>		1	1
<i>Support for parents of young people with disabilities</i>		1	1

## EDUCATION, PLAY AND LEISURE

Issue	10-14s (out of 5 groups)	15-25s (out of 7 groups)	Total (out of 12 groups)
<b>Right to education</b>			
<i>Education for all</i>	4	2	6
<i>Exclusion/ dropping out</i>		2	2
<i>Training and vocational education</i>	1	4	5
<i>Higher Education</i>		1	1
<i>Support for young parents</i>		1	1
<i>Transition for disabled young people</i>		1	1
<b>Aims of education</b>			
<i>Relevant education</i>		2	2
<i>Developing every child to their fullest potential – meeting individual needs</i>	1	2	3
<i>Specialist teachers/ additional support</i>		2	2
<i>Resources/ equipment</i>	1	1	2
<i>Approaches to teaching</i>	2	1	3
<i>Sex and Relationship Education</i>		2	2
<i>Bullying</i>	2	4	6
<i>RE</i>		2	2
<i>Integrated schools</i>		1	1

<b>Right to play and leisure</b>			
<i>Having (safe) places to play</i>	5	2	7
<i>More youth clubs (for 13+, open after 10pm and at weekends)</i>	1	2	3
<i>More parks/ open spaces</i>	3	1	4
<i>More community-based activities</i>		1	1
<i>Places to go with mates</i>	1	2	3
<i>Having fun</i>	4		4
<i>Inclusive activities for disabled children and young people</i>	2	2	4

## BASIC HEALTH AND WELFARE

Issue	10-14s (out of 5 groups )	15-25s (out of 7 groups)	Total (out of 12 groups)
<b>Right to health</b>			
<i>Children being healthy</i>	1	1	2
<b>Right to health care</b>			
<i>Access to healthcare – free if under 18</i>	2	6	8
<i>Information about STDs</i>		1	1
<i>Counselling and support</i>	1	3	4
<i>Information and support for LGBT young people</i>		1	1
<b>Health care and support for young people with disabilities</b>			
<i>Health care/ special care and assistance</i>		2	2
<i>Being independent</i>		1	1
<b>Right to an adequate standard of living</b>			
<i>Not having enough money</i>	2	4	6
<i>Advice about benefits and allowances</i>		1	1

## SPECIAL PROTECTIONS

Issue	10-14s (out of 5 groups)	15-25s (out of 7 groups)	Total (out of 12 groups)
<b>Protection of children affected by armed conflict</b>			
<i>Child soldiers</i>		1	1
<i>Children affected by armed conflict</i>	1	1	2
<b>Protection from economic exploitation - child labour</b>			
<i>Protection from harmful work</i>		1	1
<i>Fair pay for young people</i>		2	2
<b>Administration of youth justice</b>			
<i>Experience of the police</i>	1	2	3
<i>ASBOs</i>	1	1	2
<i>Prevention of offending</i>		1	1
<i>Treatment when arrested</i>		1	1
<i>Representation in court</i>	1	2	3
<i>Police custody</i>		2	2
<i>Youth custody</i>		1	1

### APPENDIX 3: WHICH CLUSTER OF RIGHTS IS MOST IMPORTANT?

99 children and young people each chose the UNCRC cluster of rights they thought was most important. (The children/ young people in the Traveller After School Club and Young Voices Project did not complete this activity.)

Given its significance for all ages, 'Play and Leisure' was presented as a cluster (rather than within Education).

Overall, 'Civil Rights and Freedoms' was chosen as the most important cluster of rights:

UNCRC CLUSTER	TOTAL (of 99)	Share	Troy	Gen. Y 10-14s	Youth @CLC	New Start	SAM	Gen. Y 15-19s	6 <sup>th</sup> Sense	GLY NI	Care Leavers
Civil Rights and freedoms	21	5		1	1	5	2	2		4	1
Family Environment and Alternative Care	18 ½	7	4	3		1		½		3	
Play and Leisure	17	8	3	1					4		1
Health and Welfare	13 ½	6			2			½	3	1	1
Education	11	3		1		1	2			3	1
Special Protection	8		2			4		1			1
General Principles	6		2		2	1	1				
Implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	4	3							1		

For children (mainly 10-14), the most important cluster of rights was 'Family Environment and Alternative Care':

UNCRC CLUSTER	TOTAL (of 54)	Share	Troy	Gen. Y 10-14s	Youth @CLC
Family Environment and Alternative Care	14	7	4	3	
Play and Leisure	12	8	3	1	
Health and Welfare	8	6			2
Civil Rights and Freedoms	7	5		1	1
General Principles	4		2		2
Education	4	3		1	
Implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	3	3			
Special Protection	2		2		

For young people (mainly 15-25), the most important cluster of rights was 'Civil Rights and Freedoms':

<b>UNCRC CLUSTER</b>	<b>TOTAL (of 45)</b>	<b>New Start</b>	<b>SAM</b>	<b>Gen. Y 15-19s</b>	<b>6<sup>th</sup> Sense</b>	<b>GLYNI</b>	<b>Care Leavers</b>
<b>Civil Rights and Freedoms</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>			<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Special Protection</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>1</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>Health and Welfare</b>	<b>5 ½</b>			<b>½</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Play and Leisure</b>	<b>5</b>				<b>4</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>Family Environment and Alternative Care</b>	<b>4 ½</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>½</b>		<b>3</b>	
<b>General Principles</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>				
<b>Implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</b>	<b>1</b>				<b>1</b>		