



**Response from NORTH BELFAST YOUNG VOICES  
Participative Project to the Northern Ireland Office's  
Consultation on the Test Purchase of Alcohol 2008**

**September 2008**



## **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, which attempt to influence public policy and public awareness locally and nationally.

Include Youth, particularly welcomes the emphasis on developing effective consultation with hard to reach, marginalised, and socially excluded young people, consulting with a representative range of children and young people.

Include Youth runs the Young Voices participation project for young people who have experience of the criminal justice system both in the community and in custody in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. In addition, since April 2006 the Young Voices Project has developed a specific initiative - North Belfast Young Voices - focusing on policing issues in North Belfast from a participation perspective.

## **North Belfast Young Voices**

The North Belfast Young Voices Project was established by Include Youth in April 2006, working in partnership with young people and the police, aiming to enhance communication and improve the relationship between police and young people in the area. The Project is currently funded by P.S.N.I. through Policing with the Community Fund.

### **Aims**

The North Belfast Young Voices Project aims to create and facilitate opportunities, which enable young people to safely communicate and be consulted with regards to various policing and community safety issues. In addition, the project aims to build on the capacity of young people and the police to communicate with each other in a way that helps to promote safer communities in North Belfast.

## **Objectives**

As you will see some of our specific project objectives are pertinent to the test purchasing of alcohol consultation.

- *To identify actions that the police, local agencies and community should engage in to enhance the safety and well being of young people*
- *To identify actions that should be taken to ensure the safety and well being of young people and present those actions to the police and other agencies.*

We have also included in Appendix 1 the full list of Project Objectives. We hope that in the development of any future policy initiatives, that the North Belfast Young Voices project will be involved in the process, helping ensure that the direct voices of children and young people in the area can inform such developments.

## **General Comments**

Include Youth welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Northern Ireland Office's Consultation, concerning the Test Purchase of Alcohol. Include Youth, as an organisation working to promote the rights and best interests of young people at risk, has a particular interest, expertise and track record in working with key stakeholders to improve outcomes for young people at risk on a range of issues.

Include Youth submits that a version of the equality impact assessment and guiding principles should be produced in forms accessible to children and young people of different ages, telling them about the test purchasing of alcohol and what exactly it means.

Include Youth recommends that it is essential that government hear directly the voice of young people. We believe that the North Belfast Young Voices project provides one ideal mechanism through which this process could be supported. Our experience to date of the 400 young people we have engaged with through the North Belfast Young Voices Project is that they have a great deal of experience and insight to offer. Not only do young people have a right to be consulted, it also makes sense from a

governance perspective, as the test purchase of alcohol directly and indirectly impacts on the lives of young people.

In line with the need to hear the views of children and young people themselves Include Youth applaud the provision in the Criminal Justice NI Order, 2008 of the need to ensure the consent of the young person as well as their parent or legal guardian. We would urge that clear guidance is offered that ensures that young people are giving *informed* consent. Such consent is not achieved by simply asking a young person if they wish to participate but by explaining (outlining benefits and possible downfalls) using appropriate language and information ensuring that it is fully understood that there will be no adverse consequences should they not wish to participate.

Therefore we would recommend that “young people” friendly literature and information is produced alongside practice guidance with regards to eliciting informed consent from a young person when participating in “Test Purchasing”.

## **North Belfast Young Voices participants' response to consultation**

### **Methodology**

Two groups of young people involving 13 young people aged 14-16 took part in the consultation, which was facilitated by our North Belfast Young Voices worker. Of these young people, 8 were from a Catholic background (5 females, 3 males) and 5 from a Protestant one (all males). A range of questions were asked, based on the content of the Test Purchase of Alcohol Equality Impact Assessment and Guideline Principles– although the young people were encouraged to talk openly and honestly about their perceptions. Our response draws upon the direct comments and opinions of young people, all of whom who live and interact in North Belfast and who have and are participating in the North Belfast Young Voices Project.

### **Concise summary of the thoughts and opinions of the young people around the test purchase of alcohol**

- Young people have already existing negative relationships with police, so why would they want to help them. May be better to get somebody else involved instead of police.
- “This will just not work. With the police involved no young person will want to be involved”
- “Police are just using young people to do their dirty work”
- Implication of being seen as touts for police or others
- “Young people want to drink. It is better to drink than take drugs. So why try to prevent them”
- “If you try to stop kids drinking they will do it just because they are not meant to”
- “If you stop kids drinking they will just use drugs instead because they are much easier to get a hold off”
- “The only ones to benefit will be the police. They will look like they are doing a better job but all they are doing is making it more of a challenge for young people to get alcohol. They will force us to think of new ways to do this”

- Making alcohol less accessible for young people would have the indirect effect of encouraging young people to turn to alternative substance misuse
- Issues around consent-young people stated that they could be indirectly coerced by parents or authority figures to participate
- “Young people may be forced”
- “It is good that a police officer is present in the shop with you however you are less likely to get served if an adult is around”

### **Guidelines proposed by the young people**

- “Confidentiality” is a must
- “Young people should not do it in their own area”
- “Reward off licences for not serving young people”
- “Name and shame the off licences”
- Ensure that appropriate officers lead the operations- those that can relate to young people
- Induction training for both young people and police, giving them the chance to build some sort of relationship and trust prior to doing the test purchase
- Need for proper education around what involvement would mean for those young people participating

### **Conclusion**

Include Youth welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the Northern Ireland Office’s consultation concerning the Test Purchase of Alcohol. We are committed to working alongside you to help ensure that the rights, opinions and best interests of all children and young people are taken into account, being understanding of and responsive to young people. We hope that our comments have been both constructive and useful and are more than happy to meet with you to discuss anything in this response. We wish to be kept fully informed of progress in the development of the Test Purchase of Alcohol and look forward to the recommendations made in this response being addressed, taken forward and from hearing back from the NIO in the near future.

## **Appendix 1**

### ***Young Voices North Belfast Project Objectives:***

- To build capacity of marginalized young people to effectively engage with the police.
- To build the capacity of police to effectively engage with young people.
- To produce, promote and disseminate the model for engagement, producing a transferable model of practice for enhancing communication and relationships between young people, communities and PSNI.
- To identify actions that the police, local agencies and community should engage in to enhance the safety and well-being of young people
- To publish an agreed joint agency strategy to tackle criminal and anti-social behaviour involving young people.
- To identify actions that should be taken to ensure the safety and well-being of young people and present those actions to the police and other agencies/communities.
- To develop a strategy that supports the continuance and development of the project beyond its lifetime.

**Notes from focus groups**

**Appendix 2**

**Test Purchase  
29 August 2008  
5 Protestant Males**

**Age when first started drinking?**

12/13

Don't drink

**Why drink?**

11<sup>th</sup> night

Special occasions

Weekends

Peers drink

It's a laugh

**How do young people get alcohol?**

Ask friends who are over 18.

Ask people walking past – polish people

Purchase in bars

Use fake ID's

**How can we prevent young people from getting hold of alcohol?**

Close off licences

Fines

Use CCTV

Reward off licences for not serving young people

Supermarkets – you can use self service in ASDA. Anyone buying alcohol should have to be served by a person.

Take alcohol off young people – have wardens i.e. batman

Education – For example the Teen Challenge bus

Churches outreach programme

**Risks for young people**

May be seen as touts

Should not operate in your own area

Embarrassment

Confidentiality

**How could these risks be dealt with?**

Agree with the safeguards already outlined in the guidance.

In addition you could:-

Name and shame the off licences

Advertising campaign

Police interview young people to ensure they are right for the job

Ensure appropriate officers lead the operations – they are vetted and trained and can relate to young people

Induction training (for both police and the young person)

Building trust with the police officer

### **Benefits/Incentives**

Pay expenses

Benefits for young people and the community - A Reduction in anti social behaviour

Safer community

Drunk people can be aggressive

Ensure safe disposal of alcohol

Trips/outings – i.e. paint balling

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Test Purchase 2 September 2008 3 Catholic Males, 5 Catholic Females**

#### **Age when first started drinking?**

12/13

Don't drink

#### **How do young people get alcohol?**

Try yourself – girls generally get served more easily

Ask friends who are over 18.

Get someone else to go in for you. Although they may charge (local alcoholic will always go if you pay him)

Supermarkets

Use fake ID's

#### **How can we prevent young people from getting hold of alcohol?**

Young people want to drink. It is better to drink than take drugs. So why try to prevent them.

Police target kids on the street and take drink from them. They pour it out onto the street just to annoy you.

Give kids alternatives – need more to do, more leisure facilities

Education - have a poster campaign – show the damage alcohol does to your liver. Involve kids in the campaign.

Alcopops are getting more expensive. Vodka is a much cheaper and better alternative

If you try to stop kids drinking they will do it just because they are not meant to.

If you stop kids drinking they will just use drugs instead because they are much easier to get a hold off.

#### **Risks for young people**

May be seen as touts

Police are just using young people to do their dirty work

This will just not work. With the police involved no young people will want to be involved (except perhaps anyone who has suffered a tragic loss through drink).

It is just wrong. Using young people to get off licences shut and make people lose their jobs.

Young people may be forced.

### **How could these risks be dealt with?**

Why would young people need to go to court? Could the police not use the CCTV as evidence?

Young people should not operate in their own area.

It is good that police officer is present in the shop with you however you are less likely to get served if an adult is around.

The scheme would work better if police were not involved and some other body was in charge e.g. councils

### **Benefits/Incentives**

Pay young people

No one will benefit – neither the community or young people

Young people should be allowed to drink if they wish.

The only ones to benefits will be the police. They will look like they are doing a better job but all they are really doing is making it more of a challenge for young people to get alcohol. They will force us to think of new ways to do this.