

# include YOUTH

**April 2023**

**Comments on the Northern Ireland Policing  
Board Terms of Reference Review of PSNI's  
Strip Searches of Children and Young People  
in Custody**

For further information contact Paula Rodgers  
Policy Co-ordinator, Include Youth, 100 Great Patrick Street, Belfast

028 9031 1007      paula@includeyouth.org  
www.includeyouth.org      @includeyouth

## **Include Youth**

Include Youth is a rights-based charity for children and young people in or leaving care, from disadvantaged communities, or whose rights are not being met. We work to improve their employability, personal and social development enhancing inclusion, integration and good relations. We work with over 800 young people a year aged between 14-25. Our main offices are in Belfast, Armagh, Ballymena, Derry, Enniskillen, Newtownards and Omagh.

The young people we work with and for include those from socially disadvantaged areas, those who have had poor educational experiences, those from a care background, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people, young people with mental health issues, young people who have come into contact or are at risk of coming into contact with the justice system, misusing drugs and/or alcohol, at risk or experience of CSE. We provide a range of tailored employability programmes for these young people, including programmes delivered in partnership with community-based organisations.

One of our programmes, the Give & Take Scheme, adopts a youth work approach to improving the employability and increasing the self-esteem and confidence of young people aged 16 to 24 who are not yet ready to participate in mainstream training. We work across 9 primary sites and a number of outreach locations. The core components are personal development, mentoring, training, work experience, essential skills and transitional support.

Many of these young people have experienced social exclusion, poverty or have other complex challenges in their lives and therefore need additional support to overcome these barriers and positively progress their education, training or employment needs. Seventy-five per cent of young people on the Scheme are care experienced, while over a third have had contact with the youth justice system.

Include Youth also engages in policy advocacy work in the areas of employability, youth justice and policing. This work is informed by relevant international human rights and children's rights standards, is evidence based, including that provided by young people and practitioners and is based on high quality, critical analysis.

Our Care for Change project which started in September 2022 will employ 15 care experienced Expert By Experience (EBE) Youth Mentors over two years and across 6 Give and Take sites. Our current Youth Mentors are being trained and supported to mentor other young people to become change makers and policy advocates and to contribute to consultations and policy responses, meet with decision makers and co-facilitate focus groups.

## General Comments

Include Youth welcome the Policing Board's announcement that they will conduct a review of the compliance with human rights in how the PSNI addresses children and young people and the process of strip searching in custody.

Include Youth believe there are a number of issues which would be relevant to the review:

- **Rationale and justification for completing a strip search:** we would like to know the detailed reasoning for why a search is undertaken and how it is recorded. In particular, we are concerned that the justification for such searches is often derived from 'flagging' information already held by PSNI systems on the person subject to the search. We would require further information on how that 'flag' is interpreted and used in a decision to undertake a search.
- **Vulnerable young people:** what prior assessment is made to ensure that young people would not 'triggered' by a strip search, in particular young people who may have been victims of sexual abuse or exploitation. How is the sensitivity and vulnerability of young people assessed? Is a record taken and information shared with necessary authorities if a young person in care has been subject to a strip search?
- **Governance:** what steps are taken to ensure there is appropriate governance of the arrangements and decision making processes.
- **Appropriate Adult:** It is concerning that a considerable number of searches have taken place without an Appropriate Adult being present. How are young people consulted on who they would like to be present during the search and are young people given every opportunity to request who they want present?
- **How was the search conducted:** an examination and record of what levels of restraint were used during the search, and the justification of that level of restraint/ force.
- **Where the search was conducted:** a review of the location of the search and clarity about any searches that were conducted outside custody setting.
- **Follow up to search/safeguarding referrals:** what was the outcome of the search and was there a follow up in terms of a safeguarding referral if it was deemed necessary? If young people were 'triggered' by the search, what attempts were made to provide follow up support?
- **What evidence is there of a trauma informed approach to strip searching of children and young people?**