



Include Youth Response to NICCY Priorities February 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 aimed at influencing public policy and public awareness - 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 who have been truanting, suspended or expelled from school, those from a care background, 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.

Young Voices

Include Youth runs the Young Voices project, which is a participation project for young people who have been involved or are at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system, with the aim of supporting these young people to become involved in decision-making processes which impact upon their lives. Currently the Young Voices project supports young people in two groups – one drawing its members from the Greater Belfast area, and the second based in the Juvenile Justice Centre, Bangor. We are also developing groups in Hydebank Wood YOC and in the community across Belfast.

For the purposes of this response we worked with young people in the Juvenile Justice Centre, Woodlands. All quotes in this response are theirs.

“Ones like us in here [JJC], ones who do burglaries, steal cars, joy riders, arsonists like me – that’s what I do, that’s what I am.”

Format of Response

Include Youth appreciates the need for the Commissioner to prioritise the work that she needs to undertake. We were challenged by the task of trying to rank the priorities identified and believe that all children should be able to enjoy all of their rights as identified by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We are confident that NICCY will take cognisance in its Corporate Plan (2008-2011) of the recommendations of the UN Committee with regards to the UK government's implementation of the convention particularly in relation to young people in the criminal justice system

We did not ask the young people to rank the priorities but instead to outline their own experiences of the areas identified by NICCY. We believe that it is more productive for the Commissioner to gain some insight on the views and experiences of some of our most marginalised and disenfranchised young people in our community on the 5 areas.

We are offering direct quotes from young people with our prompt questions in italics. Include Youth has made no attempt to interpret or edit the comments.

Young Voices (JJC) Feedback on NICCY Proposed Priorities

There was an initial apathy from the young people we talked to. When explored further it was clear that these feelings were based on firm belief that nothing they said would make any difference. There was an acceptance that they may be listened to but scepticism with regards to whether anything would be done about what they said. Eventually the young people accepted that what they said may help other young people but not them. The overwhelming majority of the young people we spoke to believed that the world is a "hard place" and "bad things" happen but "you just get on with it".

1 Play and Leisure

When I say "Play" to you, what do you think of?

- Games
- Being out with your mates
- Sports
- Messing about on the street
- Having fun
- Messing about with your mates
- Swings, see-saws

Why do children play?

- To enjoy themselves

- To have fun
- For friendship – to meet other people. Its how you make friends when you're a kid
- Play's like going to school...you learn stuff when you play
- It gets you out of the house
- You can pretend you're someone else – you can pretend to be whoever you want, be wherever you want
- Like Superman - not me, I never did that! My wee brother used to – pretend he was Superman and go flying about everywhere

What happens if kids don't get the chance to play?

- You'd go nuts if you didn't get out to play
- Kids will always find something, some way to amuse themselves
- Sure that's why kids start doing crime, cos there's not enough to do that interests them in their community.
- If you don't get a chance to play you end up throwing a rope up. I don't mean me, but that could happen – kids *need* to play
- If you don't play you won't make friends, you'd have no mates. That's how you make friends when you're a kid.
- You don't learn new skills
- They don't know how to have fun and enjoy themselves
- They won't be streetwise – you learn how to look after yourself when you play about on the street

What games do kids play when they are?

(The young people were clear with regards to their memories with regards to what games they played at what age)

<u>0-5</u>	<u>5-10</u>	<u>10-15</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kissy catchy • Tig • I spy • Hide and seek 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murder hunts – its the same as hunts, but you get a beating when you're caught • Computer games • Football • You start to play with yourself • Mucking about with your mates • Shoplifting – you just start with wee things – sweets, wee balloons • You start going into empty houses – I used to go into any empty houses I could find and smoke bonges with my mates • The first time I smoked a joint I was 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You do more crime – more serious things • More drink! • Harder drugs – you start to take E's and whatever else • You try and get chases – rapping doors and windows then running away • From the cops too – throw bricks at them to try and get them to chase you

	about 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You start drinking then too • And you get interested in girls – you try and get a ride or at least you start to pretend that you are – messing about with girls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quads, scramblers • You start stealing cars, joyriding
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Would you say you play now? What sort of things do you do now, that you'd call play?

- Stealing cars
- Playing chicken – see who can do the best strokes [*offence*]
- You dare your mates to do stuff and they dare you to see who'll do the best one, the hardest, without getting caught
- Going to house parties, taking drugs and getting drunk.

How and what do older young people play?

- Football, sports
- Steal cars
- Playstation, computer games
- Crime – its just for fun...well its for money too, but crime's just an amusement
- Go-karts
- Gambling machines

What stops kids playing, what sort of things get in the way to stop them?

- Getting grounded
- Getting locked up! Like in a children's home, or Lakewood, so you cant get out to play anymore
- If they're disabled
- Older kids get punished for playing. You get beaten with bats with nails in them for stealing cars
- You can't stop kids playing; they'll *always* find something to amuse them. Even if its just pretending you're Superman – you don't need anything to play, but its still playing
- Hoods smashing glass bottles so it's not safe for kids to play – round play parks.
- Drugs. You just sit in the house off your head, so you don't want to go out and play.

What children and young people do instead of playing?

- Drugs
- Steal cars
- Burgle houses
- Sit at home, bored

- Drink
- Do whatever, just to amuse yourself

So would you say older young people play for all the same reasons as you were saying earlier that kids do – for fun, for pleasure etc?

- Aye, its exactly the same – doing you make all sorts of friends and it's a laugh, amusement
- See flying about all over the place in a car, you get to know people.
- You see other people joy riding about in a car, then you do it and people come up and talk to you about what you did, so you get to know people
- And you see people from other areas cos you've a car to get about in.

Do adults play?

- Yes – they go to bars, they play music
- Or watch music in bars
- They play cards, go to each others houses, watch DVDs
- They go out walking dogs – everyone does something
- Adults don't go out hooding cos they've got cars to drive about in, houses to go to

Do any of you ever use the leisure centres or the youth clubs in the areas you're from?

Leisure centres?

- NO! I've got better things to spend my money on
- Why would you pay in to play football when you can just kick about on the street for free
- They're a waste of money – you can get fit running from the cops!
- Save your money for drink and drugs!
- The swimming pools are always stinking.
- I stopped going when I was 9. I got barred.
- They should be free, you shouldn't have to pay anything to go in
- They should be a community based thing, so everyone would use it. The government should pay for it and volunteers would run it
- It would cut down on obesity too!
- You can't go in cos you fuck about in the pool – they say wee kids aren't safe and you get fucked out. But what about us, just cos it's not safe for the wee kids, we don't get to use it.

Youth clubs?

- Youth clubs only have things for wee kids
- They're crap, there's nothing to do in them

- All they have is pool and shit like that
- Paramilitaries more or less run most of the clubs. They might be after you or just mightn't like you
- I'm barred.
- They're full of people we don't like – touts. Staff *and* young people.
- Clubs are only open at certain times
- You have to be “in the club” – you have to be a member to go to them
- Most of them say no over 16s are allowed in
- Loads of them are in churches and you don't want to be going into a *church* club!
- The community cops are always there – just calling in, but they're probably in to see what they can find out

2. Having Your Say”

Agree/disagree statements

Adults listen to young people?

- Disagree – they think we're all balloons
- Adults think that just because they're older than us they know better

In court young people don't get the chance to speak out and give their side of the story

- Agree – you don't get the chance to have your say in court
- You should be allowed to speak directly to the judge , tell him what you think
- I tried, but every time tried to talk he'd shout “Shut up young Rainey!”

What negative things have you heard said about you or young people?

- I get called “wee hood”
- Scumbags

In school, teachers respect your point of view

- In here [JJC] they do – they take time to ask you what you think about something. Not in main school though – they don't care what you think, they don't want to hear it
- I got kicked out of school since 2nd year – I don't know what they think.

Adults always think young people are up to no good

- No – only if you look suspicious – like if you’ve got your hood up and a scarf round your face
- Adults are wankers. You’re standing outside a shop and they’re scared to walk in past you, think you’re going to mug them.
- They done much worse when they were younger.

The police are interested in hearing what young people think and believe

- Bollocks! The police hate me – they don't care what I think
- They don't like us cos we make their job hard, do crime
- Some are sound, they're alright – but others just abuse their authority and give you a hard time.
- Some talk to us when they come out – like if someone's complained about us standing on the street drinking, some cops will talk to you and ask you to move to somewhere else. Other ones just come and tell you to move, or take your drink off you and pour it out in front of you.

Adults always look down on young people

- In some ways they do
- Some adults say “Respect your elders!”, but they don't respect us.
- Some are ok – like some of my mates Ma's and Da's are alright with me, talk to me and all – others won't let me into the house.
- Aye, some call me “Scumbag wee bastard!” and won't let me near their door.

Young People are not given enough say about what happens to them in life

- Agree – they need more chances to say what they want to happen to them. Like if you're put into care and you're told that you're not allowed to live with your Mum – you don't get a say in that, you don't get asked what you want to do.
- You get angry. You need to be involved more in what happens to you, you need to be listened to.

Nobody cares about what young people who do crime think

- Agree! Nobody cares about us. We're just a problem, wee hoods.
- They don't listen to us, they don't care

What happens when you are not listened to?

- When they don't listen to you, you go nuts – wreck the room, smash the windows.

Social workers are good at asking young people what they think and feel.

- Agree – that's their job – they ask you things and find things out
- It doesn't mean they listen to you though.
- Aye – disagree. They don't do what you want them to do.

Adults always listen to me and take me seriously

- Disagree. They never listen – they don't care, cos we've been in trouble

What does that feel like, not be taken seriously, to not be included?

- It makes you feel like shit
- I can't be included
- People call us “Wee bastards!” or “Scumbags!” – that's what we are to them, to most adults – we're the bad people.

If the government listened to young people they would learn more about how to help them

- Agree.
- That's not going to happen – the government doesn't care! They only care about their money, about getting the money in, the taxes they get from people. Do the government pay taxes? Do they, do they have to pay tax like everyone else?
- We just make problems for them, so they're not going to listen to what we think

3. Well Being and Mental Health

What is good mental health?

- You think positive, you feel good – like you think you'll get a job and all
- Like everything's going to work out, be ok
- If people don't need to drink or smoke
- You're clean
- Acting normal

What is bad mental health?

- You just feel bad all the time.
- If you're acting like a balloon
- Depression
- Stress
- People cutting their wrists
- You start seeing things – hallucinations
- You hear things that aren't there – you hear voices
- Like God – you think God is talking to you

How might you know if someone had mental health problems?

- They talk slowly, slurring their words.
- They might be violent – a bit mad on it
- They talk shit all the time
- They might be addicted to gambling
- Or on drugs
- Just the way they get on, you can tell
- They might be on medication – prescribed blues
- Hurting themselves. XXX used to eat himself – he'd just sit there chewing on his arm – really biting himself like.
- Your memory goes – they'd have a bad memory
- If they tried to hang themselves
- Smoking blow all the time

Do you think young people in the justice system; have more mental health problems than other young people?

- Cos of family – under stress from their Ma and Da – cos they're fed up with them
- If you're bullied it could lead to a mental health problem – like cos you're fat, or too skinny. Or poor – people take the piss out of you and it gets to you.
- Anyone can have a mental health problem, it doesn't matter who you are: poor, posh, whatever.
- They're always on drugs – so they do crime to pay for the drugs
- If you get kneecapped you might start having flashbacks to it and all, or nightmares.

What help do young people need to deal with mental health problems?

- Counsellors
- Someone to talk to just
- Psychologists
- People you feel close to

- A holiday – get them away to get their mind off their problems
- Drugs. Taking drugs makes you feel better – you get stoned and it takes you away for a while, takes your mind off things.
- Doctors
- Helpline
- A mentor

What skills do young people need to help them cope when times are hard or they have problems? Like why is it that some people will fall apart if there's problems in their life, while others are ok and can get through it.

- Being able to talk about your problems – if you can't and you bottle it all up, you'll just explode one day.
- Drink. When you get drunk you can talk about anything. Like when you're drunk you'll tell your mates you love them and all – you can't do that when you're sober. So if you got drunk it would help you talk about your problems
- If people don't laugh at you. If you don't care about people laughing at you, you don't mind talking about anything. People don't want to be laughed at but, so you don't talk about anything or tell people anything.
- If you think you're hard – if you act hard, act like there's nothing wrong, then you don't fall apart
- Football – just something to do to take your mind off it.
- Drugs! If you take drugs, then you just forget about your problems or medication – some people take medication and that helps them
- If you're able to ask for help you can get better sometimes.

Are young people discriminated against if they have mental health problems, are they looked down on and left out of things?

- Some people do. They look down on them, or discriminate.
- They think they're weirdoes, balloons.

4. Protection

Do you think Northern Ireland is a safe place for young people?

- No – cos of all the paramilitaries and that
- Yes – cos of the peelers – some places don't have that
- Cops make it worse sometimes – cos they beat you
- It's not *always* for nothing – sometimes its cos you've stolen a car, or cos they've had to chase you!

- It depends where you live – if you live out in the country, there's not much crime, or drugs, or paramilitaries, so you're ok, safe
- If live in a posh place, where rich people live – like the Shankill's more dangerous than say...Crawfordsburn.

Where are young people most at risk?

(Locations are ranked for safety, with the safest first)

1. JJC

- You're pretty safe in here – like the paramilitaries or the police cant get you, as long as you're here
- And there's not really any bullying
- But sometimes staff restrain you, and you get hurt
- And they can hit you when they restrain you.

2. School

- Teachers could abuse you
- People can bring weapons into school – knives and all
- You could walk into school and someone could come up and stab you.
- Or you could get shot – there's nobody frisking you for weapons in schools, teachers don't look in people's bags
- They could wait for you in the toilets
- You can get bullied too

3. Home

- Its safe-ish, cos you're in your own house, a wee bit protected, but the RA could still kick your door down, come in and club you.
- Its not safe in the house if they want to get you – they can still come in and give you a kicking
- Yeah, or you could get abused – your Ma or Da.

4. Children's home

- Not safe.
- There's bullying – from other young people. Or from staff sometimes, but mostly other young people

5. Street

- Your 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
- You've got your mates round you on the street but, so you've got a bit of protection, but if the cops or paramilitaries want to get you, they will.

If you felt unsafe, what would or could you do about it, or who would you tell or get help from?

(Young people struggled with this question and there was quite a lot of prompting with regards to suggestions)

- A social worker or something
- I wouldn't go to the police – some other young people might, but I wouldn't. Cos they're scumbags, *they* wouldn't help me.
- If it was a paramilitary threat I'd talk to my social worker.
- I wouldn't! I'd just say fuck it, I wouldn't let those bastards tell me what to do. I hate them. They've given me a beating before, so I know I can take it – I'd just take another beating.

Are young people who have been involved in crime more at risk than other young people?

- Yes, cos of paramilitaries – they're always after you
- And cos of the police, they beat you
- Cos if you give them a hard time, they give you a hard time back. You do crime, make their job harder, so they give you a beating

Are there different or more risks for either girls or boys?

- Girls can get raped.
- Wee girls don't get shot or get beaten though. When did you ever hear about a woman getting shot by the paramilitaries? You hear about wee lads getting shot all the time but.

Which of those 4 areas do you think the Children's Commissioner should work on most over the next 3 years?

- All of them, but child abuse is the most serious
- Beatings, paramilitary beatings.
- Paramilitary 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.

5. Equal Treatment

Agree/disagree statements

The government doesn't care about young people

- Agree. They don't care cos we get into trouble, break their laws.

- The government doesn't care about anything except the money they're getting the taxes. As long as they get that, they don't care about anything else.
- If we break their laws, it's costing them money, so they don't like us.

You would get a hard time if you were not white. E.g. Chinese, Black, Indian, Pakistani

- Sometimes you would, cos you'd be seen as different - it's a cruel world we live in and you get a hard time if you're different
- I know I've been cruel to people
- Like the Polish – they're coming over here and taking over everything – all the jobs and all
- Aye, but their getting all the jobs cos they work harder and people don't have to pay them as much – people here wont take they jobs but they do.

I have been discriminated against because of my religion

- Agree. I've been called "orange bastard" and all
- You cant walk through certain bits of town cos of your religion – its not safe
- I don't care but, it doesn't matter to me what religion my mates are – I've got both. I don't care, but if someone's bitter to me, I'll be bitter back.

When you have got a criminal record everyone thinks badly of you

- Sometimes, but not everyone, but it does happen
- You get called "You wee scumbag bastard you!", cos you've done crime, stolen cars or something
- They see us as the "bad" people – they just think that we're wee bastards.
- That we're going to rob them or beat them – that you're out to get them

Conclusion

Include Youth accepts that the views expressed in this paper do not represent those of the majority of children and young people in NI. We fully appreciate (and indeed hope) that these views represent a minority of children and young people. Nevertheless it is these young people who have often had the poorest start in life and the fewest rights - whose behaviour also poses our society with the most challenges. We would contend that NICCY must in all of its five priorities ensure that its work reaches targeted these most marginalised of young people. Young people who are only visible because of the problems their behaviour presents and their cost to state.

We hope that the Commissioner is able to, in word and deed, convince these young people she will listen to them and indeed act on what they say. Include Youth would be very happy to support the Commissioner in these endeavours.

Include Youth

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**Alpha House
3 Rosemary Street
Belfast BT1 1QA**

028 90311007