

## Childhood in Transition: Summary of Research Findings for Children and Young People

Haydon, D., McAlister, S., & Scraton, P. (2010). *Childhood in Transition: Summary of Research Findings for Children and Young People*. (1 ed.) Save the Children.

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# CHILDHOOD IN TRANSITION

**SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**



Queen's University  
Belfast



Prince's Trust  
Northern Ireland



Save the Children

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ISBN: 9780853899792

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lots of people helped us with the research as well as putting together the full report and this booklet. We would like to thank our partners at Save the Children and the Prince's Trust and our colleagues at Queen's University, especially those in the *Childhood, Transition and Social Justice Initiative*.

Thanks to the design and publications team at Darragh Neely Design Works and to Niamh McConaghy, from St Michael's Grammar School in Lurgan, who helped design the image for the back cover of this booklet. Thanks also to Gail Neill for her comments and suggestions for the 'Ideas' sections.

Sincere thanks to all the organisations, community workers and representatives who took part in the research or put us in contact with children and young people.

Most importantly, we would like to thank all the children and young people who gave up their time to speak with us. They shared their views, experiences, and personal details about their lives with energy and honesty. We hope we have done justice to their words.

Politicians, policy makers, people who work with children and young people, community members, parents/carers, children and young people need to hear what those involved in the research have to say - to understand what it's like to live in Northern Ireland today, the difficulties faced by some children and young people, what they enjoy and their suggestions for positive change. Adults also need to act on these suggestions - to make sure *everyone* is included in decision-making, give and earn respect, and meet the obligations they have to promote and protect the rights of *all* children and young people.

Deena Haydon, Siobhán McAlister and Phil Scraton  
Childhood, Transition and Social Justice Initiative  
Queen's University Belfast  
May 2010

## THE RESEARCH

Over the last few years, research with children and young people has explored the issues they face when growing up. But Save the Children, the Princes Trust and researchers at Queen's University in Belfast felt that we need to know more about what it's like living in communities in Northern Ireland that have been most affected by poverty and the Conflict (some people call this 'the Troubles'). So we set up the 'Childhood in Transition' research project.

In 2008, we chose 6 communities where we would carry out the research - one in each county of Northern Ireland. These had all been seriously affected by the Conflict and had high levels of poverty. They were a mix of urban (town) and rural (country) communities outside Belfast. Some were Catholic, others were Protestant and one was mixed but segregated (Catholic and Protestant areas were separated from each other).

We talked with 196 children and young people aged 8-25. The topics discussed included: how adults view children and young people; whether children and young people are listened to and respected; the issues affecting children and young people living in their community; local services; and children's rights. We also talked with 65 adults in the communities - most of them worked with children and young people. This booklet discusses the issues that children and young people talked about (their own words are in blue). We have not included everything because this is covered in a larger report. If you are interested, the

full report is at: [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/Childhood\\_in\\_Transition.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/Childhood_in_Transition.pdf).

At the end of each section are a few ideas that you might want to talk about in your youth group/ class and some useful website addresses are included at the back of the booklet.

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## IMAGES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

### Children

Most people thought that when we discuss children we are talking about those who are under 13. Most children and young people agreed that adults usually treat children well. The sorts of words adults use to describe children are:

Wee

Adorable

Cute

Kind

Loving

Helpful

Young people thought that when children do something wrong, they are called *"cheeky"* or *"naughty"* and that children *"get away with"* bad behaviour. But children themselves did not agree. They said adults often say or think that *"children should be seen and not heard"*. Children didn't like it when adults thought they did not understand things because of their age, or when people used negative words like *"a nuisance"*, *"loud"*, *"spoilt"* and *"a pain"* to describe them.

Children felt they were involved in decisions and usually listened to by adults, especially if they were worried, upset or had been hurt.

### Young people

Most people thought that when we discuss young people we are talking about those who are aged 13-18. Both children and young people believed that adults think young people are anti-social and intimidating (frightening). The words adults use to describe young people are usually very negative:

Wee Hoods

Thugs

Louts

Hooligans

Anti-social

Troublemakers

Gangsters

Children often thought negative things about young people too – that young people were involved in drinking, smoking, taking drugs, and *“acting hard”*.

Young people felt they were always seen as a *“problem”* or *“threat”*. They agreed that some young people *“act up”*, but were annoyed that all young people are *“tared with the same brush”* (stereotyped).

Young people felt they were not involved in decisions or listened to by most adults.

## Becoming a young person

Young people said that adults become less supportive *“when you hit the teenage years”*. As well as being expected to *“have more sense”* than children, they were also expected to take more responsibility for themselves and in their families - by getting a job to earn money or by cleaning and babysitting if they are girls.

While making the transition (change) from being a ‘child’ to being a young person, young people also felt other pressures but did not have enough information, advice or support about these. The main pressures they talked about were:

- Physical and emotional changes: *“... all the changes you’re goin’ through [physical and emotional] ... you’d be too showed, embarrassed, to talk to people. When you’re a wean [child] you get help.”*
- Being expected to ‘fit in’ and have the ‘right image’: *“Going to high school you need to wise up – it happens too quickly. You had to be more mature. You’re trying to fit in. You start cursing and all that.”*





## CHILDHOOD IN TRANSITION

- Feeling pressured into drinking, smoking and having sex: *"They think 'If everybody else is doin' it [having sex] and I'm not doin' it, then I'll get wile stick'. Then they do it ..."*
- Worrying about their future: *"It's hard to know what you're goin' to do in the future. About your work, what you're goin' to do and where you're goin' to go – tryin' to get a job and your own house an' all."*

## Anti-social behaviour

Young people were angry or upset that when they are on the streets with their friends, adults think they are doing something wrong and being 'anti-social':

*"When we're on the corners we're just gettin' together, havin' a laugh. But straight away they see it as a threat ... Anti-social behaviour is simply congregatin' in a group. Just bein' together with your pals is targeted as anti-social. You want to tell them that you're bein' social, not anti-social. They wouldn't get it!"*

Adults judged them based on how they dressed or where they hung out:

*"... if we're standin' on the streets with hoodies an' all, they think we're goin' to batter old women."*

*"Here people think that, because you dress in tracksuit bottoms, you're a hooligan. But they don't know you personally, what you're really like."*

They said that in their communities, they are often shouted at and asked to 'move on' by adults or the police. They felt this was unfair and it never happened to adults. It meant they could not go where they wanted when most of them were doing nothing wrong and were just talking with friends or playing football on the streets.

Always being seen or treated negatively led to young people feeling *"sad", "upset", "hurt", "insecure", "self-conscious", "unloved", "depressed",* and sometimes *"suicidal"*. Many felt *"angry"* because they were *"not given a chance"*. They also felt *"not loved and not liked", "hated"* by adults and *"as if you don't belong in the world"*.



ANTISOCIAL  
Behaviour

## Media

Young people felt that the media (newspapers, TV, radio) stereotype young people. Groups on the streets are often called 'gangs', those wearing hooded tops are called 'hoodies', and stories are usually about their involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour. There are not many stories about the positive things that young people do, or the contributions they make to their communities.

Young people believed that the way they were written or spoken about in the media affected how adults thought about them. They gave lots of examples, this is just one:



*"My granny would say, 'Oh these young ones these days now. That's all they do – drink and take drugs and get people pregnant.' That's the way she would speak. I think it's because of readin' the newspaper."*

## Respect

Young people felt judged and treated differently because they were considered too young to take part in their communities. Adults did not try to understand them: *"They don't know the person inside ... they see what they wanna see"*.

Children and young people agreed that if adults treated them well, they reacted better. They wanted adults to think differently about them and to understand their lives. All age groups thought it was important for children and young people to be listened to, included and respected. When this happens, they feel cared for and good about themselves.

Children believed that their views should be taken seriously so that they don't get hurt or cover up their worries, are kept safe, and because *"children can be more imaginative so could have better ideas"*. Being listened to means they have less to worry about, feel safer, and are given more advice or support.

For young people, being 'respected' by adults didn't happen often. They felt their views were not taken seriously: *"They think we are a joke and just mess about ... Adults brush over our ideas"*. Because they were not respected, young people said that they lost respect for those who judged them. Some became angry and their behaviour then gave them a bad name:

RESPECT

## CHILDHOOD IN TRANSITION

*"It just makes us do more ... If they have a name, they may as well live up to it."*

*"People get drunk and wreck the place because of the way they're treated."*

### What does respect mean?

We asked children and young people what respect meant to them. They said being treated well and fairly, not being discriminated against or judged negatively: *"to be treated like an equal"*. Respect needed to go both ways - it had to be earned to be returned:

*"It's about give and take."*

*"You help me, I help you."*

*"Be nice to us and we'll be nice to you."*

*"If they don't respect you, you don't respect them."*

Main Entry: **respect**  
Part of Speech: verb  
Definition: admire; obey  
Synonyms: abide by, adhere to, adore, appreciate, attend, be awed by, be kind to, comply with, defer to, esteem, follow, have good opinion of, have high opinion, heed, honor, look up to, note, notice, observe of, pay attention, recognize, regard, revere, reverence, set store by, show consideration, show courtesy, spare, take into

All age groups agreed that respect between children or young people and adults should be based on 'listening' and 'trust'.

### Who respects you?

Children and young people found it hard to answer the question, 'who do you think respects you?' Children usually talked about a family member or someone like a police officer or health worker. Young people talked about their friends or a youth/ community worker who they knew.

### Who do you respect?

When asked who they respected, friends were very important. For some, their friends were the only people they could trust, talk with openly and rely on: *"If they [friends] told me something I'd be there for them. I'd think more of them because they asked for help"*.

Many children and young people also named a youth or community worker they respected. They felt that these workers *"always have time for us", "understand your problems", "they're fair", "done good stuff for us", "stuck up for us"*. These workers often provide support for children and young people that they do not have in their homes, schools or communities.

## SUGGESTIONS

Children, young people and adults had lots of ideas about how things could be changed. Most were about respecting children and young people:

### Developing positive relationships

- Help children and young people of all ages feel cared for and good about themselves by developing relationships based on trust, care, understanding and respect.



### Understanding pressures

- Understand the pressures faced by young people, give advice and support as they move from being children to being teenagers.

### Challenging negative images and views

- Challenge negative images and views about young people in everyday life and in the media.
- Write and send stories about young people to the media, including their achievements and the positive things they do in their communities.

### Developing intergenerational projects

- Encourage everyone in communities to understanding that acts of violence and 'anti-social behaviour' are carried out by adults as well as by children and young people.
- Gain funding for more projects and events where children, young people and adults can meet and work together to help improve understanding and respect between generations.

## IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION...

These are some ideas that you might want to talk about in your youth groups or with your teachers.

What are the main things that change as people make the transition from being a child to becoming a young person? What help and support do young people need as they go through these changes?

You could write a list of people and places where children and young people can go for information, advice and support.

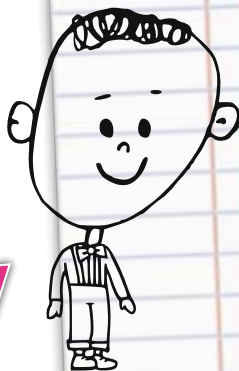
Are children and young people listened to and respected in your school/ group? You could develop a rap song or role play about how respect can be "earned and returned".

How are young people viewed in your community? Do you think these views are accurate?

You could develop a poster comparing 'Assumptions about young people' with 'The Reality'.

Is there anything your class/ group could do to help adults better understand what young people are really like?

Are young people stereotyped in your local media (newspaper, TV, radio)? You could collect newspapers over a week, then cut out the positive and negative stories about young people. Discuss what the stories focus on.



## SCHOOL, COLLEGE AND JOBS

### School subjects

Lots of children liked school, but many young people thought school subjects were not interesting or relevant to their future. School was too focused on written work or exams and grades:

*"It's boring. All you ever do is write and listen."*

*"They just give you work and mark it, that's it."*

School did not prepare them for jobs or life:

*"How are we expected to handle ourselves and take decisions an' all if we don't have information? We get nothing like that from schools, nothing that matters to our lives."*



### Careers advice

A few young people said the advice they received about future jobs, education and careers was good. Most did not think this was the case. They felt they made very important decisions without useful information. Many also thought they should have more work experience while at school.

### Sex and relationship education

Most young people thought the sex and relationship education at school was inadequate. Some said that it was all about biology and not about relationships: *"[Sex education] was too scientific"*. Others said that they did not really understand it when they were young:

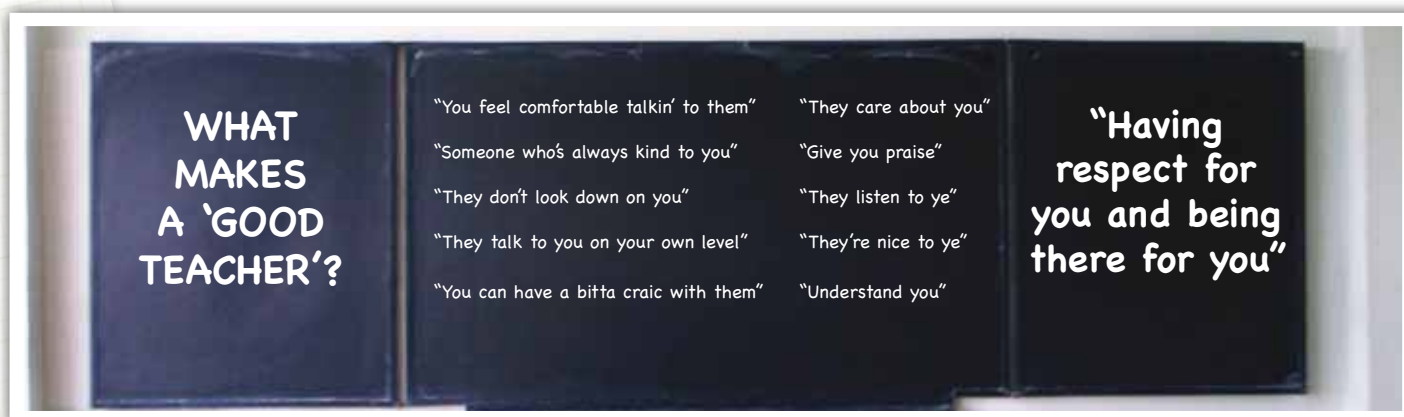
*"It talked about pregnancy and contraception, and sure you never even think of pregnancy at that age. I didn't even understand half the stuff they were talking about – different contraceptions and that. I still don't."*

Young women would prefer a woman teaching sex education so they would be less embarrassed. Some young people thought it would be better if this subject was taught by people who came into the school, who were not teachers.

### Teachers

Children usually had good relationships with teachers – they felt listened to and could rely on teachers to sort out serious problems such as bullying. Teachers also included them in decisions about school trips and play activities. Young people did not feel the same. Many felt misunderstood, judged and silenced by teachers: *“teachers are always right”*. It was not worth challenging teachers. They were not asked for suggestions or to make choices about lessons. Some also felt patronised: *“... whenever you went into the older school you’re still treated like a child”* or disrespected: *“They think they’re better than us”*.

A few gave examples of being embarrassed or put down by teachers in front of friends: *“... he said somethin’ to my friend and she went all red and he said ‘Aw look at ye, I made ye all red haven’t I?’ and everyone started laughin’ at her and she was wile embarrassed.”*



### School counsellors

Most young people thought that it was a good idea to have school counsellors and pastoral care in school. But many talked about teachers, school counsellors and school nurses breaching confidentiality (telling others what a child had said). This stopped them raising problems with school staff:

*“Everythin’ you tell them, you hear the next day in class. They tell ye that ye can trust them, but ye can’t.”*

*“I wouldn’t trust a counsellor in school in case they told ... my friend ... told them ‘cos she didn’t want the teacher to know. But they told the teacher.”*

*“... we have a school nurse who’s meant to be our school counsellor and they tout about everythin’.”*

## School councils

Usually, young people were not involved in making decisions in school. Even if they had a school council, issues they raised were often ignored:

*"It wasn't mentioned again when we mentioned it about three times."*

*"When you were talkin' about the behaviour and all it wasn't really taken serious ... they wouldn't listen to ye. It was like nine of them onto one of you, so you couldn't really fight your cause."*

Some felt that the members of their school council did not represent everyone's views: *"... It would be better if they asked the whole class 'cos them people could be wantin' somethin' what we don't want",* or they were chosen by teachers: *"It's always the popular people and the smart people."*

## Jobs and training

For those over 16, it was difficult to find training or courses for the types of jobs they wanted to do. This meant either doing whatever course was available or being unemployed:

*"I went on to do mechanics. After a couple of weeks they were supposed to get me a placement. But they couldn't get one, so I had to give the mechanics up and sign on the dole."*

*"If the course you wanna do is finished, or taken up, or it's not running, then you're threw into IT or somethin' that you've no interest in ... You're stuck goin' to ... a certain buildin' that has maybe courses that ye don't want to do. Or else you're left sittin' with nothin' to do 7 days a week."*

Young people were also aware that there were not many job opportunities in their local areas: *"There's nothing here, just work in the shop or the pub".* But they didn't want to move away from their family, friends or community to find work.

Those who had jobs worked hard for low pay or were on schemes. They felt they had few job choices, especially in rural areas. For these young people, and those who had no job, having little money and being bored was frustrating and sometimes depressing.





### SUGGESTIONS

Children, young people and adults had many ideas about how school could be more interesting and meet the needs of all children and young people. They suggested how they could be better prepared for life after school:

#### Making education relevant and inclusive

- The school curriculum should meet young people's needs, interests and future lives.
- Provide more discussions and practical activities to help learning and skills development.
- All young people should receive useful and accurate careers advice, sex and relationships education, education about mental health and emotional well-being. These should be taught by specialists or peers who understand how to give information to girls and boys of different ages.
- Provide earlier work experience to help subject choice and preparation for life/employment.
- Teachers and school counsellors must keep information confidential, and clearly explain when this cannot happen (e.g. if a child is at risk or being harmed).
- Teachers and school staff should listen to, care for and respect children and young people (praising, understanding and consulting them).
- School councils should act on issues and suggestions, involve a range of children/ young people as representatives, give feedback and reasons for decisions.



#### Understanding employment opportunities

- Young people do not 'choose' to be unemployed – they need local courses and jobs.
- Local training centres should offer relevant practical training or educational courses (especially for those who have been in care, who have criminal records, who have no financial support or qualifications).

## IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION...

These are some ideas that you might want to talk about in your youth groups or with your teachers.

What kind of information and advice would you like about future careers?

Are there any topics you would like to discuss about sex and relationships?

You could ask people to anonymously (without their names) write questions or things they'd like to know on a piece of paper and put them into a question box. Then you could invite someone from Brook or the Family Planning Association to visit your class/ group to answer the questions.

Is there a person in your school or youth group who you can talk to in confidence?

Find out how they can be contacted.

What sorts of things cannot be kept confidential and why?

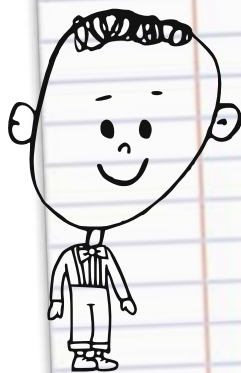
You could design a leaflet explaining to children and young people when an adult would need to breach confidentiality, and what would happen if they thought a child was at risk or being harmed.

Do you have a School Council?

If you do, you could find out who the representatives are - ask them what they do and how they make sure that they collect the views of everyone in your school. If your school does not have a Council, you and some friends could talk to your teachers about setting one up.

Does your group have a Youth Advisory Group?

If they do, you could find out what this Group does. Would you be interested in joining? If they don't, the Northern Ireland Youth Forum would be able to offer you some advice about setting up an Advisory Group.



## CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

### 'My community'

Most children and young people liked living in their communities, even though they knew there were some problems in them. They wanted their communities to be improved, and didn't like people saying negative things about the place they lived in. Most children and young people spent a lot of time in their own community and many said they used parks, fields, shops and youth clubs in one part of the community. This was because they felt safe there, fitted in and knew most people. But it also meant that others who were not from the local area did not feel they could use these facilities. Sometimes children and young people did not know about facilities they could go to or use in the area beyond their streets.

### What do you like about your community?

- Local facilities such as parks, football pitches, youth club or project.
- Having friends living close by.
- Knowing the local area and the people who live there.
- Being safe and feeling comfortable.
- Being able to walk from home to local shops.



### Local youth clubs and projects

Some young people were very positive about local youth clubs and projects. Workers treated them with respect, they met new friends and it gave them something to do in their free time. Local clubs and projects gave them new opportunities and helped them gain new skills. Youth clubs and projects were one of the main places where they could get information, advice and support.

### What don't you like about your community?

- Not enough things to do or broken swings and equipment in the park.
- Fighting and violence.
- People drinking alcohol.
- The area looking untidy - rubbish and litter, graffiti and dog fouling.
- Lack of privacy and *"getting a name for yourself"* (especially for young people living in small rural communities).

## Unsafe play areas

Younger children complained that parks were often unsafe. There were smashed bottles and broken equipment. Some had been promised their local park would be fixed and new equipment provided, but this had not happened:

*"The parks aren't working, they're not cleaned, there's glass all over the place. The swings and slide were broken and taken away."*

*"They asked us what did we want and we said 'monkey swings an' all', and they said 'yeah we'll get that' and we're still waitin' on it."*

## 'Nothing to do, nowhere to go'

Young people felt there was very little to do in their communities. Those who went to youth clubs seemed to really enjoy them, but other young people felt they were too old for this type of activity:

*"There's nothin' to do ... for adults there's six pubs and what's there for us? Sweet FA!"*

*"I went to the youth club when I was really young but stopped. It's mostly kids."*

Many young people spent most of their free time walking about their community talking, playing football on the streets and sometimes drinking alcohol. They often got in trouble, or people thought badly of them, even when they were doing nothing wrong.



## Drinking and fighting

Children and young people complained there was often fighting in their community, mainly at night-time and weekends. Most fighting was because of alcohol: *"there's lots of fighting around here because of drinking on weekends"*. Adults as well as young people were involved in fighting, but young people often got blamed.

Young people said that they often drank alcohol because of boredom. Drinking on the streets sometimes led to fighting and trouble:

*"What else are we meant to do? You drink. It's something to talk about. But when we do it, we get in trouble."*

*"You only go drinkin' because you're bored."*

They also drank alcohol because of 'stress', or to help them forget their problems.

### Are you included in community decisions?

Children and young people felt distrusted, disrespected and disliked in their communities. They were excluded from community projects, consultations, residents groups, community forums or decision-making committees. They felt adults made all decisions and were not interested in what young people thought:

*"They [adults] think they know what's best for us, so they just do it."*

*"Most of them just aren't interested in what young people want or think. They never ask."*

*"If one of us went in, they wouldn't respect our views. But if we sent an older person in, then they'd respect them."*

### Policing communities

Many children and young people had negative views about the police. Some had learned these views from others in their families or communities who did not trust the police. Others felt abused or intimidated by police officers. Some said they: *"... just see the police as bad because we're never taught any different"*.

A few believed the police favoured the Catholic or Protestant community:

*"Sure look at [Catholic area] they have their flags up all year and we're not allowed any... Favourin'. Bias... Sinn Féin win everythin' ... Catholics get everything."*

*"the cops ... take sides" ... "Protestants get all the protection they want, and we get nothing."*

Some thought that *"The police don't do anything when they come up. They don't sort out the problems"*. Others felt the police coming into communities made things worse, leading to young people throwing bricks or stones and 'rioting'.

Most young people did not feel respected by the police – they believed the police saw young people as 'problems'. Some children and young people described being verbally harassed, threatened with Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, or police officers using violence against young people. Young people thought that they were an 'easy target' for the police, who discriminate against them because they are young.



## SUGGESTIONS

Children, young people and adults gave many ideas about making things better for them in their communities. They suggested how relationships between the police, young people and their communities could be improved:

### Valuing and including children and young people in communities

- Involve children and young people in community forums and decision-making processes; young people should feel valued in their communities.
- Improve local neighbourhoods by: locking play parks at night and supervising them during the day; providing 'dog poo' bins and more litter bins; keeping estates clean.
- Develop more safe, well maintained play and leisure facilities for children of all ages; open youth clubs in the evenings and at weekends; provide social activities for older young people outside local communities.
- Provide affordable transport for those in rural communities to use play and leisure services in nearby towns or villages.
- Local youth clubs or programmes should be well-resourced with staff, equipment, transport and money for activities.



### Improving relations with the police

- Improve relations between the police and local communities by keeping the same community police officers in an area and having regular foot patrols.
- Recruit police officers from local communities and encourage discussion between community members (including young people) and the police about how to deal with disruptive behaviour, violence, alcohol and drugs.
- Train police officers to communicate in less threatening and more respectful ways with young people.

## IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION...

These are some ideas that you might want to talk about in your youth groups or with your teachers.

What do you like and dislike about your community?

You could download or draw a map and highlight all the pros (+) and cons (-) of your local area.

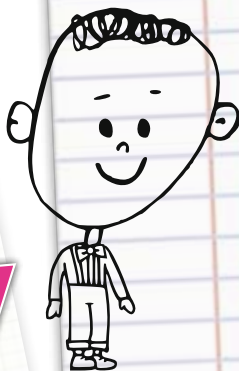
What could you do to raise awareness about some of the negative things in your community?

Is use of alcohol a problem in your local area? Why do people get drunk? What are the effects of alcohol on people's behaviour and the risks involved in drinking too much?

Are you involved in making decisions in your community? What could your class/group do to make sure that young people's voices are heard when decisions are being made?

Is anti-social behaviour a problem in your area? Who is involved and how? Why do you think people behave like this? What do you think could be done to deal with anti-social behaviour?

Is there a good relationship between young people and the police in your community? If there is, what advice would you give to other areas? If there isn't, could anything be done to improve relationships?



## SECTARIANISM, RACISM AND VIOLENCE

### Segregation

In Northern Ireland, segregation means that many people are separated or divided by religion (e.g. Catholic and Protestant) and cultural or political identity (e.g. Nationalist/ Republican and Unionist/ Loyalist).

Most children go to a Catholic or Protestant school - only 6% go to integrated nurseries, primary or secondary schools. Many people also live in areas where most of their neighbours have the same religion. They can tell if an area is Catholic or Protestant because of murals and flags, or because they have learned this through family and friends.

In this research, most children and young people grew up in either Catholic or Protestant communities – living, playing and going to school there:

*"There's like different places for like Catholics and there's different places for Protestants to go to."*

Separate housing, schooling, play and leisure activities meant that there were not many opportunities to meet those of 'the other religion or culture'. Most children and young people learned about 'the other community' before they had met them. One young person said:

*"... a long time ago, before I met them [Catholics], I would think I would hate them an' all and I would always argue with them. But then, when you meet up, they're really dead on. And then, like, ye get to know them and then, ye know like, they're just the same as ye."*

Segregation often leads to a lack of trust between communities and fears about people from 'the other community'.

### Sectarianism

Sectarianism means that people who share the same religious or political beliefs have negative attitudes towards those who have different beliefs and live in other communities. Not everyone is sectarian, but negative attitudes about those from 'the other community' are often passed down from parents and grandparents to children and young people. Many young people told us that this still happens:





## CHILDHOOD IN TRANSITION

*"It comes from your family background, your whole behaviour and your beliefs."*

*"... sectarianism, ok it's bad. But it's like the parents are the worst culprits of it because if young people were allowed to do what they wanted, it wouldn't be as bad as it is. It's the older people that are makin' it so bad ... what ye have passed down, like, it just stays with ye sorta thing."*

### Experiences of sectarianism

Children and young people from all the communities felt that sectarianism affected their lives. Many had experienced name-calling or had been chased by those of 'the other religion'. There were certain areas they would not enter because these areas were not safe for someone of their religion. They felt their community was the only safe place for them.

Worries about safety affected people's friendships and their movements. This meant that they felt they could not use leisure centres, football pitches or shops in certain places - they feared that if people knew their religion they would be attacked. One group of young people told us they could not use leisure facilities close to their community because: *"... if you walk up yourself then you wouldn't be seen comin' back out."*



Some young people were careful about what they wore when they were outside their community (e.g. soccer or gaelic football shirts), and young men stayed in groups to feel safer:

*"When you're off the estate you're always lookin' where the trouble might come from. Always lookin' over your shoulder ... you always have to be in numbers."*

### Sectarian fighting and rioting

Young people from Catholic/ Nationalist/ Republican and Protestant/ Unionist/ Loyalist communities said that they would not accept people living in their community who were *"the other religion"* or *"not part of your culture"*. Some would attack those from the 'other community' if they came into their community: *"... if ye seen one [a Protestant] walkin' about here you'd take a swiipe at him"*.

Some young Protestants felt the Peace Agreements and recent changes in Northern Ireland meant that Catholics were being treated better than Protestants: *"Catholics get everything. Everything that goes up is in a Catholic area and we don't get nothin'".* Some young Catholics felt that they were treated differently from Protestants, especially by the police. This is why some young people became involved in rioting against those of 'the other religion' or the police. They said they were *"sticking up for themselves"* or *"fighting for our identity"*.

These are similar reasons why their parents and grandparents fought during the Conflict ('the Troubles'). Some young people found it hard to forget this, especially when they were reminded by people in their families or communities, by local politicians and through murals and anniversaries. They said if they didn't fight for their culture, *"We'd lose everything. Everything we've fought for"*.

## Paramilitaries

In all communities, adults stated that paramilitaries were still a threat. Young people feared threats or warnings from paramilitaries – some had experienced this. Because they spent time on the streets, adults saw this as anti-social behaviour and they were given warnings by the police and paramilitaries:

*"They [adults] blame us for stuff and we get a bad name for it ... and there's cops comin' up round here and there's paramilitaries lookin' round all the time and they blame ye."*

A few adults and young people said that former paramilitaries and people with influence in their communities encouraged children and young people to be violent and sectarian:

*"Like here you have the RA and they would be encouraging you to be Republican and to row with the UDA and all that there, and then that's how riots and all that there sectarian stuff starts ... you see wee young ones runnin' about as well 'Up the RA' ... and they don't even know what they're chattin' about, but it's just they're encouraged to do it."*

*"There are a small number of Loyalist paramilitaries who would send young people out to do things but do little themselves."*



### Cross-community and community relations projects

Many children and young people had been involved in cross-community projects, usually through schools. Although these projects gave an opportunity to meet people from 'the other religion', they didn't always lead to a better understanding about each other's cultures, or change negative opinions about 'the other community'. This was because they were often one-off events, with little preparation and no follow-up activities to make sure that people kept in contact:

*"I went on a cross-community project and, like, there's no talkin' or nothin' goin' on. It's just Catholic boys and Protestant boys playin' football."*

*"They take ye on a wee trip just to make sure you get on ok but we didn't learn anything about different cultures."*

*"... if ye went anywhere ye sat beside your own friends."*



Involvement in cross-community projects sometimes led to criticism from friends. A few had experienced sectarian abuse or violence while involved in a project. This made them question the benefits of cross-community projects.

A few young people had been involved in community relations programmes through their youth clubs. These were better than cross-community projects because they focused on learning about 'the other culture' and challenged negative attitudes in a safe environment. They often led to positive contact between young people outside their own areas. But this was difficult to maintain - sometimes *"when they came back they went back into their own territory"* and *"fighting between both sides of the community continued"*.

### Racism

Many adults, children and young people had negative attitudes towards people who have come to Northern Ireland from other countries to live and work. They often described them as *"foreigners"*, and some felt that they were *"taking over"* their local area. They pointed out the differences between people from other countries and people from Northern Ireland, mainly because *"they talk different languages"* or dress differently.

Some children and young people felt frightened or suspicious of those from other countries and cultures, describing them as *"dangerous"*, violent and *"drinking a lot"*. They blamed increases in crime or drugs in their communities on *"outsiders moving in"*, and argued that *"they're takin our jobs. It's hard enough to get a job without them here. There are too many of them."* A few young people disagreed, saying that people from other countries did poorly paid jobs that local people did not want to do.

Whatever their reasons for negative attitudes, many children and young people did not want *"outsiders"* in their communities. This led to racism, harassment, abuse and attacks on property.

## SUGGESTIONS

Children, young people and adults felt that people of different cultures and religions should mix more and understand each other better:

### Valuing diversity

- Value and celebrate religious/ cultural/ community identities while encouraging respect for religious and cultural differences.



### Freedom to practice own religion and culture

- Make sure that children and young people can practise their chosen religion and culture, outside their community as well as in their community.

### Community relations

- Provide more long-term community relations projects that focus on learning about and valuing different cultures.
- Challenge negative language, attitudes and behaviour towards people of 'other' religions and cultures.
- Improve police-community relations based on better understanding of different communities, their cultural traditions and local concerns.

## IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION...

These are some ideas that you might want to talk about in your youth groups or with your teachers.

Our identities are about being more than a 'boy' or 'girl', 'Catholic' or 'Protestant'. There are many aspects to our identity. What five words would you use to describe your identity?

You could draw around your hand and on each finger write something about yourself, that defines who you are. Share this with friends and talk about what you have in common as well as what makes each of you different.

How are different identities expressed in Northern Ireland?

Using pictures, drawings or words, you could make a poster showing the different ways we express identity and culture (e.g. through flags, sports, music, language, food, clothing). Discuss how people can celebrate their own culture without causing upset or offence to others.

Are children and young people in your community encouraged by adults to be sectarian or racist? Why?

Can you describe examples of sectarianism or racism? Why do people behave like this? What could be done to improve community relations?



## CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

### What rights are

Rights are entitlements (something you can claim, should have or be able to do) whoever you are, wherever you live, whatever your circumstances or beliefs. In 1991, the UK Government signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – promising to promote and protect children's rights. This means the Government should make sure everyone understands the rights of children and young people under 18, and that children's rights are protected.



'Living in a society which respects their rights' is one of the six outcomes in *Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge: A ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006-2016*. This Strategy sets out what government departments will do to improve life for children and young people in Northern Ireland.

### What do you know about children's rights?

A few children and young people had some understanding of rights, but many did not know what rights they have. One young person said:

*"I don't know anything about my rights ... It's not a natural thing to think about. But I do think, if it was said more about – it's always ye hear about adult's rights, civil rights. That's all I've heard. You never hear nothin' about weans."*

Some also felt that discussions about children's rights are usually negative:

*"We might have heard of children's rights and the rights of teenagers – mainly because adults are always going on about how we have too many rights – but we know nothin' about any of it. That's the reality."*

Some children felt they did not have rights: *"We have no rights. Parents have the rights"*. Others thought that rights were *"Something you're allowed to do"* or *"It's what you've earned"*. Only one group talked about rights as something everybody should have.



## CHILDHOOD IN TRANSITION

Only 21 out of 136 children and young people (15%) had heard of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, usually through 'Learning for Life and Work' or 'Personal Development' lessons in school. Only 7 of 145 (5%) had heard of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY). Some felt that children and young people should have *"The right to know your rights"*. In fact, the UNCRC states that children and adults should know about children's rights.

### What rights should children and young people have?

Children and young people felt strongly that their views should be taken into account. They wanted to give their opinions and ideas, describe or explain their emotions and be involved in making decisions for themselves. They said it was important to have their views taken into account in their homes, at school and in their communities:

*"Right to talk, express your views."*

*"To speak out. To have your say and not be told to be quiet."*

*"Right to be listened to."*

*"A right to be heard."*

Children and young people also talked about other rights they felt were important:

- To information - *"to know what's goin' on around ye – information"*.
- To freedom of religion - *"Churches for all religions"* and *"The right to stand up for your own religion"*.
- *"To express your own culture"*.
- To freedom of movement - *"the right to stand on the streets without gettin' gyp or slagged"*.
- To basic needs (e.g. food, water, shelter, clothing), public services (e.g. transport, energy, shops, schools and colleges, health services, somewhere to live).
- For young people to work and earn decent wages.
- To education - matching school work to children's abilities and interests as well as preparing them for jobs and life.
- To play and leisure - *"to play and have fun"* in safe play areas.
- *"Not to be stereotyped"* or judged unfairly because of their age, how they dress or look.
- To be safe - from harm, violence and intimidation (by adults and other children or young people).
- To *"have the same rights as older people"* and *"to be included"*.
- *"To be loved and cared for"*.
- *"Not to be so over-protected"* and *"to have your own life too, your own independence"*.

While children and young people do have most of these rights, hardly any knew this.



## SUGGESTIONS

Children, young people and adults gave many ideas about how they could learn more about children's rights and make sure these are protected:

### Learning about children's rights

- Include learning about children's rights and the UNCRC in training for teachers and all adults working with children and young people.
- Make sure that lessons in schools include information about children's rights, the UNCRC and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.



### Listening to and involving children and young people

- Encourage children and young people to express their opinions, describe their feelings, explain their behaviour, and be involved in decision-making processes.
- Ensure that parents/ carers and the adults who work with children and young people in schools and communities make the effort, and have the skills, to listen to and understand what children say from the child's point of view.

### Promoting and protecting children's rights

- Provide age-appropriate support, information and advice for young people as they move from being a child to being a teenager. This should be available in places where young people can easily find information.
- Protect children and young people from discrimination because of their appearance and age.
- Make sure that children and young people are safe and cared for in their homes and on the streets in their communities. They should be protected from harm and violence by adults and other children or young people.



## IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION...

These are some ideas that you might want to talk about in your youth groups or with your teachers.

Do you know what 'rights' are?

You could write a definition of 'rights' for younger children.

Have you heard of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)?

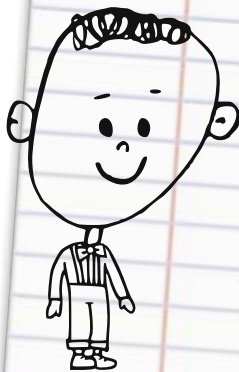
- There are some website addresses at the end of this booklet where you can find out more about the UNCRC and children's rights.

(A) You could draw a poster showing what rights children have. In small groups, highlight which rights you feel are most important - agree a top five.

(B) discuss whether these rights are being realised (met) for all children and young people. Are any groups or individuals likely to need additional support to make sure that their rights are protected (e.g. young children, children with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) young people, children in or leaving care, children from minority ethnic communities)?

Have you heard of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)?

You could find out more about NICCY's work through their website or by contacting the NICCY Office.



## WHAT NEXT?

### What has been done with the research?

Booklets for children and young people, and copies of the report, have been sent to those who took part in the research. We also visited some of the communities where the research was carried out to share the findings. If you or your youth group took part in the research and want to know more about it, contact Siobhán and she will arrange a visit.

On 4th November 2009 we had a meeting at Queen's University in Belfast to let people know about the research. After listening to a summary of the key findings and quotes from children, young people and community representatives, everyone who came was given a copy of the research report. Over 100 people came to this event, including people working in youth and community organisations, education, the police, the Youth Justice Agency, NICCY, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, children's services; teachers and researchers working at Queen's and Ulster Universities; university students; politicians and civil servants (people who work in Government departments).

Copies of the report have been sent to the voluntary and community organisations working with children and young people in Northern Ireland, so that they know what issues affect their lives and can develop services or information to meet children's rights and needs. The report has also been sent to the politicians on the All Party Assembly Group on Children and Young People and the two Junior Ministers with responsibility for children.

We have been asked how we think the planned Northern Ireland Youth Assembly could include children and young people who represent everyone, especially those who are not usually listened to or involved. We have written short articles about the research for websites and for the *Northern Ireland Community Relations Council Newsletter* and *Fortnight* magazine. We have also been interviewed on BBC Radio Foyle and Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio. We will continue to use quotes from the research in presentations and articles about the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

You can look on our website – [www.qub.ac.uk/ctsji](http://www.qub.ac.uk/ctsji) for details about the work we do. The section called 'Links for children and young people' has links to other places where you can get information and advice.

**Thanks again to everyone who took part in the research.**



## Northern Ireland Youth Forum

Northern Ireland Youth Forum:  
[www.niyf.org](http://www.niyf.org)

## School councils

School Councils UK:  
[www.schoolcouncils.org](http://www.schoolcouncils.org)  
The School Council: a children's guide:  
[www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54\\_2354.htm](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54_2354.htm)

## RACISM AND SECTARIANISM

Video clips and newspaper reports:  
[www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/schools/11\\_16/citizenship/racism](http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/schools/11_16/citizenship/racism)  
[www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/schools/11\\_16/citizenship/sectarianism](http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/schools/11_16/citizenship/sectarianism)

## UNCRC and children's rights

Copy of the UNCRC: [www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/Know\\_Your\\_Rights\\_poster.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/Know_Your_Rights_poster.pdf)

Respect! Exploring children's rights in the UK and the world: [www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54\\_5973.htm](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54_5973.htm)

Children's rights in Northern Ireland: [www.allchildrenni.gov.uk](http://www.allchildrenni.gov.uk) and [www.childrenslawcentre.org](http://www.childrenslawcentre.org) (green links)

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People: [www.niccy.org](http://www.niccy.org)

## CAREERS SERVICE

NI Careers Service: [www.careersserviceni.com](http://www.careersserviceni.com)

## SEXUAL HEALTH AND RELATIONSHIPS

Brook: [www.brook.org.uk/brook-northern-ireland](http://www.brook.org.uk/brook-northern-ireland)

Family Planning Association:  
[www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)



## CHILDHOOD IN TRANSITION



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**ISBN: 9780853899792**