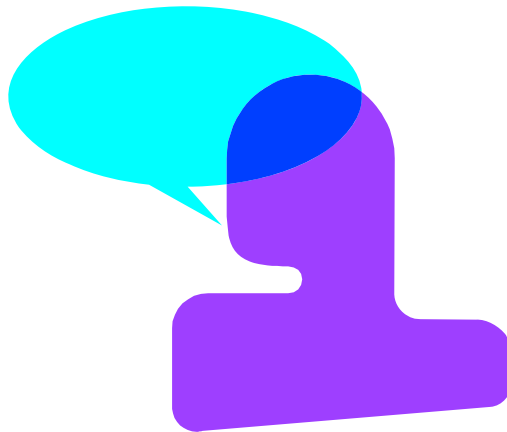


**NORTHERN IRELAND REPORT FOR UK GOVERNMENT REPORT
TO THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE
RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

**CONSULTATION WITH
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S REPORT



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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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

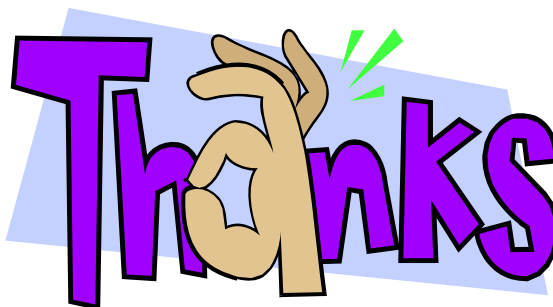
I'd like to acknowledge the time given by the children and young people in each group consulted – thank you for participating and talking so honestly about your experiences and thoughts. The quotes and your messages will help to inform Government on protecting and promoting children and young people's rights in Northern Ireland.

Thanks also to those with whom I directly negotiated access to groups: Eilis Gill, Jonny Ashe, Deborah McKenna, Mairead McCafferty, Rosemary Ramzy, Mat Crozier, Rosemary Murray, Liam Larmour, Nuala Ferris-Magennis. I really appreciated your commitment to ensuring that the voices of the children and young people with whom you work are heard, and that the consultation was a meaningful process for everyone involved.

Finally, thanks to Eilís McDaniel, former Head of the Children and Young People's Unit (OFMDFM), who commissioned the consultation and met with each group. Also to other civil servants who attended consultation meetings to hear what the groups had to say and their messages for Government, including: Aideen Donnelly, Fergal Bradley, Louise Warde-Hunter, Cathy Galway, Tony Kavanagh, Judith Shaw, Jenny Rushe, Gordon Campbell, Theresa Robinson.

Deena Haydon

May 2007



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CONSULTED



132 children and young people, aged 4-25, were consulted. 63 were female, 69 were male. 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 (Share, Youth@CLC); children/ young people with special educational needs (Troy); Travellers (Traveller After School Club); care leavers (Care Leavers); children/ young people with disabilities (6th Sense); young people in conflict with the law (Young Voices); lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transsexual young people (GLYNI); children/ young people from minority ethnic communities (Generation Y); young parents (SAM Project); young people in an alternative education project (New Start). Some groups included children/ young people whose identities or experiences combined a number of these categories.

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 (group) of rights in the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC) 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.

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.

Rights are:

- 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 (NICCY) 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."*

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Non-discrimination [Article 2]

'Being treated equally' was a right noted by a number of groups, best explained by 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."

Children and young people talked about being treated differently because of their **age**, **gender** (being a boy or girl), **sexuality** (being gay, lesbian or bi-sexual), **disability** and having a **criminal record**.

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 healthy **food, water and shelter** was noted by both children and young people:

"Children should have a right to have a shelter and clean water and food."

"Children have a right to nutritious food and clean water."



Although most believed that they had access to food, some said this was *"Not [a right] for everyone"*, particularly in families experiencing poverty.

School meals were thought to be unhealthy:



"If you're vegetarian, you have no options in school - there are just different forms of potatoes."

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

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



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

“Right to have... fresh air.”

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

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.”

Children and young people did not think they were **being treated with respect**.

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

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

Being listened to was an important right for children, who thought that their rights should include:

“To take part.”

“The rights to be listened to.”

“People listen.”

“Teachers and adults listen to children.”

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

This right was particularly important in protecting them 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 resented not being listened to by adults:

“Nobody listens.”

“Adults don’t act on what we say.”

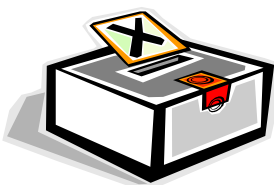
“Some adults don’t think kids or young people have anything worth saying.”

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

“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!”

Children and young people believed that not **being involved in decisions** happened in every part of their lives. For example:

- in courts: *“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.”*
- at school: *“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.”*



Some young people felt that: *“Young people don’t have any rights.”*

There is no way that children/ young people, as a group, can make their views heard: *“Young people can’t vote.”* They suggested 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].*

Disabled young people felt that their right to have a say was respected through their involvement in the 6th Sense group and the way the group worked. But they thought there should be more Participation Workers across Northern Ireland.

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”* especially if under 16 (when decisions were often made by their parents).



Young people in conflict with the law did not feel listened to or involved in decision-making in any 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 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.”

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 **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, most groups believed that this right was not enjoyed by children or young people: *“Young people are not listened to and told to shut up by teachers, parents, clergy.”*

The Generation Y group commented that this right *“Depends on whether it is socially acceptable”* to encourage children and young people to say what they think. They did not think this was the case in our society at the minute.



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:

“People can be attacked because of their religion.”... “Like Catholics and Protestants.”

“Especially in Northern Ireland – sectarianism – Protestants here, and Catholics here.”



Generation Y (a group including young people from minority ethnic communities) 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.”

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 [Juvenile Justice Centre]. And my ASBO stopped me meeting certain young people.”

Access to appropriate information [Article 17]

Access to information (eg about drugs, sexual health, pregnancy) is affected by literacy (being able to read). One young person said: *“I want to know how to do things myself. But I can’t read.”*



Others did not know where to find information, and 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.”

Some believed that: *“Information about drugs, pregnancy, drink etc should be provided in primary as well as high school”*. Others argued that this sort of 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.”*

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 thought this was: *“OK – because it’s there for the right reasons... to make sure you don’t do anything stupid.”*

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

“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.”

“On visits one person stays in the room – doesn’t say [anything at all], just sits there.”

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.”

“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 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.”

They thought that foster care was better than residential care: “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.”

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.”]

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 suggested that: “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 or harm or abuse, and finding the right person to tell:

“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.”

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.*”

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 talking about family life, one child in the Troy group emphasised that:

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

Young people were aware that sometimes parents need extra support. For example, **parents of young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or trans-sexual (LGBT)** may find it difficult to deal with their child’s sexuality when they come ‘out’. [This can lead to young people’s homelessness, D.H.].

There may be times when **parents who are substance users or experiencing domestic violence** need extra support.

The Young Voices group talked about support for **parents of young people in trouble with the law**. “*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.*”

Those in the 6th Sense group felt that **parents of children and young people with disabilities** don’t have enough support: “*They need support above the level of other parents to cope at different times.*”

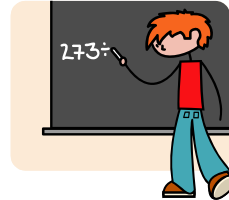
EDUCATION, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

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.”



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.”*

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.”

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

Access to vocational training and employment is 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.”*



Disabled young people believed they were not given the opportunity to achieve meaningful qualifications. For this to happen, mainstream training would have to be adapted, with assessment of their needs and support requirements at an early stage.

The Care Leavers group agreed 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. The group also recognised that self-esteem and confidence were vital: *“Some people don’t have the belief in themselves that they could go.”*

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 because they 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.”*

One group suggested that schools should have **specialist teachers** to support children with special needs or to provide counselling. Another group argued that all schools should give **additional support** to 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 had enough **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.”

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."

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 discussing education, a number of young people talked about **sex and relationship education** (SRE), saying that 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 is still a taboo subject: *"If we have civil partnerships now, and homosexuality is recognised as a way of life, why is this not recognised in schools?"*

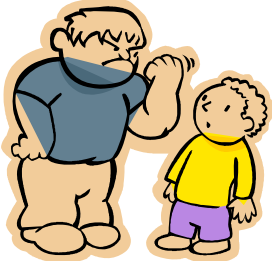
Sexual health information is restricted, particularly for lesbian and gay young people:

"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."



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]

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.”

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

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

Homosexuality is not addressed in **Religious Education** (RE) lessons: *“In RE we had to read about abortion but couldn’t mention homosexuality.”*



Emphasis is placed on Christianity: *“RE doesn’t respect 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’.”

The need for more **Integrated schools** was raised by some young people. 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.”

Right to play and leisure [Article 31]

One of the children in the Traveller group said: *“It’s important for children to play.”*

For these children, playing outside was especially important:

“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.” “Like to play in the garden.”

“I like to play in my bedroom and my back yard.”

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 ball games.... nothing to do but stand and drink, sniff glue.”

Many argued that there should be **more youth clubs**, which are open after 10.30pm, at weekends and during holidays, providing activities for 17-25 year olds. They also suggested that there should be **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.”

And a range of **community-based activities**:

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



“[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.”*

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.”*

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 cafés – 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.

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

Access to mental health care was a particular problem: *"You're always on the waiting list."*

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 sexual health information, 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."*

But, 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's an interview room – people know who goes and might make a big deal about it."

They commented that they did not think teachers were 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."

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.”

Information and support for LGBT young people was a specific issue - gay or lesbian young people did not feel able to approach staff in school because they feared that if they spoke with teachers or counsellors, they would be ‘outed’ to their parents. They did not think that teachers respected confidentiality and 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.”*

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. When a disabled young person leaves school, the services they received while at school (eg physiotherapy) end. The 6th Sense group believed that the transition age for young people with disabilities should be 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” - 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. 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 they 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 a good standard of living may not be enjoyed by everybody:

"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]."*

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.

SPECIAL PROTECTION 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... stealing cars, house burglaries."*

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 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 youth justice [Article 40]

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.”



While one young person stated: *“There are some good cops out there”*, a number raised issues of police brutality: *“The PSNI can be abusive and sectarian.”*

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

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.”

Children/ young people did not feel that their **representation in Court** was good: *“Lots of young people don’t understand what’s being said in court.”*

Deprivation of liberty [Article 37]

Young people believed conditions in **police custody** were poor. One young woman stated: *“I’ve been in prison with adult women.”*