



**EVIDENCE SUBMITTED TO NORTHERN IRELAND
POLICING BOARD'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE'S THEMATIC
INQUIRY ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

“What we need is a bit of support and understanding, what we get is told we’re bad and end up on the receiving end of police and paramilitaries.”

July 2009

Introduction

Include Youth promotes best practice with young people in need or at risk. We achieve this through the development and promotion of resources, the provision of training, information and support of practitioners and organisations. We also undertake activities aimed at influencing public policy and policy awareness – both locally and nationally.

Include Youth promotes the development of positive choices and opportunities for vulnerable and challenging young people in the community, residential care or custody. Include Youth promotes the use of community alternatives to care and custody for children and young people.

Amongst the young people at risk with whom, and on whose behalf, Include Youth works are young people from socially disadvantaged areas, those with a learning disability, those with special needs, those who have been truanting, suspended or expelled from school, those from a care background, those who had a negative parenting experience, young people who have committed or are at risk of committing crime, misusing drugs or alcohol, undertaking unsafe sexual behaviour or other harmful activities, or of being harmed themselves.

Include Youth manages the LACE (Looked After Children in Education) Project which is a multi-agency partnership with the aim of promoting better educational outcomes for children and young people in care.

The Give and Take Scheme aims to improve the employability and increase the self esteem of young people in need or at risk from across Northern Ireland. The Scheme works with approximately 135 young people from a care or criminal justice background. The Scheme aims to support young people to overcome particular barriers that prevent them from moving into mainstream training or employment and towards independent living. 75% of people on the Scheme are care experienced and we have strong partnership with all Trusts, YJA, PBNI and Careers service. The Scheme provides essential skills training (ICT, English and maths) to all of the young people.

In addition, Include Youth runs the YOYO Practitioners Forum, which draws together professionals from a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations working directly with young people in need or at risk, and meets on a quarterly basis.

Include Youth's Young Voices project is a way of delivering participative democracy to marginalised young people in Northern Ireland. Its main aim is to support young people at risk or with experience of the criminal justice system, as well as young people marginalised for a variety of reasons, to become involved in decision making processes which impact on their lives, particularly in social welfare, education and criminal justice matters. The project works with a range of groups of young people in the community and both juvenile and youth custody facilities in Northern Ireland.

Include Youth welcomes this thematic review undertaken by the NI Policing Board. We recognise that this is the first stage of this process and are very much looking forward to working with the Board as it progresses this work.

The Policing Of Anti-Social Behaviour Including Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

General Comments on Image of Young People

We agree with the statement in the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, that the widespread perception is that children and young people are responsible for the majority of anti-social behaviour. This widely held public perception undoubtedly has an impact on how young people are treated by the police on our streets and as the Terms of Reference suggests, this perception can 'taint' how a police officer will interact with all young people. Many people's knowledge of young people often comes from the media and hearsay and not based on direct experience. This results in young people being perceived as a threat to public safety and generally up to "no good". We are not naïve enough to believe that all young people are not a threat to society and clearly there is a small minority who do pose a threat and a danger to themselves and others. Where we do take exception is the portrayal that many young people are a threat and measures must be introduced to curb their behaviour even when neither threatening nor criminal.

Young people are not immune to the harm that this general demonisation can do. There is a real danger that this discourse becomes self perpetuating serving only to marginalise an already disaffected group in our community.

'All my life people have had a bad opinion of me. People's Ma's were always saying: "don't go near him, he's bad". All you have to do is get in trouble once or twice and that's you for life – you're stuck with a bad reputation.'

'You walk past people in the street and they just look at you and shake their head. You know what they're thinking. They think that they're better than you. Like they're better educated, or they've got more money.'

'It makes you angry – it makes you want to do things (offences) again – to put one over on them, to prove they weren't going to beat you. Like you'd go and shoplift.'

'It makes you feel bad cos they think they're better than you – you feel crap, cos they've got a better education, a better future, a better life'

'No adults treat young people with respect – I wear a hood, I am a hood.'

'Young people are not valued in our society. We are all labelled as bad news, as trouble, nagged at.'

Include Youth believes that a concerted effort must be made by the criminal justice system (and beyond) to ensure an accurate portrayal of children and young people.

Following its recent examination of the UK Government, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child raised concerns about:

'The general climate of intolerance and negative public attitudes towards children, especially adolescents, which appears to exist in the State party, including in the media, and may be often the underlying cause of further infringement of their rights.'

Include Youth's views on ASBOs

Include Youth's objections to ASBOs are well documented and it is well known that we see them as a significant breach of children's rights. We completely concur with the words of the Council of Europe's Commissioner of Human Rights who said of ASBOs:

‘One cannot wonder that their purpose is not more to reassure the public that something is being done ... than the actual prevention of the anti-social behaviour.’ (Mr Alvaro Gil-Robles, Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights, June 2005)

On a general level, they fail to take account of the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and impact unequally on children and young people with already complex needs.

We remain concerned about the fact that the definition of anti-social behaviour (harassment, alarm or distress) is too subjective thereby ensuring that any challenge is unlikely to succeed. Also, as ASBOs are civil orders there is a lower burden of proof with hearsay and professional evidence being admissible hearings. This results in a blurring of civil and criminal law and young people as a result can find themselves unwittingly committing a criminal offence. The leap from committing behaviour which is not actually deemed as being criminal to appearing in court being criminalised in respect of breach of the Order is one which is made too easily for many.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have already raised several concerns about the introduction of ASBOs. In their concluding observations in 2008 they stated:

‘The Committee is concerned at the restriction imposed on the freedom of movement and peaceful assembly of children by the anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) ... as well as by the use of the so called “mosquito devices” and the introduction of the concept of “dispersed zones”

80. The Committee recommends that the State party conduct an independent review on the ASBOs with a view to abolishing their application to children.’
(UNCRC, 2008: paras 34, 35, 79 and 80)

In the recently published draft Community Safety Strategy, ‘Together, Stronger, Safer’, it would appear that the NIO have completely ignored this advice and even more critically are actually suggesting extending the application of ASBOs and the powers the relevant agencies have with regard to anti-social behaviour.

We believe that these actions are in breach of human rights legislation, namely Article 6 (right to a fair trial), Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life), Article 10 (right to freedom of expression and Article 11 (right to freedom of assembly) of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), as incorporated by the Human Rights Act 1998. We also note the failure to have regard to Article 14 of the ECHR, the Right to Enjoyment of Rights and Freedoms without Discrimination.

ASBOs only serve to exclude and further demonise marginalised young people. Being tough on children and young people is not the answer to address deeply rooted problems within communities.

Use of ASBOs to date in NI

Despite their widespread use in England and Wales there is a relatively limited use of ASBOs in Northern Ireland. This is largely as a result of a widespread campaign against their introduction, led by NGOs. We continue to monitor their implementation and subsequent impact on young people. The Criminal Justice Inspectorate's inspection of the operation and effectiveness of ASBOs, concluded that alternatives are as effective, if not more effective (CJINI, 2008). While we welcome the relatively low level of use of ASBOs in NI to date, we remain concerned about a potential increase of their use. They do nothing to address the causes of offending behaviour or engage the young person in any rehabilitative process.

Young Voices Views on ASBOs

Young Voices submitted their own response to the initial consultation document on the introduction of ASBOs and we would like to draw the Committee's attention to their views as expressed in that response (Young Voices, 2004).

The young people believed that ASBOs would only serve to alienate them further from their communities. As one participant explained:

'young people like us already get the blame for near enough everything. I suppose it's easy to do that – blame it on the teenagers. But people just don't know the lives we lead, the problems a lot of us have, and that what we need is a bit of support and understanding – what we get is told we're bad and end up on the receiving end of police and / or paramilitaries'.

The group felt that all young people needed support, but that some probably needed more than others. Young Voices believes (as does Include Youth generally) that it is important to engage with at risk and challenging young people, not blame them for everything and criminalize them unnecessarily.

Young people were very concerned that breach of a civil order could lead to a criminal sanction, including custody. All the young people believed that these proposals were neither necessary nor fair. Some members of the group expressed the view that this was a case of the government unfairly picking on young people, and getting them *'by fair means or foul'*.

There was a long discussion in relation to how these proposals could impact upon the actions of paramilitaries with regard to young people. Time and time again, when Include Youth speaks to young people at risk, the single most terrifying thing that they fear is paramilitary threat or attack.

Therefore, the content of the measures proposed – particularly in relation to naming and shaming – deeply shocked all of the young people involved. The general feeling was that *'the government is just making it easier for the paramilitaries'*. The Young Voices group strongly believes that if these naming and shaming provisions are implemented here, it will leave already vulnerable young people in a very precarious, indeed life-threatening position.

'They are leading the paramilitaries right to the young person's door.'

Young people attending the session also commented upon the fact that victims of this 'naming and shaming' policy would be much more easily preyed upon by paedophiles. Such predators would be given key personal information about the young person, including name and photograph, and importantly would also be alerted to the very real possibility that he or she is vulnerable and isolated. This left all members of Young Voices deeply concerned and unsafe. One young mother asked the question whether government was just interested in protecting

babies from abuse: *'there is all this focus about child protection and that is a good thing, but don't they realise that older children can become victims of sexual abuse too?'*

All members of the group expressed concern that these proposals will extend the PSNI's discretionary powers. The young people voiced concern about the potential for abuse and feared that the measures could be experienced as an increase in harassment. These views have been expressed by young people who have in the main had a negative experience of policing, and who believe themselves to have been the victims of police harassment on occasion.

The Community Safety Strategy Which May Include Proposals for Dispersal Zones, Parenting Support Orders, Parental Compensation Orders, Family Intervention Orders and Powers to Close Premises

General Comments

Include Youth submitted a detailed response to the NIO Draft Community Safety Strategy and the following comments draw heavily from that paper. In the course of preparing our response we consulted with practitioners and with young people from Include Youth's Young Voices project. We are aware that the Strategy is entering a further phase of development and consultation and welcome the NIPB's interest in this area as it is likely to have significant impact on the relationship and interaction of police with communities generally and young people specifically.

While we wholeheartedly support the overall aim of the community safety strategy 'to make Northern Ireland a safer place to live, work and socialise', we are extremely concerned about many aspects of the proposed strategy which we believe are misdirected and ill thought out, and if some aspects of it are introduced, could potentially set the good work that is being undertaken with families and young people at risk back drastically. We believe that children and young people must be viewed as partners in endeavours to make communities safer not as the subject of measures aimed at controlling them and their behaviour.

Proposals such as those outlined in the draft Community Safety Strategy serve to feed into an unjustified "fear of crime" within the community, in particular in relation to the children and young people. The suggestions are punitive and sensationalist and reinforce negative media and public representation of young people.

Specific Comments

Dispersal Zones

Include Youth is deeply concerned about the proposed introduction of Dispersal Zones. Dispersal Orders are discriminatory against children and young people with scant regard to due process and human rights. Dispersal Zones are directed more towards young people and in particular young males and thus are discriminatory on the grounds of age and sex. If implemented they will further increase the likelihood of criminalisation of young people.

The establishment of curfew and dispersal zones from which under 16 year olds can be removed irrespective of committal, or even suspicion, of 'bad behaviour' has also been subject to legal challenge. In 2005, the High Court ruled this particular police power to be in breach of the international obligation to 'treat' each child as an autonomous human being' (Muncie and Goldson, 2006: 40).

There is potential for young people to be moved on and targeted simply because a police officer deems them to be likely to engage in anti social behaviour, when in fact they may simply have gathered to socialise and 'hang out', something which is clearly not a criminal offence. As one commentator has stated:

'Guilt is no longer the founding principle of youth justice. Intervention can be triggered without an "offence" being committed, premised instead upon a "condition", a "character" or a "mode of life" that is adjudged to be a "failing" or posing "risk". This

comprises a major departure from the fundamental principles of youth justice... children face judgement, and are exposed to intervention, not only on the basis of what they have done, but what they might do, who they are or who they are thought to be' (Muncie and Goldson, 2006: 41).

These proposals are simply responding to media coverage which repeatedly demonises all young people and fuels the assumption that any group of young people gathered together on the street are a threat to community safety. This is not the case - young people should have every right, as other sections of society, to meet and talk with their friends. The young people we work with do not have the luxury of having a place of their own to invite friends to and neither do they have the money to meet in social venues such as bars, cafes and restaurants. Why should they be penalised just because they do not have anywhere else to be? The street is where they have to be if they are to socialise and hang out together. These proposals are clearly aimed at young people and are based on totally unfounded and simplistic perceptions of youth culture. In a recent consultation undertaken by the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People it was clear that one of the biggest issues for children and young people across NI was "things to do" – there is insufficient play or leisure facilities for our younger citizens particularly those children aged 13 to 17 years.

If this were any other group of individuals, who were standing about, chatting in a group, they would not be subject to this discriminatory action. For example, a group of parents gathered at school gates after pick up time, are unlikely to be told to move on or have that spot named as a dispersal zone!

'if they keep moving us on, it's obvious that people will just get locked up. Cos people get sick of being moved on, but you have to stand somewhere, so there'll just be people getting pissed off, getting moved on from one place to another, and with drink, someone will just crack.'

'that's why I don't drink on the street, it just leads to trouble – I just get myself into nightclubs instead.'

'aye, it's alright for you 'cos you look old enough, but most people can't, they've nowhere to go.'

We are also concerned about the proposed new power which the PSNI and NIHE may have to ask people from an area to leave and not return for 24 hours and also to take a child under the age of 16 home or to another safe place between the hours of 9pm and 6am. We are deeply concerned about the consequences for those children who refuse to submit to these measures, as ultimately they will be deemed to be committing an offence. This provision has been heavily criticised in England and Wales and we are appalled that the NIO can think of adopting such draconian and discriminatory practice in NI. It will potentially result in children who are doing nothing more than being out of their homes past 9pm being classed as criminals.

Furthermore, these proposals do not recognise that for some young people, being brought home will actually result in them being placed in danger of being harmed. For too many young people, home is not a safe place.

'I used to wait for my Da, like, and he'd take off on us for nothing ... belt, fists, anything he could use. I was bullied all through my childhood. There were always fights in the house, like. And then I got it at school. You were going through enough at home, you didn't expect it in

school, like. Then it was on the street with the peelers. You've got the attitude problem. You feel like a hurt animal, just waiting to be released.'

The young people shared their experiences and talked of always having to negotiate the violence in their lives. Much of it was within the family and at school, the two places that many other children experience as safe havens.

Again, this reflects the failure of the draft community safety strategy to fully understand the reality of some young people's lives potentially placing children at young people at risk. These are simplistic and punitive measures which do not have the best interests of children and young people at their heart. The PSNI, as a key authority responsible for the "safeguarding" of all children and young people has sufficient powers to take a child home or to a relevant place of safety through child protection and safeguarding regulations which are more likely to result with the "best interests" of the child being the central consideration and the child or young person being safe rather than criminalised or labelled anti-social.

Individual Support Orders/ Parenting Support Orders/ Parental Compensation Orders

We are concerned that Individual Support Orders will be disproportionately used against young people and by their very nature will impose further requirements on children, increasing the likelihood of breaches of Orders and widespread criminalisation of children and young people. Likewise Include Youth does not support the introduction of Parenting Support Orders to NI. We believe rather than reducing offending and 'anti-social behaviour' they will actually increase hardship for many families and young people and further demonise children, young people and parents who are already struggling to cope in exceptionally difficult circumstances.

Punitive measures will not reduce offending. What is needed is an overarching response which meets people's needs across the board, in relation to poverty, health, housing and employment. So we wholeheartedly support the move to increase assistance to families contained within the community safety strategy. The young people themselves recognise the need for it and those working in the voluntary and community sector can see what a positive impact correctly delivered programmes can make to families. However, we believe the strategy underestimates the complexities of delivering such provision and does not acknowledge the existing work being undertaken by other statutory organisations such as health and social care and education in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. Furthermore, we completely oppose the notion of enforcement as we feel this runs contrary to the ethos of positive parenting.

Parental Compensation Orders are in contravention of the UNCRC and other relevant international standards, as it imposes fines and criminal sanctions for acts that are carried out by children who are legally presumed to be incapable of 'offending behaviour' thereby making any evidence impossible to obtain. This measure has the effect of lowering the age of criminal responsibility through the "back door" and Include Youth is appalled by this proposal. Imposing fines on parents who are already struggling financially will simply deepen the extent of poverty in Northern Ireland.

Alternative approach to community safety needed

Rather than suggesting a "populist" and punitive approach community safety initiatives must work alongside young people, their families and communities, relevant government departments, and voluntary and community representatives to address issues which impact on health, education, family life, media representation, policing, domestic violence, play and

leisure and alcohol and drug misuse. We would guard against the adoption of a interventions that are reactionary and punitive and have encouraged the authorities to think again about the measures within it and rather than punishing our young people, seek to understand the reality of their lives. We believe it is imperative that children and young people are seen as partners in the fight against the causes of crime. Our experience is that young people in conflict with the law have considerable, pertinent experience which they are eager to share when they feel listened to, valued and treated with respect.

Alternatives Such As Diversionary Disposals and Community Restorative Justice

As part of our response to the NIO Draft Guidelines for Community Based Restorative Justice Schemes in 2006, we consulted with a range of young people in both community and custody based settings and would like to draw the Board's attention to the young people's views expressed then.

As the following statements illustrate, there existed a degree of mistrust among young people in relation to the Schemes, and in order to overcome these clear issues of trust, young people require reassurance about how and by whom the Schemes are run.

I wouldn't trust them [paramilitaries], but I'd give it [community-based restorative justice] a go. It's better than getting beat. But I'd still be suspicious, on my guard.

You might go for it [community-based restorative justice], but I still wouldn't trust them [paramilitaries].

You'd do it [participate in a community-based restorative scheme] out of fear.

You would give it [community-based restorative justice] a try.

You would do it [community-based restorative justice] to get the paramilitaries off your back. But you still wouldn't trust them.

These comments are a stark reminder of the challenges and harsh realities involved in brokering a shared and common vision of community-based restorative justice in the transitional society in which we live.

Include Youth fully supports the principles and ethos of restorative justice, and diversionary measures which seek to steer children and young people away from the criminal justice system. We believe that there is a positive role for Community-based Restorative Justice in Northern Ireland within this process. Include Youth strongly believes that, alongside all interventions, whether statutory, voluntary or community based, CBRJ measures must be fully compliant with domestic and international human rights and children's rights standards.

Include Youth believes that the recent protocols imposed by NIO requiring these schemes to comply with rigorous conditions should begin to go some way to allaying regularly voiced concerns about the activities of CBRJ programmes. Include Youth would argue that CBRJ have played a pivotal role in the conflict transformation process that NI is currently undergoing not least as it affects policing and justice. CBRJ should no longer have to justify their role in the continuum of services for children and young people deemed at risk and should be evaluated and monitored in the same way as other community based diversionary schemes.

Include Youth has undertaken extensive work on the area of the diversion of young people from crime and anti-social behaviour where there is significant international evidence that interventions which divert a young person from the formal criminal justice system are likely to see better outcomes. As a result we have produced the "Include Youth Manifesto for Youth Justice in NI" (enclosed). It is clear that effective diversion is the responsibility of numerous government agencies but is nearly always best undertaken within a young person's community and family.

Causes of Offending

To fully understand the reasons why young people come into conflict with the law we must full understand the broader context of their lives. The young people we work with in Include Youth have experienced multiple challenges in their lives including poverty, truancy, limited educational attainment, neglect or abuse within their families, placement in residential care, drug or alcohol abuse, physical and mental ill-health. Again this is outlined in more depth in our Manifesto Background paper.

When asked “If you were Prime Minister how would you stop people committing anti-social behaviour?” young people said:

- *Listen to young people more about anti-social behaviour and what goes on in their communities.*
- *Have more for young people to do instead of just punishing you after you have done something.*
- *Put things into communities that keep young people off the street, especially in the summer. There is nothing to do, you just drink ‘cos you are bored.*
- *More money in communities – money would be better spent on a big scheme for young people round where they live.*
- *If police were nicer to young people. If they were young ones would be nice back. They’re older, grown up – they should know better.*
- *The police being able to talk to you, not just annoying you, being cheeky and putting you down or slagging your family.*

It can not be denied that the prevention of offending and re-offending by children and young people is a complex process one that requires co-ordination across a range of agencies and government departments. However it is clear from the comments above that young people believe that there are some central themes that can be address by criminal justice agencies namely adequate play (leisure) provision, education, employment and training, respectful attitudes and directly engaging with them.

Children and Young People’s Views on Safety and Well Being

Many young people feel isolated and excluded from their own communities. If we ask young people if they feel ‘safe’, the majority would answer absolutely not. The world is not a safe place for the young people in Young Voices. They fear crime, and in particular, violent crime, from their peers and ‘elements’ within their communities. Their experience is borne out by statistics which reveal that young people are the group with the greatest fear of crime in Northern Ireland, which makes sense, given that they are also the group most likely to become the victims of violent crime.

‘You’re not safe on the streets.’

‘Anyone could get you on the street.’

‘It’s safe enough if you can fight but – and I can, so I’m alright.’

‘You never know what’s going to happen on the street.’

Young people continue to fear the paramilitaries.

‘You need to be protected, people need to be safe. From, paramilitary beatings. Look at my ankles and my head! My two ankles were broke and my head was smashed in by them.’

They shot at my house. Anybody could have been hurt or killed. You need to be safe from that sort of thing - when you're a kid or anytime, for anyone.'

'[Paramilitary] beatings aren't supposed to happen anymore, but they do.'

Beatings still happen, they just don't do it in your house anymore – they're not allowed to, so they take you away and do it somewhere else. '

We are concerned about the amount of under-reporting of crime against children and young people. The young people we work with consistently speak of their lack of trust in the police and believe that there is no point in reporting crime as nothing will happen as a result.

'You don't go to the police anyway – they're scumbags. Like when they brought the letter to my house about the paramilitaries being after me, they just left it in and said, "see you" – they didn't do anything to help my family or anything.'

'do something about crimes that are directed at young people – not just adults or rich people.'

Young People's Experiences of Police

In the context of this report we will draw more heavily on the work that Young Voices undertakes on policing. Naturally we are very happy to expand on the issues outlined in whole of this paper.

The Young Voices North Belfast project was established by Include Youth following funding from the PSNI in North Belfast. The project was a direct result of the ICR report, "Young People's Attitudes and Experiences of Policing, Violence and Community Safety in North Belfast, published in 2005.

The aim of the North Belfast Young Voices Project is to build the capacity of marginalised young people to effectively engage with the police and also to build the capacity of the police to effectively engage with young people. 575 young people from across North Belfast have been involved in this project. Two evaluations of the project have recently been completed and the following information draws heavily from the results of those evaluations.

Over 60% of the young people stated that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the policing in the area.

'They judge people for their family. Like when I was asked my name, they'd say to me: "I suppose you're an arsehole like the rest of your family.'

'Getting harassed in the park. They used to provoke us and try to get us to start a riot.'

*'I just didn't like them. They scared the **** out of me.'*

'They just thought we were dickheads before. They never used to acknowledge you and they used to belittle us.'

One aspect of the North Belfast Young Voices has been a project engaging with a group of young women from the Newington area. A recent report has documented the specific learning from this work (Young Voices North Belfast, 2009). It outlines that the general conceptions of the young women were that police stereotyped them, judging them on how they looked or where they were from and did not listen to them or their point of view. They felt alienated from police, due to a variety of reasons, including being fearful of them, but ultimately because of pre existing and current police attitudes and behaviours towards them as young people. They pointed out that police attitudes towards young people were revealed through the language used by the police when addressing them.

'everything is negative about the police in the area.'

'there is nothing positive that any of us have to say about them.'

'treat adults better.'

'you can't have a relationship with the peelers because nobody ever gives you a chance to have a relationship with them.'

Naturally many young people involved in the project were very sceptical as to whether their involvement would make any difference.

'Thought it wouldn't make any difference – cos they have a bad attitude towards us and we have a bad attitude towards them.'

The evaluation identified a number of instances in which young people reportedly felt more confident in the police and able to communicate with and engage with officers, at a variety of levels, as a result of their involvement in Young Voices North Belfast. As well as the specific opportunities for young people to engage with the police that were created by the project, participants also noted that they felt more confident and less fearful in communicating with the police on the street, outside of the project's programme. It was also noted that young people had developed a greater understanding of the police's role.

'It was a whole new learning experience and I'm less scared of the police now.'

'I feel more confident when talking to police – especially the ones that participated in the project.'

The project has also given the young people an understanding of policing and police as individuals.

'getting to understand their point of view – in the same way as they did with ours.'

'I learnt about what it's like for the families of those working in the PSNI. One said that he is always scared when he goes out to work.'

Some of those involved in the project felt that although progress has been made in terms of youth/ police relations, communication and confidence, there was still work to be done in making these improvements more widespread. It was clear that the project's success was hampered by the erratic levels of engagement by the police. A number of the young people expressed their disappointment at being let down when police did not turn up for meetings, while others said that some officers had not interacted with them as fully as the young people would have liked at sessions.

Overall, the project has contributed to positive changes within the specified geographic locality and has succeeded in developing an effective model of engagement between young people and the police that can be adopted and adapted by other communities and police districts.

The positive impact of the project has been felt beyond those directly involved. Through engagement between young people and the police positive benefit for local communities have been reported which includes young people causing less of an annoyance, quieter interfaces, the diffusing of tensions/situations, young people having greater sense of belonging and ownership in the community and the potential for shared work across traditional community divides.

"It is less likely now to be any hassles or rows in the area." Young Person

"They know how to approach you now and this has calmed things down on the interfaces. They stop people and talk now." Young Person

"The leaflet was good as it showed the community we're not just hassling them." Young Person

"I got to know the peelers through this – there was one guy there, and one day he stopped outside the school as there was a bit of trouble – I recognised him from the group work things and he was able to talk to us and sort things out." Young Person

There also appears to be an impact on policing practice.

“This included benefits such as: how some police approach young people and deal with issues with young people, tangible benefits in terms of policing and diffusing tensions and situations, dealing with and resolving problems, changing attitudes and procedures, influencing the training of new recruits as well as starting to influence other parts of the police (although this was difficult to measure) and some young people were considering the emergency services as a future career.” (RG Consultancy, 2009).

There have however, been some additional difficulties associated with the work with the PSNI. These include the actions/ attitudes of response police officers of some police recruits towards young people and the project itself.

“Before Christmas we had two bad experiences over two weekends – there was a bit of rioting and the police circulating – there was trouble between two brothers and the police weighed in with the batons out and a couple of us got hit. We are all for trying to do what we can do but that just put me up against them. I know it’s not everyone of them – just the response unit ones – but they don’t try to calm the situation down and they should think before they act – I know they say they don’t have the time to do this as things would get worse, but then it takes them longer to calm things down after.” Young Person

There are also limitations of working in a small geographical area and a general need to widen the scope and learning from the project.

“We need to develop this on a more district wide approach and filter down to response police.” PSNI Representative

The young people want to move beyond creating opportunities for positive youth-police engagement at a local level, to being involved in a process that would have a more strategic and long term impact. The young people were interested in affecting current practice at an operational level but are now even more committed to and enthused by the prospect of affecting future policing policy and practice. The need to address youth-police relationships at a broader structural level has also been recognised by the Neighbourhood officers who have been involved with this group of young people, as highlighted by the comments below.

‘there is a need for a strategy for engaging with young people which addresses the more strategic elements of policing’ (Police Officer)

‘police need to bring other police along in terms of what they have learned and concerning appropriate and positive engagement with young people’ (Police Officer)

Need For PSNI and Policing structures to Engage with Marginalised Groups of Young People

We recognise and applaud the efforts the PSNI have made to engage with young people in general and welcome the establishment of the Independent Advisory Groups. However, our experience during the last 5 years is that young people who are considered “disaffected” or who have experience of the criminal justice system are generally reluctant to join such groups. We would urge the Board to consider complimenting any advisory groups with outreach activity to different groups of young people within their own environments these can include communities, schools, on the street, in JJCNI, children’s homes, youth groups, etc... In this way a breadth of experiences and views can be accessed that would ensure that as many groups of children and young people are accessed as possible. Include Youth accepts fully that the Board must reach out to all young people, the majority of whom have little

contact with PSNI. However particular efforts must be made with those who have the most contact with policing and the criminal justice system – because, after all, they often have the most to say. These contributions, given the right circumstances are often very insightful and to the point.

Additionally we would caution against too many consultation process as young people could be consulted or engaged with by a number of policing processes (DPPs, NIPB, Ombudsman and PSNI) which could be confusing and repetitive and ultimately unproductive. We urge that structure communicate and share relevant and appropriate information.

Concluding Comments

Include Youth welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to this Inquiry and we look forward to engaging with the further stages of the inquiry in any way that we can. As Members of the Committee will appreciate, we have over the years gathered substantial evidence which is highly relevant to the subject matter. We are therefore, more than happy to discuss our submission in further detail or provide additional information if required. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of any further assistance.

Include Youth

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