



Young people's views and experiences

A Submission to the Youth Justice Review

May 2011



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Include Youth and Youth Safety Network

Introduction

Include Youth is an independent non-governmental organisation (NGO) that has been in existence since 1979. The organisation promotes the rights and best interests of and best practice with young people in need or at risk. We undertake activities aimed at influencing public policy and policy awareness – both locally and nationally. Include Youth works directly with young people to support them to be engaged with policy decision-making processes and to improve their employability. The organisation has developed particular expertise in participation and consultation with young people involved with the criminal justice system and on policing and criminal justice issues. We produce resources and provide training, information and support to practitioners and organisations.

The **Youth Safety Network** is a consortium made up of Challenge for Youth, The Terry Enright Foundation and Northern Ireland Alternatives. The Network aims to promote the safety and well being of young people, their families and their communities through a process of engagement, participation and service delivery. The Youth Safety Network is in its second year of a five year funded project supported through the Big Lottery Fund 'Safe and Well' initiative. The first two years of the project set aside time to trial a number of approaches within four communities that include Northside, the Greater Shankill, Bangor and Coalisland and to create a model to roll out across other communities. The aim of the project was to establish Youth Safety Partnerships within communities which aim to empower young people to explore issues that affect their lives and their communities and to design solutions to address these issues. It is the intention that 4 new communities will be brought onboard each year from year three onwards, with 16 Partnerships operating by year five of the project.

Establishing effective communication channels between young people, service providers and decision makers is crucial to the success of this project. A key priority of the programme is to build the capacity of young people to play an active role in the decision making processes of statutory agencies.

The four organisations have facilitated direct engagement between the Youth Justice review Group and young people on a number of occasions. This report is intended to provide further evidence to the Review Group.

Methodology for Youth Justice Review 2011 consultations with young people

In total 12 groups of young people from Include Youth and the 3 organisations making up the Youth Safety Network – Challenge for Youth; Northern Ireland Alternatives, and Terry

Enright Foundation - were consulted to inform the response to the Youth Justice Review. The process involved approximately 80 young people, from a variety of backgrounds and geographical areas, with a variety of experience and knowledge, some of whom were consulted in custody. Their experiences included:

- Court;
- Sentences / court orders and disposals:
 - Youth Conferencing;
 - Community service;
 - Custody – Woodlands Juvenile Justice centre and Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre ;
 - Probation;
- Community issues and projects;
- Bail;
- Tagging
- Safety and violence;
- Alternative education;
- Community Restorative Justice;
- Drugs and alcohol issues
- Social services;
- The care system;
- Policing;
- Diversionary services/projects;
- ASBOs
- Paramilitaries

In order to obtain young people's feedback on these issues along with others, prior to meeting the young people youth workers from the 4 organisations advised Include Youth's participation worker on the experiences of the young people involved who were to be consulted. This was used to put together a template specific to each individual group, designed to initiate discussion around their experience of particular issues.

A youth work approach was used to carry out the consultations and was based on several fundamental principles:

- **Respect for young people** - an essential element of illustrating to young people that their opinions are valued and will be taken seriously. Respect also helps to foster trust, making it more likely that young people will participate fully;
- **Clarity of purpose** -giving young people as exact and comprehensive information about the reason for consulting them, and where this fits into the process of

developing a response. In this scenario, this means describing to young people how policies are developed, why the Youth Justice Review was conceived and what will happen with the information they provide;

- **Responsive** – it is important to ensure that the process and atmosphere of the consultation is not stilted or inflexible, but is as relaxed, informal and “young person friendly” as possible, while also being conducive to focussed discussion;
- **Individual truths** - This equates to an understanding that what the young people express is based on their individual interpretation of issues and experiences, regardless of how anyone else might interpret similar experiences. This also means giving validity to how the young people have reacted following this interpretation;
- **Realistic expectations** - Being clear with participants that despite the fact that while *you* and your colleagues will place significance on their feedback, you cannot guarantee that what they express will make a difference to the final outcome of a consultation – i.e. in this case if what they say will help shape the Youth Justice Review Team’s final report or not;
- **Confidentiality** - young people may refer to personal or sensitive information in discussion. They must be assured that while you will record this, nothing of this will be attributed to any individual and that you will ensure, as much as possible, that no individual can be identified via other subsidiary information. E.g. references to particular communities, projects or localised issues. This is done by anonymising details or information that participants may refer to when writing up the consultation. Should a child protection issue be raised than names would be disclosed with the full knowledge of the young person.
- **Relationship building**– this fosters mutual trust, maximises engagement and allows young people to be more open with their opinions. While the participation worker was not familiar with the majority of young people involved in the consultation process in this instance, he co-facilitated with youth workers who knew and worked with the young people on a regular basis – this was vital for the consultations to be carried out effectively
- **Blank page** - an assumption that you as a worker you know *nothing* about the issues you are asking the young people about. This allows young people to paint a complete and unbiased picture of what they experience, how they feel and how they react. It also ensures that the learning from what the young people say is maximised

The feedback from each group was written up and forwarded to the staff in each organisation, to ensure that the feedback had been recorded accurately and that there were no omissions. These were also to be shared with the young people who had been involved from each organisation.

The purpose of this report is to give an accurate account of the experiences of young people and we believe that their quotes are self-explanatory.



Young people's views and experiences

Demonisation

- *Anyone standing at the shop gets a bad name, and we're not allowed to stop at [street name]*
- *If you were just walking past, some people would complain – I wasn't doing anything and someone complained about me, that I was causing trouble – it was only my neighbour who stood up for me*
- *We get accused of, stealing cars, selling drugs, antisocial behaviour – fighting and drinking*
- *You get stereotyped a lot. But there's stereotyping for a reason, cos you do get the odd hood*
- *Elderly people hate us – they were slabbering about me cos I had red [dyed]hair, saying, "It's people like that who don't get jobs.", but I've been working since I was 16*
- *If you're from [local area], people think they're all taking drugs, you're a house breaker*
- *In court they look down on you cos of your clothes. I was in Hydebank and all I had to wear was a t-shirt and I went to court and the judge said to me, 'Could you not have presented yourself a bit better?'*
- *Why does it matter how you dress, it's no different than other people, it doesn't mean you're guilty*
- *It's the same in the street – people just think, 'Bunch of scumbags.'*
- *They should treat all young people the same. Yes we're wearing hoods, but that doesn't mean we're going to do anything*
- *If you're from the [area], people think they're all taking drugs, you're a house breaker*

How does this affect young people, when they have a bad name like that?

- *It makes you angry, paranoid*
- *Young people get talked about like an outsider and you feel like you don't belong*
- *Cos of the reputation of young people everywhere, they don't feel like they're part of their community*
- *Or even if people know you're from [this area], people say 'They've got no education achievements, they don't know anything, why should we listen to them?'*
- *I got praised for winning a match, then I come back here and I get called scumbag. It was in the newspaper and I got praise for doing well, then they wouldn't let me into a bar when I went back, it was just, 'No, you're not getting in here.' (o18 young person)*
- *It knocks the confidence out of you, big time, because there's people walking about talking about you*
- *It makes us disrespect them'uns more, cos they're not going to give us respect*

- *It makes you angry and you're always looking over your shoulder*
- *I can't sleep at night*
- *The doctor gave me tablets for not being able to sleep*
- *There's people standing out my back at night time and I get paranoid and I can't sleep*
- *We all went into a shop, a crowd of us, but they let everybody out except me. They stopped me and hit me a dig, so I hit back and knocked him out. Then 2 days later the cops came out to the house and told me there was a death threat on me*
- *And then paramilitaries – residents threaten us with paramilitaries*
- *If a crowd comes in [to a shop], they say, 'Two at a time, two at a time!'*

Why might older people be scared of young people?

- *Because of the reputation young people have round here – like as if they're always up to no good*
- *They get stuff put in the papers about us – only about half of it's true*
- *Aye, they see a crowd of us out and they're scared*
- *All adults call us that, but they did as much when they were young*
- *I was in shop and a woman who lives down the street from me said to an old woman, 'You better tie your handbag round your neck'*
- *People say they're "Scared to approach" that crowd cos they carry guns."*
- *There's about 14 or 15 of us. Maybe about 30 on the weekend*
- *Because of our reputation, because people talk about us and we have a bad name*
- *And I agree, there are some [young] people like that*
- *We were known as good kids till 3 or 4 years ago*
- *They treat us unfairly, but they wouldn't do that to adults*
- *People look down on us because of our clothes*
- *It's prejudice – people see us walking down the street and think we're going to do something*
- *And peelers are worse – if they saw 5 wee lads walking down the street dressed in shirts and all and then saw me walking down the street, who are they going to stop? Me, they'll stop and search me just because of the way I dress*
- *I don't people to be saying, "Look at that wee scumbag, wee rat." Sometimes it annoys you, sometimes it doesn't annoy you. Then you be nasty tempered to people. Once you get a name for yourself, people automatically think you've done it [offence]. I just say, "F*** them!" and do what I want, let them think what they want.*

Early intervention and family support

1. Education, training and jobs

Problems

- *You shouldn't have to do a crime to be able to do things to get back on the straight and narrow – you should be able to do things to keep you on the straight and narrow in the first place*
- *I'm not going back cos it's sh***, it's melting my head. And there's a teacher picking on me – I get detention for everything – like the other day I got detention cos he said my shirt was hanging out*
- *There was only one teacher in my school who knew how to have a laugh – Mr McGrath, he was about 70, he was some craic. So I worked for him every time – he was the only one I ever worked for in class, because he was always there and he had a laugh when he was teaching you.*
- *Even if young people get onto a training course, they can't get a placements, because there aren't any and also because they have a record Young people feel that training agencies should find placements for young people when they get on a course, otherwise it is only people who can get onto training courses are those who have family members / family friends who are in trades, mechanics, building trade, plumbing etc, who will give them a placements*

Solutions

- Most [young] people here'd like to get educated, a lot of my mates can't read and write. It's because of what they've been involved in, the feud, so they got took out of school, it wasn't safe for them
- Kids need help here with reading and writing, help with getting jobs
- I tried in 50 shops in the [shopping centre] and they all said no
- People here need training and education
- Opportunities for young people in this area
- More qualifications, like OCNs and all
- Like courses for silly people like us, who can't get any GCSEs
- All I really want is to get my life back on track again, get back to school, see my mates. I want to get my education sorted out, get my GCSEs going again. All I need is to catch up on course work and focus on school every day, get my attendance up, see my family.
- Stop bullying
- Kids need help with drugs and stuff
- I hope I'll be in a job, be a spark
- I'd like to be a fireman

- Aye, get a job and have some kids

2. Family

Problems

- *Some [parents] struggle to bring their kids up, but they're not bad parents, they just need support*
- *Show them how to raise their kids*
- *Some of them are that young, they are only kids themselves and don't know how to raise their kids*
- *Support when you have difficult kids, like kids who are headers – people to take them away for weekends so parents can get a break*
- *Even financial support, they need to be given more money. More child benefit – my Ma only gets £7 for my wee brother*
- *Fighting with your family, death, suicide*
- *Being neglected by your family. Or like say you went out of the house and your Ma and Da won't let you back in*
- *It's not always just neglect, it's abuse and sh** too*

Impact on young people

- *It can affect them mentally, suicide*
- *Suicide, drink, drugs – so you can forget for a while, escape*
- *If I'm with my Ma and Da everything blows up, but when I'm living with my aunty or uncle, I'm calm, I sit in the house, go out with my girlfriend. That's what I think; it's only when I'm with my Ma and Da I get into trouble. I want to go into care, but I'd go to my Dads instead of here [custody].*
- *My Ma died when I was a few weeks old and my Da was in and out of prison all my life – my Granny brought me up. My Da was on the scene then, when I was 13 or 14 – he would take drugs and all when I was about. I took UDA blues [diazepam], just for kicks.*
- *Stress – if one person in the family's stressed, then it's going to move to the rest of the family*

3. Leisure provision for young people

- *When I was younger I went to youth clubs and played in sandpits, water tanks, but you wouldn't do that as a teenager – there's nothing for older ones*
- *If you go to the youth club it's all younger ones running about saying "Chase me, chase me!"*
- *And summer schemes, they're too expensive - £30 to get in and then a pound for each activity*
- *And you're only allowed on [a summer scheme] if you're under a certain age*

- *There used to be one for older [young people] ones, but they stopped*
- *You ask for something and they go, 'No, there's no funding.'*
- *We're not allowed anywhere near [youth centre] – it's all [paramilitary organisation]*
- *They get people to tout – they bring you in and be all nice to you and then ask you who's doing what in the area*
- *And we don't want them to be our leaders, the ones that work there – cos it's [paramilitaries], you don't want to sit and talk to them*

Benefits of community-based youth provision

- *You find out more about your community, you learn more about it and you meet new people*
- *Coming to [this project] you feel far more involved in your community. I think that's what's wrong with lots of young people – they don't feel part of the community, or they don't feel useful to the community*
- *They sit and talk to you here, it's chilled out, relaxed. Here they say the right thing at the right time*
- *They support you here [youth organisation], we never get support from anyone, but here everyone supports you.*
- *Here they're equipped to work with you*
- *The youth club tries to work with young people. The youth club keeps people off the streets, so it's safer*
- *And something that you can get qualifications to help you get help to get a job*

Youth Workers

- *It depends on you [workers], if you can have a laugh or not*
- *It's not that we want to make trouble, it's just about the type of leader*
- *You need someone that'll let you f*** about a bit*
- *And they need to do what they say they will. We painted a big mural up in the [area] and the [paramilitary organisation] took all the credit for it. The day they opened it, we were told to go down, but nothing was said about us, that we had done it*
- *[BELB worker] used to work with us but he got moved to do outreach somewhere else*
- *[Community worker] was meant to work with us but she left*

Solutions

- *Encourage them to go to youth clubs*
- *Get them to join teams and all, get them involved in something*
- *Stop them getting distracted by joy riding and riotous behaviour. Like say to them to come in here [youth club] every night instead – but go out to talk to them and tell them about it*

- *All the [youth] clubs should open till 11 at night, because that keeps them off the streets - most people have to be in at 11, of our age. But if the club closes at 10, you could go out and steal a car before you go home*
- *They should have something like this [youth organisation] in every estate. Somewhere you can come and drop in on every estate*
- *Youth club - it keeps young people and the community safer*
- *Work with us - , like actually teaching them something. Like we bring all these kids into here [youth club], but don't work with them one to one. Get them interested in doing something and get them off the streets, because when they get to about 14 they'll be into drugs*
- *Ask the young people themselves what they want to do. Like there's nothing for girls to do in here, you need to target girls*

4. Mental health

- *Mental health doesn't get looked at*
- *In hospitals it's just like...if you had a mental health problem and someone had a broken arm, they'd fix the arm and you'd sit there*
- *In my experience, if you come from [my area] and you said you had a mental health problem, they'd look at you and say "Who doesn't, sure you're from [local area], suck it up, move on."*
- *One girl had been through 3 counsellors and doctors and she still hung herself. They should have worked with her*
- *Like in [different area] I had a friend who took tablets to try and kill himself – they took him to the hospital and pumped his stomach then sent him on his way, then later he hung himself*
- *There was this girl who cut herself, self-harm – the doctor was stitching her up and the nurse asked were there any spare cubicles and the doctor said "No, but she'll be away soon, she's only cut herself." You never get any help, never ever*
- *Mental health's terrible, it's not funny. It's mostly young people too. Northern Ireland's got the highest suicide rate in Europe.*

Why do you think there have been so many suicides?

- *Because they're all taking the same drugs*
- *Because of stress – because they've been in an argument*
- *Because of downers after drugs. If they get down they take more and more and it all adds up*
- *They get into debt then end up getting a beating*
- *They can't pay so they take their own life*
- *Or because of bullying – dealers give you a beating if you don't pay the money*

Solutions

- *Somewhere that people could go...drop in*
- *Go away for a number of weeks*
- *Get everyone in a group, like this [youth] group, go away and do courses*
- *There are people who do need that, who clearly do, have mental health problems, but they're not seen as bad enough, so they don't get help*
- *You need someone really dedicated*
- *It's hard for families who have someone with a mental health problem – they need to get away*

Drugs and alcohol

Are drugs an issue in your area?

- *Are you trying to get us to tout? Get our knees done?*
- *Course there's drugs - Everybody knows*
- *Cos you see lungs [for smoking cannabis] lyin' all about the place*
- *Paramilitaries sell drugs then take them back off them again*
- *Drugs rule everything*

What drugs are available in your community?

- *Glue, dope, blues (benzodiazepine), heroin – but none of us take that*
- *Es, grass, coke...*
- *I found syringes in my bin*
- *Drugs are getting worse – when I was young you only heard about blow [cannabis], but now you can get all different drugs*

Why do young people take drugs do you think?

- *...they do it to because they enjoy it*
- *Aye, I started because I wanted to enjoy it – it was just there and I was offered it and everyone else was, so I joined in*
- *You take drugs cos it's taking your head away*
- *That's why people do glue, because it clears you head*
- *Aye, and you don't feel as paranoid at the time*
- *My Ma died when I was a few weeks old and my Da was in and out of prison all my life – my Granny brought me up. My Da was on the scene then, when I was 13 or 14 – he would take drugs and all when I was about. I took UDA blues [diazepam], just for kicks.*
- *People need help with drugs – I took 100 blues [diazepam] and didn't know what I'd done. I didn't plan it [offence], I just did it [drugs] for a good time, didn't mean to do*

anything. I was standing in front of the judge still high, I didn't know what I was doing, the judge even saw me, swaying about, slurring my words – he must have known I was on something. I didn't even know I was in court till 2 days later, when I woke up in Hydebank and didn't even know why I was there.

And how does that effect young people or the community in general?

- *Violence and all that sh***
- *It gives the area a bad reputation*
- *It affects the look of a community*
- *See if dope was legalised here, I think the crime rate would go down - you don't see people getting stoned and then going out doing crime*
- *Drugs can make people do crime – it's not because they're stoned that they do it, but they'll do it to pay off debts to dealers*
- *People want to go and do mad stuff, smashing stuff up, going nuts*
- *Drugs lead to all the rest of the problems*
- *Depression*
- *People kill themselves*
- *There's been loads of ones who've killed themselves up at [location in the local community]*

What about alcohol - can that lead to more crime?

- *And there's loads of derelict houses and people go in and drink and they get wrecked and then they get burnt*
- *They always get burnt eventually*
- *No, it's an addiction just*
- *People drink to have a good laugh*
- *It's so you can't remember what you did the night before*
- *If you can't remember what you did then it's been a good night*

Legacy of the conflict

Community

- *The only thing I like about [my area] is my mates*

Interface areas

Problems

- *Rioting and paramilitaries*
- *You can't get a job here anyway, there's no jobs*
- *And it's harder to get a job if you've been scooped [arrested] for rioting*

- *And there's f*** all to do in [our area]*
- *If you're not in an interface area, it's all posh – you don't see any riots in the posh areas*

Rioting

- *Rioting's just for fun*
- *It's just for a bit of craic*
- *You know the ones you rioting with, you know them by their first names even, it's just something to do*
- *Drinking too - people get drunk and want a buzz, so they riot*
- *Or if your mate gets knocked by a brick you go out to get them back*

Do you think living on an interface is more likely to result in young people being involved in offending/crime?

- *Aye, because there's more ways to get into trouble*
- *And it's drugs as well – in interface areas you're more likely to drink and take drugs so get into trouble*
- *And break ins, people would do burglaries to pay debts from drugs*
- *When you're younger they see older ones hanging around the interface so you just think it's normal*

Solutions

- *More to do, A big joy riding track, more youth clubs that they could feel safe going to*
- *Getting rid of paramilitaries*
- *Give them [young people] something to do instead of sitting about*
- *More opportunities. Like Duke of Edinburgh, things like that. I did my silver [award], but the only way I did that was because I was with Youth Justice [Youth Justice Agency Community Services]. You shouldn't have to do a crime to be able to do things to get back on the straight and narrow – you should be able to do things to keep you o the straight and narrow in the first place*
- *More opportunities. Like Duke of Edinburgh, things like that. I did my silver [award], but the only way I did that was because I was with Youth Justice [YJA Community Services]. You shouldn't have to do a crime to be able to do things to get back on the straight and narrow – you should be able to do things to keep you o the straight and narrow in the first place*
- *A good youth club, with football and all*
- *It's open Monday – Friday and we're trying to on Sunday as well*
- *Give them something to do instead of sitting about*
- *There's nothing really [to do] here at weekends, when it's needed most*
- *If you're involved in something*

- *Because in the summer everyone's off school – there's nothing to do so they just sit in the park drinking*

Safety and violence

How safe would you say your area is?

- *Not safe at all*
- *There were 2 people knee capped in [local area] last night*
- *And there were 2 people shot the other night*
- *My house was broken into – I caught him in the back garden. So I don't feel safe at all*
- *It's not...like it's not that your sacred all the time, but it's just the paramilitaries*
- *It's ok on your own, but if you're in a crowd something'll start, because they do all know us because you're living in the area*
- *It's not safe – they [paramilitaries] all beat young ones*
- *You can't go into [local] park*
- *And there's loads of places [in the area] that aren't lit – they have lights, but they're not lit*
- *And there's glass all over the ground*
- *The roads here are terrible – three people have died up my way in the last year*
- *Well you're always looking about, making sure no one's looking at you*
- *You wouldn't walk up [a street on the interface] on your own*
- *You'd go up to Tescos if there was a big squad of us*
- *But if you go in a crowd it ends up in a big fight anyway, but it is safer, cos if you go and there's just 2 or 3 of you, you get a kicking anyway*
- *But you're more likely to attract trouble if there's a squad of people – people are scared if they see a crowd of young people*

What do young people do if they don't feel safe?

- *Be with a friend*
- *Or ring someone when you're walking in your own*
- *But you'd be ascaerd if you see a crowd, scared that they'd take your phone or something*
- *If you don't feel safe you might move to a different area*
- *It's only on the interface really*
- *Carry a knife. Well not a knife, but a weapon*
- *It can be scary if you're on your own*
- *Or if you're walking back at night, especially if you're on your own*
- *I take a different route, if I see a crowd*
- *I keep jogging shoes on in case I have to run*
- *I go to bright places*

- *Stay away from dangerous bits, like [shopping centre], the park, the roundabout*

What can make things safer in the area?

- *If you got all the paramilitaries out*
- *The paramilitaries don't even do what they used to now, like during the troubles – now it's all about drugs just*
- *A drop in [youth centre] because then we wouldn't be out on the street all the time*

Paramilitaries

- *Paramilitaries are a big deal round my area*
- *You know cos you see '[paramilitary names]' all over our wall*
- *And there's bombs about*
- *Our way if someone's a threat to the paramilitaries, they just get rid of them. If there was one person[in a family], they get rid of their whole family - put them out of the country.*
- *In my area they do punishment shootings*

What sort of punishment attacks go on in your community?

- *Getting shot*
- *Beaten with hammers, baseball bats, whatever*
- *I got a digging with a key in his hand, cut the inside of my mouth*
- *I'm not allowed to go to the side of the estate where my granny lives, [Paramilitaries] beat me with flick sticks for 10 minutes – they're just a bunch of hoods turned into scumbags*

Antisocial behaviour

- *Everything we do is called antisocial behaviour, it all really falls under the same thing*
- *I was told they'd "get the boys down on me.!" I picked up a 50p from the street and the [paramilitary] said I'd picked up a stone and I was going to throw it at his house*
- *It's not...like it's not that your sacred all the time... but it's just the paramilitaries*
- *The paramilitaries don't even do what they used to now, like during the troubles – now it's all about drugs just*
- *It's not safe – they [paramilitaries] all beat young ones*
- *Paramilitaries sell drugs then take them back off them again*
- *And [police] sending us ASBO letters, saying: 'If you do one more offence you'll get an ASBO.' It's just threatening you*
- *They're giving ASBO letters to the wrong people*

Have any of you ever been the victim of a crime and did you report it?

- *Aye, loads of times! I was victim of an assault and I reported it and they [police] did f*** all. When I was interviewed I even gave them the names of the ones who'd done it. If you've offended they don't care if you're a victim*
- *Even when I was in town and 6 people chased me with knives, cameras all over the place even, they [police] did f*** all about it. They just say, 'That's [young person's name], we don't care.'*

Looked after children

Why do think there are more young people from care involved in crime?

- *Because they feel they've been neglected and no one wants them*
- *Because they think nobody cares for them I it's just they think nobody gives a f*** about them*
- *And they've no support, no family, no one to support them*
- *I went into care when I was 14 – it was shit. I thought the grass was greener on the other side, I thought I'd be able to do what I wanted [in care], because my Granny was always telling me what to do. She was looking out for me, but I didn't know that then. Then I ended up in a place like this [JJC].*
- *I got FAR worse when I went into care. Care always makes people worse. People go into children's homes and they become statistics, drug addicts, criminals. Them children's homes make you worse. It's just the company you keep. It's ok, it's not bad – they look after you and they give you stuff, clothes and all. But you can do what you want – they're not your family, just staff. You get more charges in care because if you break windows, kick something, they phone the cops and you get charged. They shouldn't call the cops, they should try and calm them [young people] down.*
- *When I was 15 I was moved to a different children's home, then I came in here [JJC]. I'd been in on PACE when I was 14, but that was my first time in properly, when I was 15. I'd hung about with the wrong crowd and got done for robbery.*

Police

What sort of relationship is there between the police and young people in your area?

- *They always slabber*
- *And they don't listen to you*
- *They'll do anything to make you react, so they can lift you*
- *They just pick on young people*
- *And they favour Catholics*
- *It's just in working class areas – they're not going to fly into Glengormley and slabber*
- *Some [police] are ok*

- *If you're not allowed to go the park and drink, you'll just move on and drink somewhere else*
- *You get pushed to the worst places and you end up sitting on the interface*
- *Some police abuse their power*
- *They make you angry - because there's so much harassment, [young] people want to get back at them, so they go out and do stuff [crime]*
- *It's revenge just*
- *If the police didn't make so much of a scene, there wouldn't be so much of a fuss*
- *They create more of a feud*
- *I got my takeaway food knocked out of my hands when I was eating it*
- *No point in making a complaint about the police*
- *You get held in police cells over the weekends*

Do you feel any benefits to you from having the police about?

- *They scunder you - they say they have to search you, "Under the drugs act", with wee girls slagging you and all*
- *You can't do anything about it*
- *The only time you see the cops is when you're in trouble, but if you call them out they take 2 or 3 hours. I've never had any help from cops*
- *The cops are always there when nothing's happening, then when things happen they're nowhere to be seen*
- *One night I got beat and the cops didn't come into [area] at all that night*
- *You should be innocent until proven guilty, but with cops its guilty until proven innocent*
- *The police don't listen to our side of the story, they only listen to the other side, to the ones doing the complaining*
- *And then even if we haven't done anything, they take your name and address anyway*

What would you want to change?

- *Getting respect from the police*
- *For police not to look down on us cos they're higher than us*
- *They should treat us with respect because we're part of the community too*
- *If we got treated with respect we'd give it back*
- *They come out and take our names and won't tell us why when we ask*
- *Cops always oppose my bail, no matter what I've done. And even if the judge gives me bail conditions. With conditions they torture me even, calling at my door 4 and 5 times a night, at all hours. Even [named judge] said they shouldn't be doing that.*

Young people's experiences of being stopped and searched by the police

- *Without an appropriate adult there they shouldn't be allowed to stop and search you, and a cop isn't an appropriate adult*

- They tell you to “F*** away off!” and all
- They get on like they're going to fight you
- They took me into an alley and said, “Do you like fighting then?!”
- They slabber at you and you slabber back and they say it's disorderly behaviour and arrest you.
- And I don't like the way they touch you when they stop and search you
- They stop you and search you and say its “Article blab blah blah, under the blah blah blah terrorist act.” Or you were, “acting suspicious”, -they say the biggest pile of s****
- Like they have to say you're acting suspicious – like if you're walking down the street with you hood up, they'll say you're “acting suspicious”.
- They shouldn't be allowed – they can only do that cos of the “terrorist threat”, but they abuse it

Why do you think police stop and search you?

- Cos they think if they stop and search you they might get something, they might actually find something so they can charge you
- Cops stop us just because they feel like it
- They stop you because they're bored
- Some are just out there doing their jobs; some are just out to get you
- I got stopped and searched 3 times in about 10 minutes – no joke. I even had the piece of paper saying that I'd been stopped and searched already, but when I showed it to them; they just said I was going to be searched again. It's because I'm a “known criminal”
- Sure what's the point of this, no one's going to listen to what we say about the police, we're not going to change anything
- They'll [the government] say we're just criminals, they're locked up, we don't care about them'uns.

Restorative justice

What do you think would help to stop young people getting into trouble?

- I definitely don't think people should get fined – it just doesn't work, they just go and do time [in custody] then come out and do it again
- It's facing up to what they've done
- If you put people in jail it's just taking all their responsibility away, rather than them facing up to what they've done
- They might go to jail and say, “This is a gift, I don't give a f***.” and they come out and do it again

So you think restorative justice works better than jail?

- *Restorative justice [is better]- like a programme here [CRJ project] or going to jail*
- *It depends on the crime – if it's severe then they should go to jail, but maybe they could do restorative justice in jail*

Like what sort of thing could they do in jail, how would that be done?

- *Well if [the offence] isn't that bad, they could get time out [of custody] to do it [restorative justice]*
- *If it's not that serious*

Do you think people would be happy to do a restorative justice programme?

- *I'd rather go to jail than go through a restorative justice programme*
- *Well...it depends what it was – what I would have to do [in the RJ programme] and how long I'd have to go to jail for*
- *Well jail doesn't work, so they have to look at a better system*

Should Restorative justice be across Northern Ireland?

- *It depends what community it is, it depends on the area – some need it more than others. Like deprived areas need it more*
- *But it depends who's doing it, what organisations and people work on it – it takes a certain type of people*
- *You have to know the people[RJ staff] and you have to respect them*
- *You have to know them before you go and tell them everything. You wouldn't go in and say, 'I've done this, I've done that,' if you don't know the person*

Is there anything else that you think might put people off doing a restorative justice programme?

- *Reputation – if you say to people you're going to [RJ project], they say 'What!? Have you done something wrong?', so it puts people off*
- *Aye, because people in the community would look down on you*

Disposals and Sentences

Youth Conferencing

What do you think about Youth Conference Orders?

- *They're head melting. I'd rather go to jail than do that [a Youth Conference Order]... instead of talking to you, they talk about you - my social worker told them, "He's really sorry."*
- *I refused to do it, refused to sit with the peelers. They tried to make me feel bad. I said "right, I'm going home."*

- *...see the bit about meeting the cop, that doesn't help, it's just them trying to have control over you – you've to sit and grovel to them sitting there harassing you*
- *They slabber at you and you slabber back and they say it's disorderly behaviour and arrest you. I'm not going to sit there [in a Youth Conference] with them [police], after taking that from them. You have to write an apology letter and all – f*** that. They start something and you get them back and then you're meant to apologise to them*
- *They know what I'm like so they try and get to you, so you crack. They get on like they're going to fight you*

What about if it's not police at the Youth Conference, if it's someone else who's the victim – is that better?

- *I would've said sorry if it had been a wee girl or something whose bike I stole, but not to a cop*
- *I had [a youth conference] with ones from the children's home, I didn't mind that, I felt bad – they're just there to look after you, but the cops just wind you up*

Is a youth conference just a punishment, or is it support?

- *It's not [support] – because you're sitting there in front of this person and you have to say in front of him what you did – it's like name and shame*
- *Support. I got a tech placement, drug programmes and all. Sometimes I minded going to the meetings, but not because of what happened at them, just the time it took. For probation I had to go straight after school. It took away my time like, but it was easier to do it that way, it meant I had the rest of the day to do what I want. I had to go and talk about reoffending and all - it gave me an idea about what I'm doing and all, what's the point of doing it: crime, drugs and all. It didn't stop though, it didn't work.*
- *And you get help with drugs*
- *[It's hard] Cos you face the person you've offended against, the victim. And you don't like it cos you have to face them, so it makes you twice.*
- *Aye but no one thinks like that when they're doing something [offence], that just doesn't happen*
- *It worked for me doing that youth conference, from when I'd been rioting – I haven't done it since*
- *It was very confusing, all big words, I didn't understand it*

Probation

What about probation, if anyone has experience of it, what do you think of probation?

- *Probation doesn't help you stop, but in here [youth organisation] they do. The only time I hear from probation is if I miss here Community Service Order condition*

- *Na, they're full work horses – they make you do things and you either do it or you're f***ed*
- *In here [youth organisation] it's more relaxed. If you do something they talk to you about it, they're not straight on your back*
- *Because it gave me an idea about what I'm doing and all, what's the point of doing it: crime, drugs and all. It didn't stop though, it didn't work.*

Community Service Orders

- *They [Community Service Orders] should have proper people to do it, proper youth workers, able to communicate with us*
- *It's better doing your community service here [youth organisation]*
- *There's other places [facilitating CSOs] like that too, except for [youth work organisation], but some places have ones working with young people who don't know how*

Why is it that you can't do that as easily with the Youth Justice Agency or Probation?

- *Because [staff member], you know him, you don't start all embarrassed*
- *At Youth Justice [Agency] it's all about crime, what you did. But in here they talk to you about everything – drugs, communities, DJing and all – it's not just about talking to you about crime*
- *There's all activities as well, not always the same thing, not always about the crime*
- *I don't trust anyone – I don't take nothing from no one, but it's alright here [youth organisation]*
- *Here [youth organisation] there's nothing you can't do. The other place I was for my Community Service Order was in Cancer Research, in a **shop**. I've got shop lifting on my record and they put me in a **shop**! They just test you, see if you're going to steal again*
- *If I wasn't here [youth organisation], I wouldn't be here now, I'd probably be in jail. If I didn't get the help here [youth organisation], I'm telling you, I wouldn't be here now*

Would you see a Community Service Order as punishment or something that will prevent people from reoffending?

- *Punishment, but it's never going to stop you*
- *It depends what [the Community Service Order] would be – if it was somewhere like here [youth organisation] it could work*

Custody

- *Jail won't stop you. You are worried about going in, the first time, but once you get there you get used to it so you're not worried about going back in*

- *At [youth work organisation] they're trained to work with us – in Hydebank, what do they know about working with us? They're not trained to work with young people – they know about prisons, about security*
- *What if a young person was talking about wanting to kill himself? They'd have no idea how to deal with that. In here, in [youth work organisation], they know how to talk to us*
- *Most Community Service places, or in Hydebank, they'd just say, 'Don't be doing that.'*
- *Talking to people in jail just makes it worse*
- *In here's [JJC] too easy. It's somewhere to stay. You get bedded, breakfast, lunch and dinner; activities, looked after, clothed. I asked one wee man why he was in here and he said to me he came in for a few weeks to get money just, get 60 or 70 quid to get drugs with when he got out.*
- *I've been in here [JJC] 15 times but I've never been sentenced here. I've done 165 days on remand, then I just got 2 years probation and a suspended sentence, a conditional discharge.*
- *It's good to get looked after, but it's...I put in for a transfer to Hydebank cos here's [in the JJC] not changing me. I hope if I go there it'll be harder, it'll be like a hammer to the head and make me think twice. Because I want to change.*
- *JJC they were treats you like a wee kid.*
- *The YOC or the JJC don't stop you offending*

Solutions

- *A centre like this [JJC], but an open unit - like a rehab centre, where workers are normal people who've been through it themselves*
- *I was in Hydebank for 4 weeks on remand, and then transferred back here – they asked in here for me to come back, cos I was too young. I'd rather be in here, cos you get more down here, more activities and all.*
- *Young people shouldn't be custody cos it doesn't help, it make you worse*
- *It puts your head away cos when you get out you're angry with the cops for making you go there.*
- *They talk to you about joyriding and all here, but it does work [to stop you]*
- *If you're in for a long time you just get out angry, you've anger inside you, then when you get out you're angry with the government, police, judges – but you can't take it out on judges, you can't go up to Stormont, so you take it out on the police – you see the cops and you go, "I'm going to throw a bottle at them."*
- *A month in [JJC] would help – do a drug programme – like the Daisy Project [drug and alcohol programme]. Not for murder like, they should get life*

Bail

- *I've been in the JJC 18 times but I've never been sentenced here. I've got 32 convictions, but no JJCOs. If I do, I'll have my time done and all.*

- *Curfew is the worst thing t get*
- *I had to be in 7 to 7 – that’s f***ing terrible*
- *But it gives you a structure, sets things out for you, having to be in for a certain time and all*

Bail conditions

- *Aye, I had to stay out of MacDonal’d’s and ASDA – it worked like*
- *They tell you not to do all these things and it’s like...this **big** red button sitting there, that you’ve been told to stay away from, not push it, and it’s just sitting there, tempting you, **daring** you to push it.*
- *We’re kids, if you tell any kid not to do something, he’ll just go and do it*
- *I was refused a **tag** – why couldn’t they have tagged me instead of giving bail conditions? They [police] torture me, but a tag would keep the cops away from door all the time. It just makes you angry. I wouldn’t mind if it was twice a night, but they torture me*
- *They set you up to fail*
- *I didn’t like sitting in the house at 6 o’clock – they said to me I had to be in the house for 6, all my mates out and about*
- *Say you can’t take drugs, drink, curfews, not being allowed on certain streets, not getting into bother, having to submit to breath tests to being stop and search*
- *A tag, an 8 o’clock curfew, not allowed going into [local community], having to go to drug and alcohol counselling, go to Youth Justice [Agency]. I stuck to them all for 2 months, then I was 10 minutes late for my curfew and came here [JJC]. I’ve been here 2 months and nobody’s said to me about getting me a bail address.*
- *I should be on bail now, but I’ve no bail address. My Dad said I can’t stay with him, but he said I wasn’t going into care, so I got sent here [JJC] cos I’ve no bail address. My social worker should’ve been on the ball – even if my Dad won’t have me back, my social worker should find me somewhere to live...but I’ve nothing good to say about them [social worker], I can’t really praise them. She said she’ll speak to my Da but she says she can’t find me a secure place. I’m asking to go into care, I don’t want to live with my Ma and Da, so it should be voluntary care. I’d rather be with my Ma and Da than be in here, but I’d prefer a secure place [secure care].*

Rehabilitation and resettlement

- *When they get out of the JJC you need to work closer with young people. They said to my brother they’d get him courses and all, but they haven’t. Like they should bring young people to classes*

What sort of help do you think you, or other young people, need to change?

- *To be able to chill out in my community. Going back to my Granny’s house. It’s in [local community], it’s a bad area like, but it’ll be ok.*

- *Something to do just. And tech.*
- *I went to [drug and alcohol project], talking about different things, like what's in drugs, like all the s*** they put in cannabis and how to get off drugs*
- *I'm not going to do anything anymore, that's me done, I've got a wee girl [daughter] and all now, I have to stay out of trouble*
- *I just have to not drink vodka. When I drink it is when I do all stupid stuff*
- *I'm not coming back here [YOC] I can tell you that.*
- *Somewhere to live - only 3 hostels in NI where I can go, but they are at other end of the country*

Solutions

- *Mentoring by adults with experience of crime/the justice system*
- *Maintaining the relationship and contact with JJC staff when they are released*
- *Appropriate and safe accommodation*
- *Having activities/programmes to occupy their time – that do not focus entirely on their offences and are attractive to them*
- *Drug and alcohol support*
- *The only thing that'd work would be if people from Maghaberry came and talked to you, in cuffs and all. Like if they said to you, 'Look at me, jail for life.'" And about getting stabbed and all. If they said, 'I won't tell you any bullsh**, I know what it's like.'" You'd say, "I don't want to be like that.'*
- *Like drug people [counsellors/youth organisation] said to me about doing meth and all – they've never taken a drug in their life. But if it was this fellah who used to be a heroin addict, who knew what he was talking about, you'd listen to them*
- *And it's not about changing you, it's about looking at it twice*
- *It makes you think about it if you hear about it from someone else who's done it, who's been there*
- *There should be one agency who dealt with everything to do with young people in the justice system*

Courts

When you went to court, did you understand about the sentence that the judge was giving you, about what it meant for you?

- *I had no clue – it's like some talking English to a Chinese person. So you just say, "Yes sir, I'll be good sir".*
- *They talk that fast that you don't know what they're talking about. They ask, "Do you understand all that?" and you say, "Aye.", so you can get out for a smoke*
- *And you can't hear all that they're saying because of all that glass [in court].*

- *They said, “Are you guilty or not guilty?” but I couldn’t hear it and I said, “What?” And she shouted, “I was asking you a question!”*
- *It’s the same on video link, you can’t hear what’s going on and it keeps knocking off*
- *It’s the same in Rathgael [JJC] and you have to sit for hours and hours*
- *It’s the same in Hydebank – it wasn’t working, I couldn’t hear anything and I said, “What the f***’s happening?” but, the judge said, “Could you repeat that?!” and I said, “Wha’?” It makes you sound hostile*
- *And they’re prejudice about the way we dress in court – the judge doesn’t like T-shirts.*
- *Why does it matter how you dress, it’s no different than other people, it doesn’t mean you’re guilty*

Complaints

- *Complaints [against police]?! No point, nothing would happen, it’s 3 of them against me, who’s going to get believed?*
- *There’s no point making complaints – you complain against cops they say you need witnesses and they [PSNI colleagues] all come out and back each other up*
- *My complaint [to the Police Ombudsman] hasn’t been dealt with against the peeler who elbowed me. I said I wanted to make a complaint, but nothing’s been done about it. I said about it and my solicitor said I need evidence. A cop elbowed me in the face and I kicked my legs up – my social worker was there but she said she didn’t*

Conclusion

The views expressed by the young people demonstrate the stark reality of their lives and the importance of listening to their views and experiences. The young people of Include Youth, Terry Enright Foundation, Challenge for Youth and NI Alternatives have voluntarily engaged with the Review of Youth Justice and look forward to further engagement once the groups finding have been published.

