

include YOUTH

Response to Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027 March 2017

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Include Youth

Include Youth is an independent non-governmental organisation that actively promotes the rights, best interests of and best practice with disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people.

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, young people who have committed or are at risk of committing crime, misusing drugs and/or alcohol, engaging in unsafe or harmful sexual behaviour, or at risk of being harmed themselves. We provide a range of tailored employability programmes for these young people, including programmes in partnership with community based organisations.

Our 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.

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 a background in offending. We offer a range of tailored programmes including

- Core - for young people referred to us through the Health Trusts
- Start Programme – a collaborative partnership programme with community based organisations, targeted at young people in the North Down, Ards and Belfast areas
- Outreach - for groups or organisations throughout Northern Ireland
- One to One - for young people at risk of child sexual exploitation
- Transitional support - for those moving on from our Scheme and into mainstream education, training or employment

Our main offices are in Belfast, Armagh, Ballymena, Derry, Enniskillen, Newtownards and Omagh.

Include Youth also delivers an Employability Service on behalf of two of the five Health Trusts for young people aged 16 + who have had experience of the care system. This service is designed to offer tangible and concrete opportunities to assist young people leaving care to prepare for, and engage in work. We also deliver a joint employability mentoring project with Business in the Community.

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.

General Comments

Include Youth welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027. We welcome the efforts the Department has made to engage with the community and voluntary sector through each stage of the process, from the initial thinking on the strategy to forming the final draft strategy. We have been particularly impressed with the Department's commitment to seek the views of children and young people and in developing a children and young people's version of the document alongside the general consultation document. The consultation events which were aimed specifically at children and young people are to be especially welcomed. We appreciate that Departmental staff contacted Include Youth to ensure that harder to reach young people were included in the consultation process.

Approach to this response

As outlined above, Include Youth has traditionally worked primarily, but not exclusively, with young people from a care background. Increasingly we are now working alongside community organisations with other disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, who are classified as being not in education, training or employment and who are frequently on the edge of the care system and have had contact with the justice system. We are also working with young people at risk of child sexual exploitation. As such our knowledge and expertise, informed as it is by the young people themselves, by our practitioners and by research and policy analysis, relates to their experiences in the care system itself, in education, training and employment and in the policing and justice systems. This therefore is the organisational context that shapes our response to this consultation.

To inform our response we consulted with a number of young people who are currently engaged in our practice projects in Belfast, Newtownards, Derry and Ballymena. We also consulted with a group of young people from Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. The consultations were facilitated by our Practice Manager and Policy Co-ordinator who explained the Strategy and outlined each Outcome. The young people were then encouraged to discuss which outcomes they felt were most relevant to their lives. Because of the wide range of possible topics for discussion

and due to time limitations the young people selected the outcomes they were most interested in commenting on, which resulted in some outcomes not being discussed. So while we have provided where possible quotes to reflect the range of discussion, that has not been possible under every outcome. In a number of the sessions other Include Youth staff who work directly with the young people also sat in on the discussion and where relevant we have included their views also. In total 26 young people were consulted. Unless otherwise stated, the quotes in italics contained in our response are from children and young people.

International children's rights standards

We would like to see more prominence given to the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child throughout the Strategy.

We welcome the commitment to have regard where appropriate to the provisions within the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and to the acknowledgement that articles and the Concluding Observations will 'serve as a helpful guide to making sure that policies whether they hold direct or indirect consequences, will consider children'. However, we would like to see more explicit reference made to the detail of the last examination (2016) and Concluding Observations for the UK government and its devolved governments.¹ We would draw the Department's attention to the advise issued by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the production of 'National Action Plans' which should outline the State's intentions on how they will implement all the provisions of the UNCRC. General Comment 5 contains a list of guidelines which we would expect to see reflected in the development of the Children and Young People's Strategy.² In the 2016 Concluding Observations the Committee recommended that comprehensive action plans be developed for implementation in England and Northern Ireland.³

It is therefore paramount that the Strategy makes specific reference to the detail of the Concluding Observations and that under each outcome the relevant UNCRC articles and Concluding Observations are cited and a clear plan for delivering on these are included.

Programme for Government (PfG) and Children's Services Co-operation Act (CSCA)

We welcome the detail within the document on how the Strategy connects to the commitments under the PfG. We agree that the Strategy should be the appropriate

¹ CRC/C/GBR/CO/5, June 2016

² CRC/GC/2003/5

³ Paragraph 8, CRC/GBR/CO/5, June 2016

vehicle for the outworking of Outcome 14 of the PfG, which focuses specifically on children. Include Youth reinforced this point in our submission to the Draft Programme for Government.⁴ We also welcome the Strategy's inclusion of the need to meet the duties within the CSCA. Chapter 5 on Working Together effectively outlines the importance and duty under CSCA of Children's Authorities working together. We particularly welcome the clarity within Chapter 5 that co-operation is 'no longer something that may be considered. It is a statutory requirement.' Include Youth has long called for greater co-operation between a range of public bodies and for the introduction of a statutory duty to co-operate.

Ongoing engagement with children and young people

We welcome the commitment to ongoing engagement with children and young people, in particular to those who may be marginalised or seldom heard. We would stress the importance of ensuring that all fora are inclusive and accessible and Include Youth are keen to support the Department in any way possible to ensure that the young people we work with are represented.

Research

While we welcome the intention to access relevant research from academia and seek expert advice from academia on children and young people's issues we would also draw attention to the wide range of research available within the community and voluntary sector and ask that a vehicle is provided to ensure this important source of evidence is not overlooked.

Outcomes

We are broadly supportive of the themes of the Outcomes sections but feel that there is some disparity between 'where is the greatest effort needed' and the indicators which are designed to show how the outcome is being achieved. We would suggest that some amendments are made to ensure that effective indicators are chosen which will demonstrate whether there has been satisfactory progress and that change has taken place. As we have already stated, the outcomes should reflect all of the issues which are referred to in the UNCRC Concluding Observations as needing to be addressed.

⁴ Include Youth response to Draft Programme for Government, December 2016

Indicators

We do not believe that the indicators included in the Strategy will adequately demonstrate the delivery of the Strategy. In our opinion the indicators should be much broader and must include the collection of data on the progress of those most marginalised groups, such as young people from a care background and those who have had contact or at risk of having contact with the criminal justice system.

Specific Comments

Outcome 1: Physical and mental health

The issue of mental health was a priority issue for all of the young people we spoke to. While the young people acknowledged the need to meet the physical needs of children and young people it is clear that the urgent need to address mental health concerns amongst themselves and their peers is top of the list.

The big issues are mental and physical health, suicide and self harm.

We cannot overestimate what a pressing issue this is for the young people we spoke to. They all thought that the Strategy should prioritise the mental health needs of children and young people. Many of them had experience of or knew people who had experienced mental health problems and they were worried about the lack of adequate provision for children and young people to get the help they need.

Mental health is the main issue for young people – there are not enough services out there.

I know there is young ones in town and they are off their heads and they can't get help.

There are mental health problems from about 14 years and up - suicide, depression, self harm.

Mental health is a big one for children.

Suicide is a big issue as well.

A lot of young people are not getting the mental health they need.

It's a massive problem.

Some of the young people had experience of CAMHS and in particular of Beechcroft. They felt strongly that there was not enough provision to address children's mental health needs and that the geographic spread of support was too

sporadic. Several mentioned the dissatisfaction that there was only one residential facility and that it was very often far away from children's families.

There is only one hospital for children – Beechcroft.

The fact that they are really far from home when they are at Beechcroft is really bad.

They don't give you enough time, if you are really unwell and you need more time.

CAMHS is a nightmare. They say they will see you and they don't. They have so many young people and not enough professionals – they need a bigger building and more staff.

People struggle for years and don't get the help they need from CAMHS – you just can't get the help.

You have to wait far too long to get medication.

Many of the young people cited the support they received from voluntary and community organisations and it is clear that for many young people these organisations provide a lifeline during times when they are struggling with their mental health and general outlook on life.

There is lots of pressure put on young people now, the pressure can build up and over power you. I lost the head, thought I was worth nothing, when I was on the bru, but this (Alternatives) is where I got the help I needed.

Organisations like this in deprived areas are so important.

The young people were able to identify what type of help would be supportive.

They need coping strategies to cope. They need to give you a toolbox to get yourself out if it – out of the pit.

There are not enough people to support you for mental health problems.

They also identified the very vulnerable time when they have to transfer from children to adult mental health services and the concern they have that adult provision is not tailored to their age and particular needs.

And then they chop you off when you reach 18 and adult services aren't the same.

The young people were not positive about the contribution that schools make to supporting children and young people's mental health and claimed that many schools were not equipped to deal with young people experiencing problems.

No – they (schools)are no help for that.

They don't want to help you in school about mental health stuff. The teachers would just tell everyone. . I wouldn't trust them to tell them.

It just gets picked up as bad behaviour, but really it is because there are things going on for you underneath everything.

Practitioners agreed that mental health was one of the most pressing issues for children and young people and even thought that the level of poor mental health amongst young people was under represented because so many of the young people still do not want to reveal it. As one practitioner said:

A lot of schools don't do counselling, and the young ones don't want to talk to their parents, so they come here to talk to us. A lot of kids dealing with drugs don't attend school so this education needs to be offered outside school as well. (Practitioner)

Another practitioner commented:

We don't have enough provision for children in mental health. There should be a requirement for it to be provided in schools. The number of children who are self-harming, even 10 year olds, is going up. Teachers should be trained and be more aware...: Most people, especially men, want to keep it to themselves. I would say that 80 – 90 % of the ones we see in here have mental health problems. They use drugs to try and escape .(Practitioner)

Many of the young people and practitioners commented on the links between drug use and poor mental health.

Drugs is the main issue, you can get them anywhere.

I've seen 10 year olds off their head.

(drugs) is a real scourge in these communities (Practitioners)

They are so accessible.

Just a trend.

The young ones are only doing what the older ones are doing.

There is real concern amongst children, young people and practitioners that not enough is being done to tackle the drugs problem or to support young people who find themselves struggling with drug misuse.

And FASA is closed now, they used to do talks in schools and show them what could happen if you got into drugs., but FASA is gone now.

We need more education about drugs. Drugs workshops should be held in schools. .’

You need to get the drug dealer.

Comments from Include Youth on Indicators:

We recommend that the health indicators be extended as the current set outlined in the Strategy do not adequately reflect the range of issues highlighted and greatest need identified in this section, including alcohol and drug misuse, the impact of poverty, suicide and self harm and the underlying causes of poor mental health. It is also important that waiting lists are monitored and the time taken for young people to access help is reduced. We would also like to see an indicator on the number of young people entering the justice system with existing mental health concerns.

Outcome 2: The enjoyment of play and leisure

We believe that the one indicator for this outcome to measure the enjoyment experienced by children and young people as they play in home, community, school and local play facilities will not adequately address how children’s right to play and leisure is being facilitated and met. We are also concerned that the indicator will not represent the play, sport and leisure and cultural and arts experiences of the children and young people we work with, as it appears to be more directed at a younger age. We would like to see indicators developed to monitor how particularly marginalised young people will be provided with more opportunities to access a wide range of leisure, sport, cultural and arts activities.

Outcome 3: Learning and achieving

Many of the young people Include Youth works with have had negative experiences of mainstream education. Include Youth works with many young people who have experienced difficulties in learning. The reasons for these difficulties are many and varied. It can be as a result of difficulties at home, of emotional and psychological needs not being identified, of a learning disability, issues related to being in care, behavioural problems etc. This multiplicity of factors results in the chances of doing well at school being stacked up against our most disadvantaged children and young people. The young people appear to become disaffected from an early age and very often their experience at school only serves to reinforce that alienation.

We therefore welcome the Strategy commitment to see all children having access to an education which will develop their personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential as outlined in Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC.

We would welcome more explicit reference to the need to meet the educational rights of all children. We firmly believe that the Strategy should promote the educational rights of **all** children regardless of their circumstances – it should seek to ensure that a child with complex disabilities has their needs met, it should also help the child who is in the care system, a child with dyslexia, a child who is dealing with witnessing their mother being abused, a child who is struggling with depression and self-harm, a child who is caring for their alcoholic parent and trying to bring up a younger sibling at the same time. All of these children demand and deserve an education system which understands their specific needs. No-one would pretend that doing that and meeting these diverse needs is an easy challenge. Clearly, it is extremely complex but the Strategy must aim for an education system which can deliver on all these diverse needs.

Paragraph 6.6.15 refers to the need to look beyond the academic attainment goals of education and to consider how we can measure development and achievement in areas beyond exam results. Include Youth are fully supportive of this approach.

It is vital that all professionals, including teachers, have the skills and knowledge to allow early identification and appropriate intervention. It is our opinion that too many children who are struggling at school are not having their underlying needs identified soon enough.

We believe that some difficulties in learning can be exacerbated by the school's learning environment or the nature of the adult/ child relationships. The young people we spoke to were able to give examples of practice within schools which could certainly act as a barrier to learning for those young people struggling to fit in and keep up with the class standard. The very actions of certain teachers served to exacerbate existing problems and some young people felt that teachers did not respect them.

I went to a special school and I was told I would be nothing, and the bullying I got was awful but I decided to prove them all wrong.

Teachers were less likely to help me because I was in care, we were taken as people who didn't care.

I didn't like school at all, I felt uncomfortable.

The rules were awful, we had a support unit and I was put in it for 2 months just because I had hair extensions, and I didn't do well in my English because of it.

Because I'm from an estate I feel I am treated differently. You are treated better if you are from a posh area.

Schools are rubbish. They nearly fined my mum £1000 because I wouldn't go to school.

A significant number of the young people we spoke to had been suspended or expelled from school for challenging behaviour and yet it is evident when talking to these young people that many of the reasons for their challenging behaviour came from extremely complex experiences such as difficulties while in the care system, mental health problems within their family or experienced by themselves, unidentified learning needs etc.

I got expelled.

I got expelled too.

I got suspended.

I got suspended because I hit someone who hit me.

The young people were able to identify the particular barriers to their learning and the large size of classes was a common complaint.

Some schools, you learn nothing in them. There were too many people in the class and you never learnt anything, there were like 40 in my class and I couldn't cope. I hated it, that's why I failed my exams.

Half the people in schools don't get enough attention from teachers. If one of them is running about then the teacher has to deal with them and then you learn nothing.

I was always in the middle class and I learnt nothing, I came out with nothing, no GCSEs.

There should be more of these type of things (Include Youth Give and Take Scheme), for young people who don't like big classes, so I get on with more people here.

Smaller classes would help in school.

I would prefer small classes in school, at least you would get your education.

Smaller groups and more attention.

Class sizes are too big.

I learn better in small classes with a few people.

I was put in a smaller unit and I learnt far better in it. I just messed about in the bigger class.

The young people in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre (JJC) also mentioned their dislike of large classes and compared their experiences of education in the JJC favourably with those in mainstream education. The smaller class sizes, choice of more vocational subjects and focused support from educational staff in the JJC was commended by several of the young people.

You learn more in here, they know how to teach you, it's more one to one.

You do bricklaying, mechanics and all in here. If school was more like this in here, I would love it.

The classes were too big at my school, you couldn't concentrate and we just messed about. You just got left behind.

It's more enjoyable here, more practical. At school it is all writing and that is good for some people but not for everyone. You shouldn't treat children all the same.

Bullying in mainstream schools was identified as a significant problem for a number of the young people.

Bullying is a major issue in schools.

Bullying is a big issue, you can tell the teacher but then it just continues on outside. .

Schools should do more about bullying, you should be taken seriously.

Bullying was a big problem when I was at school, but I think it's lower level now.

Include Youth welcomes the specific reference to the educational needs of care experienced young people, those who receive free school meals, children and young people with SEN and children and young people in custody.

Comments from Include Youth on Indicators

Given the acknowledgement of the need to provide an education which goes beyond purely delivering on academic attainment in the earlier sections of the Learning and Achievement chapter we are disappointed that these more holistic outcomes are not reflected in the Indicators, which appear to focus solely on academic attainment. The measurement of these Indicators will not give us a complete picture of how we are meeting the educational needs of all our children and young people or how we are addressing the significant barriers to learning that exist for too many children and

young people. The Indicators are also focused on two distinct phases of learning, early years and GCSE levels. We would ask the Department why they have not included indicators to reflect all stages of education.

Outcome 4: Living in safety and with stability

Homelessness

We welcome the focus within the Strategy on the need to tackle youth homelessness. Many of the young people Include Youth works with have experienced unstable accommodation and the issue of homelessness came up on numerous occasions during our discussions with young people. There was a positive reaction to the inclusion of an indicator on the number of 16/17 year olds presenting as homeless, but one practitioner talked about the need for the indicator to be expanded.

The document talks about looking at the numbers of 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless, but what about those over that age, it needs to go beyond 17 because at 18 many of them are out of residential accommodation and if they don't take supported accommodation then they can be at risk of homelessness. A lot of young people go from intensive support to living in hostels and it just doesn't work for them. (Practitioner)

One of the young people who took part in a focus group discussion was at that exact time experiencing a housing crisis and was due to be evicted from her accommodation in the days following the date the discussion was taking place. Much of the session was taken up with the young person trying to get her accommodation sorted out and to find a bed in a home.

The following quotes from young people reflect the reality of living in unstable accommodation:

It's awful, it's really hard.

I was in a hostel and then in a flat, I was 16 with no help. Social services didn't want to help me, they said they couldn't help me anymore.

Housing is a massive issue, especially if you are care experienced. We need better financial support.

*I was put out of my place in B***** and then was in Mac for a while. I mightn't have been the best in that place in B***** and I got thrown out of that flat but I was not even mature. I didn't know how to handle it.*

When you're 18 you're out, they just kick you out.

We need more help for 18 year olds (for those in care)

In Scotland it's different, they can stay on (in care) longer.

I know someone who is 18 and he's homeless now and out on the street, and he's like a drug addict, it's awful.

There should be a system in place what you don't need to go through the Housing Executive – because I made myself intentionally homeless and I didn't appeal it so they can't get me anywhere.

*I got put in a family hostel in ***** when I was 16, then I got a flat but was kicked out by paramilitaries.*

We need financial support when you move out at 18. When you take off what you need for gas and electricity and all that then there is nothing left.

We look forward to the initiatives which will emerge from the Strategy to address the housing needs of care experienced young people.

Specific issues

We welcome the reference to specific issues which impact on children and young people's safety and stability, such as paramilitary intimidation and violence, homelessness, child sexual exploitation and trafficking. We would welcome reference to the additional needs of other groups of children and young people, including those who go missing and those who are most vulnerable to risk of abuse.

Youth Justice

Include Youth agree that the outcomes for children and young people who come into contact with the youth justice system must be improved and where possible, children should be kept out of the system altogether by providing early intervention and support, developing community alternatives, maximising exit points and diversionary disposals and increasing the use of restorative approaches. We would recommend that reference is made to the recommendations of the 2011 Youth Justice Review. In its second, most recent and final report monitoring progress on implementation of the Youth Justice Review's recommendations published in December 2015, CJINI stated that 59% of the **accepted** recommendations of the Youth Justice Review had been achieved and that 41% had not been achieved. They noted that this fell short of the

Ministerial target to achieve 90% of recommendations by 2014.⁵ Key recommendations **not achieved** include:

- Introduction of end to end statutory time limits (recommendation 15)
- The development of an appropriate range of supported accommodation to reduce to a minimum the use of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre (JJC) as a place of safety under PACE (recommendations 8, 9d, and 18)
- Looked after children should not be placed in custody, either through PACE, on remand or sentenced, where this would not have been the outcome for children in the general population (recommendation 19)
- Recommendation 21 of the Youth Justice Review regarding the retention and disclosure of criminal record information relating to children and young people was not accepted by the DoJ and has not been achieved.
- The Criminal Justice Delivery Group should develop a strategic interest in youth justice and together with the Criminal Justice Board and the Ministerial Children's Committee take overall responsibility for implementing the recommendations of the review (recommendation 25).
- The minimum age of criminal responsibility should be raised to 12 with immediate effect, and that following a period of review of no more than 3 years, consideration should be given to raising it to 14. In the intervening period, appropriate local services and programmes should be developed to meet the needs of children and young people who would otherwise have entered the criminal justice system (recommendations 29 and 30)

Include Youth would like to see the Strategy include a commitment to implement all outstanding recommendations of the youth justice review.

Political context and paramilitary activity

As a society transitioning out of conflict and violence, there are a number of specific circumstances that pertain which have relevance to and impact on the safety of children and young people. These include the ongoing threats, intimidation and attacks against young people accused of 'anti-social behaviour', particularly in economically deprived areas associated with high levels of conflict-related violence. The extent to which violence or the threat of violence represents a real risk to children and young people's safety, particularly in certain communities, cannot be

⁵ 'Monitoring of Progress on Implementation of the Youth Justice Review Recommendations' Criminal Justice Inspector Northern Ireland, December 2015, p.63.

underestimated. The lack of ongoing and disaggregated data collection and monitoring means that the real extent of this issue is hugely under estimated. PSNI statistics on paramilitary attacks are not routinely collated by age, but the NGO Alternative Report suggests that information from the PSNI indicates that children are victims of such attacks.⁶

A major research project into issues of marginalisation and conflict in the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland concluded that “violence *has remained a part of everyday life for children and young people living in communities defined by uncertainty, unease and the continued presence of paramilitaries or dissidents*”.⁷ This violence was found to come from different sources ‘*community violence, sectarian violence, rioting against the police, paramilitary-style threats and punishments*’.⁸ Most worryingly the research also found a ‘normalisation’ of such violence “*while children and young people felt threatened or intimidated by violence in their communities, they were resigned to its presence*”.

These findings are borne out by Include Youth’s own consultation with the young people in response to various recent consultations. The presence and threat posed by paramilitaries has been highlighted by young people during the course of our numerous consultations over recent years with young people on a range of issues including safeguarding, policing, the care system etc.

If any paramilitaries are after you.

Paramilitaries know you – there’s certain areas just not safe for me, certain estates close to where I live.

The way they are doing it now (paramilitary attacks), they are much worse.

We’d be safe if it wasn’t for the paramilitaries.

It’s the paramilitaries who make you feel unsafe – they know everything, know everyone ... so if they want you they will always get you.

The subject was once again raised by the young people we spoke to in January and February 2017 in relation to the consultation on the Children and Young People’s Strategy.

⁶Northern Ireland NGO Alternative Report Submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for consideration during the Committee’s examination of the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Government Report (June 2014) page 15

⁷McAlister, S., Scraton, P. and Haydon, D. (2009) Childhood in Transition Experiencing Marginalisation and Conflict in Northern Ireland. QUB, Prince’s Trust and Save the Children. Page 152-153.

⁸Ibid. Such concerns have been highlighted by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) in its submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the UK’s Fifth Periodic Report on compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (July 2015) paragraphs 15-18. The Commission has urged the UN Committee to recommend to the NI Executive that it ‘take immediate and effective action to address the issue of paramilitary style attacks on children in NI through measures relating to both transitional justice and child protection (paragraph 18)

Some paramilitaries try to help you.

No, they are scumbags. I hate that they get children, you can get brought into them too easily, they want kids to do stuff for them, to do their skivvying for them.

Kids are committing suicide because dissident paramilitaries are trying to get them to do stuff they don't want to do.

There should be more done to tackle paramilitarism.

The ones joyriding and all and the paras are trying to get that stopped and they threaten to knee cap them

Too many people are stuck in the past and the older ones pass it on to the younger ones and it goes on. It just keep them (paras) in power.

The threat from paramilitaries is ridiculous. It's a disgrace. The paramilitaries have the advantage and all the propaganda that goes out, around the 12th July and the Easter Rising and all, they have money to do what they want, the spotlight should be changed from them and should be put on young people.

Only one young person that we spoke to felt that paramilitaries were not a major threat to their own person safety, perhaps reflecting the different experiences for young people depending on the area they live in.

Paramilitaries are not a big issue here.

However, this opinion was soon counteracted by the views of other young people.

They so are!! Paramilitaries are a massive issue here in Derry!! There is lots of paramilitary activity, there are ones going round with bats and 17 and 17 year olds getting beaten up all the time.

If you grow up in an estate you grow up with people around you getting beatings. It makes us think that's alright – my Daddy died when I was wee and I put my foot through a shop window because I thought that was ok. When I saw him (one of the young person's relatives) kerb jumping someone, like smashing their head on the ground, it was awful. A lot of people see stuff like that.

It's (paramilitary activity) mostly in estates and all that, you wouldn't get it in posh areas.

The paramilitaries run the estate, it depends on what area it is for which paramilitary group it is.

When you are younger they (the paramilitaries) protect you, they look out for you, everyone looks out for everyone else, but when you hit 16 they are on your back, especially the boys, they try and get the wee lads in.

It is essential that the Strategy calls for more work to be done to understand this issue and to developing action plans to address it.

Internet Safety

We welcome the inclusion within the document of the need to address Internet Safety and the identification of online risks to young people's safety (6.7.21).

While the internet can be extremely beneficial for children and young people, as a tool to learn, communicate and explore the world around them, it also has many risks attached to its use which must be fully recognised and the appropriate safeguards developed to ensure children and young people are kept safe while online. The challenges posed by the fact that internet is global in nature and reach, coupled with the reality that internet trends are changing on a daily basis, are extensive.

The recent CSE Inquiry report also drew attention to newer forms of child sexual exploitation (CSE) such as sexting, pointing out that such developments allow greater possibilities for contact and networking that render more children than ever vulnerable to CSE⁹. The Children and Young People's Strategy must be able to be fully responsive to those challenges and developments.

Care and Criminalisation

There remains a disproportionate number of care experienced children and young people within the youth justice system. 8% (97) of children looked after aged 10 and over had been cautioned or convicted of an offence while in care during the year ending 30th September 2015. Cautions and convictions are more prevalent in the older age groups with one sixth of children aged 16 and over having been cautioned or convicted. Of the 97 children cautioned or convicted 209 separate offences were recorded with one third of offences for grievous bodily harm GBH/ assault and a fifth were for criminal damage. Children in residential care are the most likely group to be cautioned or convicted.¹⁰

There is also an over-representation of care experienced children and young people detained in custody in NI. In 2014/15 one third (33%) of young people involved with custodial services were in care.¹¹ PACE disproportionately affects children in care and often results in such children being detained inappropriately in the JJC, due to a lack of appropriate alternative accommodation. From October 2014 until September 2015, LAC children represented 40% of individual young people admitted under PACE, and LAC PACE admissions represented 44% of total PACE admissions.

⁹Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland (2014) Report of the Independent Inquiry: November 2014 page 147

¹⁰ Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2014/2015, Department of Health.

¹¹ Youth Justice Agency, Annual Workload Statistics, 2014-2015..

It is clear, given the inappropriate detention of extremely vulnerable young people and the over-representation of looked after children in the youth justice system, that detention is not being used as a measure of last resort and that the recommendations of the Youth Justice Review in this regard are not being implemented.

The 2011 Youth Justice Review reported its concerns that care homes refuse to take children back if they have offended against the home or a member of staff, or where they are considered unruly. The youth justice review noted that some care homes, accommodating young people with challenging behavior, seem not to have the same need as others to involve the police in managing behavior and they concluded that the higher levels of custodial admissions was largely due to the way in which care homes manage children in their care, the difficulties in managing this group of young people and the need for equipping and supporting staff to deal with incidents, including the use of restorative approaches.

The young people we spoke to felt that residential care staff are too quick to contact the police when there is a disturbance and as a result young people in care are receiving criminal records for what they believe to be relatively minor incidents.

*They should warn young people about criminal convictions – they follow you throughout life. At 14 I didn't give a s***.*

We can all make mistakes.

I was in two children's homes and in there when the police show up it is a chain reaction – and the police cause agitation.

Staff should be trained up how to be social workers – should be more about how to keep yourself safe.

They ring the police far too quickly – if you don't answer the phone they phone the police. If they can't get you, even at 18 years old, they phone the police – after your curfew time. They hand hold you – they should treat us like an individual.

A cop stopped me and handcuffed me and brought me back (to the children's home). And I just needed out to clear my head.

A number of young people in the JJC claimed that they would not have come into contact with the justice system if they had not been in residential care. They also said that if bail conditions included following the rules of the residential home they were more likely to end up with a criminal conviction for breaching bail conditions.

The Youth Justice Review recommended that an appropriate range of accommodation be developed for children currently being detained under PACE, that the use of PACE be reduced to an absolute minimum and that looked after children

should no longer be placed in custody where this would not have been the outcome for children in the general population. The Review also made a number of recommendations in relation to criminal records.

Include Youth recommends that the unmet recommendations from the Youth Justice Review in relation to care experienced young people and criminal records are included in the Strategy.

Comments from Include Youth on Indicators

We are concerned about the lack of connect between the areas of greatest need that are identified and the proposed indicators. The indicators listed cover a narrow range of areas and even within those areas the measurement tool suggested will not give an overall picture of progress. A broader set of data needs to be developed to be able to effectively measure progress on the detailed issues outlined in the preceding narrative. While we welcome the inclusion of children and young people within the youth justice system in this outcome area we would recommend that further indicators are developed beyond the number of first time entrants in to the criminal justice system. The strategy should include indicators which will provide information on a wider set of outcomes such as engagement in education, training and employment and health outcomes, reduction in the number of looked after children entering the youth justice system, reduction of the inappropriate use of custody etc.

Outcome 5: Economic and environmental well-being

We welcome the inclusion of this outcome within the Strategy and the distinction between economic and environmental well-being. We particularly welcome the inclusion of children and young people in need of education, employment or training amongst those identified as being in greatest need, with specific reference to those who have experienced care or those involved in the justice system.

Young people are well aware from personal experience of the hardship that comes from not being able to gain employment and they see the negative results of this within their families and communities. They were not hopeful that the Executive could do anything to improve the lives of those communities in which they live or indeed that they even cared about deprived areas.

I think the government doesn't really care, they don't care about these communities – they just care about themselves. These areas need help.

Give money to the people who need it.

The young people we spoke to talked about how difficult it was for them to manage financially and to find jobs. Gaining employment is a number one priority for the young people engaged in Include Youth's employability schemes. When we asked them what they regarded as the obstacles to them securing employment they said:

Convictions.

No GCSEs

No training.

Better education would make it better.

A further obstacle is the knock on effect of benefit changes.

For housing benefits, they will lose them. Or they can't go into full time education because they will lose benefits. Housing is a big issue. PIPS will make a massive change as well. (Practitioner)

If you work your housing benefit will be reassessed or maybe it is if you work you lose your housing benefit – so there needs to be more education.

The benefits drop down. It's so complicated – I don't understand them at all.

We know from our direct work with young people that the transition from care can be a daunting experience and many young people need the necessary support to be able to make that transition successfully and in way which enables them to reach their full potential. This is particularly true for those care leavers seeking to access education, employment and training so it is vital that the Strategy addresses the extra supports needed for care experienced young people to enter education, training and employment. We believe that care leavers should be provided with support until they reach at least 25 years of age. Support for looked after children in transition to aftercare in relation to education, employment and training opportunities would greatly enhance life opportunities.¹² We recommend that the Strategy takes into consideration the recommendations emerging from the Access All Areas report which has been endorsed by a large number of voluntary agencies working with care experienced young people.¹³

¹² Include Youth (forthcoming publication April 2017) Removing the Cliff Edge: An explanation of what enables care leavers to make a successful transition from supported employability programmes into mainstream education, training and employment; Include Youth/Business in the Community, 100% Employment Opportunities for NI Care Leavers, by Robin Simmons and Ron Thompson.

¹³ Access All Areas , forthcoming publication 2017), Barnardos.

The rehabilitation and re-integration of young people in custody should also be prioritized, if the Strategy is to deliver on improving outcomes for young people involved in the justice system and enhancing their economic well-being. Young people should be prepared for release from the outset through, for example, day release for the purpose of education, training or employment and should have continuing access to support on a multi-agency basis. Evidence based services providing support within and on release from custody should be prioritised and resourced. There is a need for specialist training and pre-employability programmes for young people pre and post release from custody. Such schemes have already had a proven track record in ensuring young people do not reoffend and in securing places for them in mainstream education and training and employment.

Comments from Include Youth on Indicators

We are concerned that the use of the child poverty indicator of the percentage of children living in absolute poverty will not be an adequate form of measurement. We recommend that the indicator is expanded to include relative, persistent, material and absolute poverty as well as detail on poverty experienced by different ages of children. This section should also include reference to the impact that welfare reform will have on levels of child poverty. As there is a specific reference to care experienced young people and young people involved in the justice system we would have expected to have seen specific and tailored indicators relating to the education, employment and training outcomes of these groups of young people.

Outcome 6: A positive contribution to society

We agree that children and young people should be given the opportunities, skills and tools needed to make a positive contribution to society. We particularly welcome the emphasis placed on the need to include 'seldom heard voices'. The young people Include Youth works with seldom get the opportunity to have their voices heard in society and we are committed to ensuring that they have a say in decisions which impact on their lives and where possible we provide opportunities for young people to meet with senior decision makers, politicians and those with influence.

Young people are the future and they should care about what we say.

Comments from Include Youth on Indicators

We are concerned that the indicators are once again disjointed from the narrative in this outcome section. While it is valuable to review the frequency of participation in

voluntary and community work, this indicator will not give us detail on the availability and exact nature of the opportunities and to what level young people are able to participate fully. An indicator should be included which will review the opportunities that young people have to be involved in decision making in various contexts of their lives whether that be in the community, in school, in health services, in politics etc.

In school you should be asked at least once a month how education is going for you – you never get asked that at school.

Outcome 7: Live in a Society which Respects their Rights

We welcome this outcome on the need to inform children and young people of their rights and to tackle a general negative public attitude towards children. We agree that a vital component of this work is to improve the knowledge and understanding of children's rights amongst 'duty bearers'.

Role of the Media and Stereotyping

Include Youth welcome the proposed indicator within the document around negative stereotyping and the role of the media, with the intention of measuring the percentage of young people who feel the media represents young people fairly.

In its 2008 examination of the UK's record on children's rights the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child criticised the *'intolerance and inappropriate characterisation of children, especially adolescents, within society, including in the media'* and recommended that the state take urgent measures to address this issue'.¹⁴

An ESCR funded knowledge exchange project between the Childhood in Transition and Social Justice Initiative at Queen's University and Include Youth has carried out in depth research into media representation of children and young people in Northern Ireland.¹⁵ Young people's participation was a central element of this research which sought to both identify and challenge negative perceptions and representations of children and young people, with the intention of increasing public understanding of children's rights and media responsibility. The research project developed a wide ranging set of recommendations for media professionals, civil servants and politicians. The findings and recommendations arising from the QUB/Include Youth/ESCR 'Behind the Headlines' research into media

¹⁴UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008) Concluding Observations in respect of the UK and Northern Ireland paragraph 25. CRC/C/GBR/CO/4

¹⁵ McAlister, S., Scraton, P. and Haydon, D. (2009) Childhood in Transition Experiencing Marginalisation and Conflict in Northern Ireland. QUB, Prince's Trust and Save the Children. Page 152-153

representations of children and young people should be considered and their implications for the Children and Young People's Strategy taken on board.¹⁶

You never hear the good stories. Like I did a charity morning for cancer and I raised loads of money and I'm also doing a sleep out for homelessness, you never about that. I love doing that sort of thing, I want to help people find a cure for cancer. Most of the stories in TV and papers are about us fighting and drugs and all – you never hear the good news about us.'

Discrimination

The young people we spoke to are all too aware of the impact of negative media stereotyping of young people and felt that this carried on into how young people are viewed by society and community generally. Many of them talked about their direct experiences of being discriminated against and being treated differently because of the age, the way they dress, the school they attend or the area they come from.

Everyone assumes you are a druggie and a drinker. But we all don't do drugs and drink, not all teenagers are the same. I admit it is bad in some places, like there is a tunnel I walk down and you can't walk past it that you aren't attacked by young ones who are off their heads.

Young people are seen as wasters, as being bad and good for nothing.

They see young people standing on street corners with hoods up and causing trouble. –

It depends on where you live too. I could never get a job and I thought it was because I am from the Shankill. People just assume you are a member of a paramilitary and that you are going to cause problems, just because of where you live.

It's all about who you are and where you come from. – your identity.

I get stared at all the time – people assume you are going to do wrong.

You are treated worse outside school as well, because of the way we dress, the way we talk.

Cos we went to XXXX School. I liked my time at school but we were treated differently because we had that school uniform on.

¹⁶ Behind the Headlines: Media representation of Children and Young people in Northern Ireland: Summary of Research Findings, 2015, Faith Gordon et al, QUB/Include Youth

My problem is how others view me. I love being from an estate but I'm judged because of where I'm from.

The issues raised by the young people are equally relevant to Outcome 8 under equality of opportunity and good relations.

Comments from Include Youth on Indicators

We believe the indicators could be expanded to include a measurement of children's participation which could include information on the extent to which children are involved in civic society, how they are able to access information, how they are able to influence the policy agenda etc. In relation to the indicator on the percentage of adults who have heard of the UNCRC, we would like to see this amended to include a measurement of the awareness and knowledge of specific sections of society, including those professionals and practitioners who are in direct contact and have influence over children's lives and who are responsible for developing policies relating to children and young people.

Outcome 8: Living in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted

We firmly believe that children and young people must be afforded equality of opportunity as outlined in the equality obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Through our direct work with young people we are well aware of numerous examples of young people not being afforded equality of opportunity, either through their educational and training experiences, their experiences of the care system, the youth justice system, the health system or within the wider community.

Children should be treated equally.

'not being allowed to take your bag in – it's not fair, you even have to take your blazer and tie off to go into this one shop. And only 3 young people were allowed in at a time.

This outcome must emphasize the obligation that the Executive has to make sure young people are not discriminated against and that they have access to equality of opportunity in all parts of their lives. The comments Include Youth made under Outcome 7 are relevant under Outcome 8.

Comments from Include Youth on Indicators

No indicators are included which relate to equality of opportunity. The three indicators listed refer only to promotion of good relations. It would be beneficial to include indicators which would measure young people's sense of equality of opportunity in relation to health, education, feeling safe etc. This information is especially important with regard to the most marginalised groups. An indicator should be added which will measure levels of discrimination felt by young people because of their age.

Concluding Comments

Include Youth welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Children and Young People's Strategy and hope that our comments and those of the young people will prove useful. We are more than happy to expand on any of the issues raised in our response. We look forward to working alongside officials as they seek to finalise the Strategy.