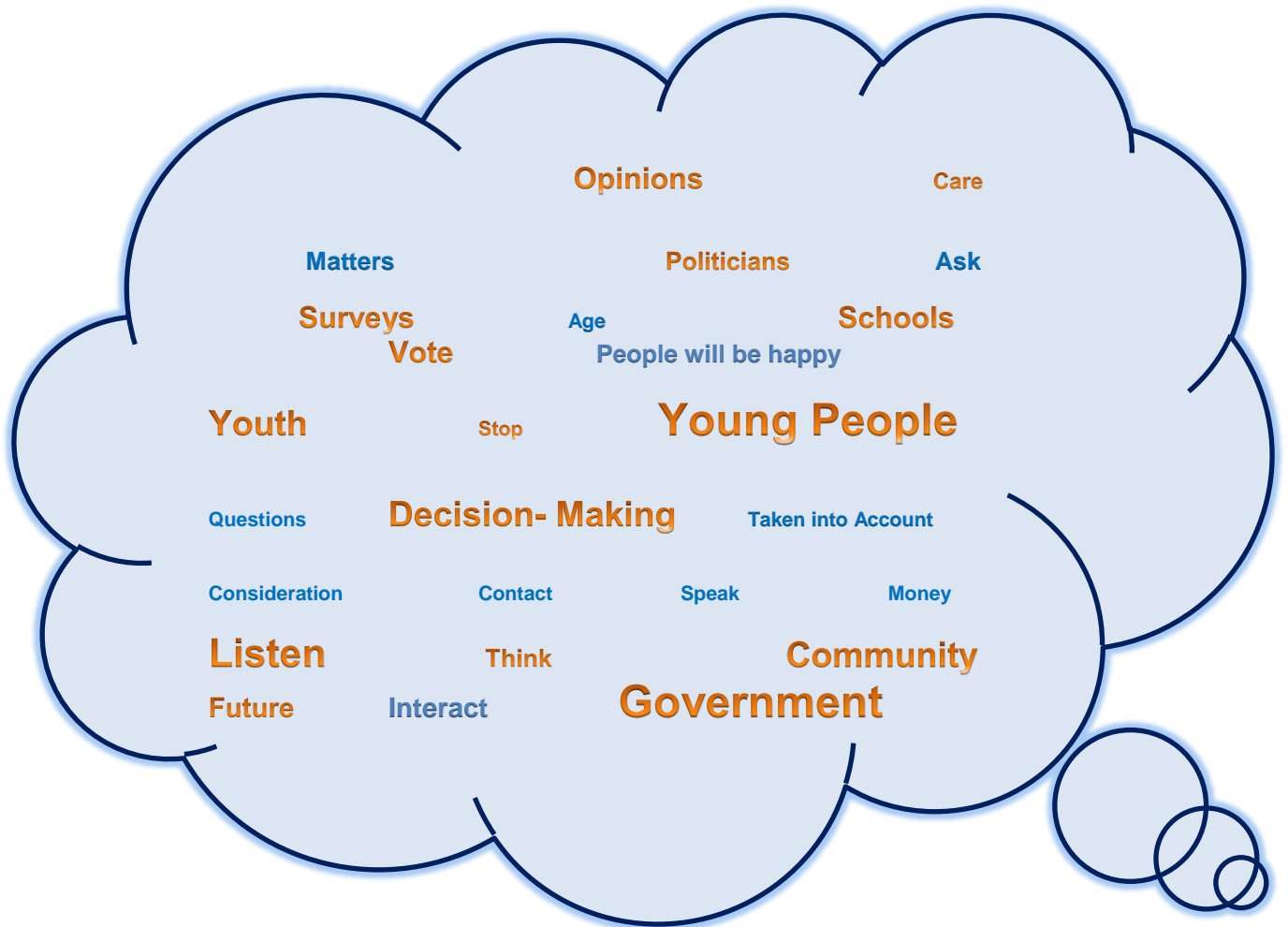


OUR LIVES IN OUR WORDS

NORTHERN IRELAND YOUNG PEOPLE'S REPORT TO THE
UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

on behalf of all children and young people living in Northern Ireland



The Young People's Report was prepared by Emma Campbell and
Deirdre McMahon; Children's Law Centre, in collaboration with:

YOUTH@CLC
Children's Law Centre
Save the Children and
Children and Young People from across Northern Ireland



NORTHERN IRELAND YOUNG PEOPLE'S REPORT

CHILDREN'S LAW CENTRE and SAVE THE CHILDREN NI

JUNE 2015

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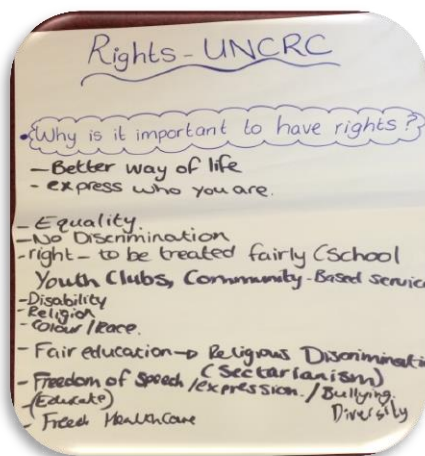
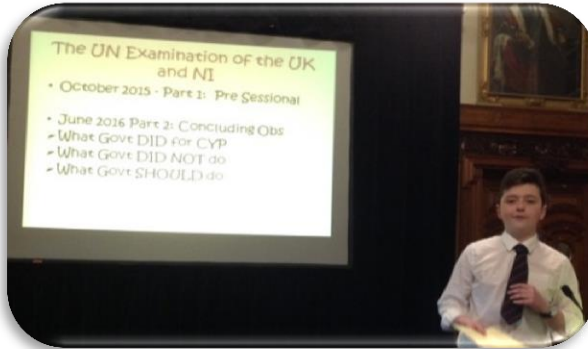


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YOUTH@CLC

Youth@clc are the youth advisory panel to the Children's Law Centre (CLC) in Northern Ireland (NI). They are a group of 16 young people aged 15 – 18, from a range of backgrounds, who inform the work of CLC, undertake peer research and run rights based peer advocacy campaigns on behalf of all children and young people in NI. Youth@clc are:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Northern Ireland (NI) Young People's Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child was compiled and written by the Children's Law Centre (CLC) and youth@clc, in partnership with Save the Children (SC) and supported by the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast (QUB). This report is informed by a survey report commissioned by CLC and SC on *'The views and experiences of young people in NI: Exploring participation, knowledge and respect for rights, community life and leisure and mental health'* (Orr, K, 2015), as well as a series of consultation workshops conducted with a range of children and young people across NI, between November 2014 and May 2015.

Purpose of the Young People's Report

The Young People's Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child represents the views and experiences of 900 children and young people from across Northern Ireland (NI) who, during 2014/2015, participated in research on their current enjoyment of a range of key UNCRC rights.

The Young People's Report was submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in June 2015, along with the NI NGO Alternative Report, to inform the Committee's fifth periodic examination of the United Kingdom (UK) Government's compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Report highlights action needed to give effect to and ensure implementation of the Convention in all Northern Ireland (NI) policy, law and administrative and judicial proceedings. The Young People's Report will ensure that children and young people in NI have a strong voice in Geneva throughout the UK examination process, with a view to informing the Committee about jurisdictionally specific devolved issues within the responsibility of the NI Executive and Assembly and non-devolved matters which remain the responsibility of the Westminster Government.

This Report presents the findings from primary research conducted for the specific purposes of informing this report (an online survey and a series of research workshops). The Report also draws upon other existing research on children's experience of their rights, to support and supplement research findings. The combined findings aim to present an accurate picture of progress made towards the full realisation of key children's rights, since the previous examination of the UK Government in 2008, from the perspective of children and young people themselves; the subjects of the Convention.

Based on these overall findings, and as evidenced by the experience of rights holders, the Young People's Report presents 15 recommendations to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, on action required by duty bearers to address Government's failure to give effect to the UNCRC and to action the 2008 recommendations.

Scope of the Young People's Report

Drawing on the UN Committee's 2008 concluding observations to the UK Government on progress made in implementing three of the four General Principles of the UNCRC, as well as their own experiences as young people, youth@clc prioritised four rights based themes which they felt were of general concern to all children and young people in Northern Ireland, and should therefore be the focus of the primary research (carried out between November 2014 – May 2015), which informs the conclusions and recommendations made in this Report. Whilst it is not the intention of this Report to represent the views of every child who may be at risk of having their rights denied due to their particular circumstances, the experiences of a range of vulnerable and minority groups of children have been included.

Based on young people's self reported views and experiences of key rights based issues impacting on their lives, the Report examines the extent to which children and young people are currently enjoying their right to:

- 1 meaningful participation in matters affecting their lives;
- 2 community life and leisure facilities free from discrimination
- 3 know their rights, be able to use them and to be respected as 'rights holders' by adults and duty bearers with obligations to children under the UNCRC;
- 4 access a child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) in NI which is fit for purpose.

The Report focuses mainly on the experiences of young and older teens, male and female, aged 13 – 17 years (including transmale and transfemale), collected through an online survey and young people's research workshops. Although the survey was not intended to generate a fully representative sample, 752 13 – 17 year olds from a diverse range of backgrounds and circumstances participated in the survey.

While the research did not comprehensively target younger children, based on concerns that the voices of young Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children are rarely heard by Government, a research workshop was carried out with 7-12 year olds supported by Belong (An NGO which works to promote a sense of belonging for BME children and their families in NI).

The younger children were asked what they liked and didn't like about living in Northern Ireland and what would make life better for them here. Their views and experiences of community life are represented through the medium of artwork in the Report.

Youth@CLC were particularly concerned that the survey ensured inclusivity i.e. that the demographic questions provided the widest possible range of response options, to minimise the frequency of a young person having to select 'other'. Therefore the demographic section offered a comprehensive range of options, for the respondent to select from. Information was collected on gender, age, religious background, political views, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, postcode (which was used to establish their multiple deprivation rank score), marital status, disability, and the area in which they live (urban or rural). As well as this, this section also established if the respondent was in full time/part time employment, in education, not in education, employment or training (NEET), "in care", a young carer, in detention or in hospital, or had a disability (see 'Survey Demographics' section below).

Research workshops aimed to include a range of particular groups of young people whose views and experiences of enjoyment of rights in Northern Ireland are not well known e.g. young people with disabilities, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgendered (LGB&T) young people, NEET, young people living in rural areas and young people in detention.

Research Methodology

The views and experiences of children and young people on their enjoyment of their UNCRC rights have been collected for this report using mainly a combination of two research methods;

- an online children's rights survey entitled '*Young People's Views on Children's Rights in Northern Ireland*', made available online, through social media and in paper form, from 3 November 2014 to 7 February 2015;
- 11 thematic workshops with 145 children and young people carried out from December 2014 – May 2015;

Additionally, a literature review of existing, relevant and recent research on the views of children and young people in NI was used to support the research findings of the survey and the workshops.

Children's Rights Survey

With the support of research staff from the Centre for Children's Rights (QUB), youth@clc developed a survey questionnaire (see Appendix 2), designed to measure (using a range of reliable numerical questions/measures, as well as open-ended questions), the extent to which children and young people feel they are currently enjoying their right to:

- *meaningful participation in decision making* at home, in education, in their communities and in local and national Government (Article 12 – Right to be heard);
- *know their rights*, use them and be supported in exercising their rights by a society which respects them as “rights holders” (Article 42 – knowledge of rights by children and adults);
- *experience community life without discrimination* (Article 2 – Non Discrimination in the context of Article 31 – play and leisure and Article 15 - freedom of association within communities). Community Life is defined as access to and use of leisure facilities and social spaces, as well as quality of relationships with adults in community;
- *health and access to health services* informed by youth@clc for the purposes of this report is defined as awareness of mental health issues, comfort in seeking help, views on the suitability of mental health services (including their views on the ‘ideal’ mental health service for children and young people) (Article 6 – survive and thrive to the maximum extent possible in the context of Article 24 – right to health).

In total 864 responses were received from the survey (77% were submitted online through Survey Monkey and 23% were completed in paper-based format). Of these 752 were eligible for analysis i.e. young people under 18, aged 13 – 17 years. Dr Karen Orr, QUB, analysed the survey findings, using a range of statistical techniques to explore the survey findings.

The Young People's Report draws on the results of the survey findings, using both results from the measures and the responses to open-ended questions. The full Survey Report, NI Young People's Report and NI NGO Alternative Report can be accessed on the CLC website; <http://www.childrenlawcentre.org.uk/homepage>

Survey Demographics

The survey analysis shows that the gender breakdown for respondents was 44% male and 56% female, including those who identified as trans-male and trans-female (see Table 1). This is close to the overall gender breakdown evident in the NI population as a whole (49% male and 51% female¹). The majority of respondents were from an urban area, categorised as a city or town (see Table 2). With regard to sexuality, the majority of respondents classified themselves as heterosexual (see Table 1). However, 10% of the sample represents young people who identified as homosexual or other (see Table 1).

Table 1: Gender and sexuality breakdown

Gender	Number	%	Sexuality	Number	%
Male	319	44	Heterosexual	610	81.1
Male	308	41	Lesbian	7	.9
Trans (male)	11	2	Gay (Male)	7	.9
Female	413	56	Gay (Female)	2	.3
Female	410	55	Bisexual	30	4.0
Trans (female)	3	.4	Transgender (Male)	4	.5
Total	732	100	Transgender (Female)	4	.5
Not disclosed	20	3	Other, Non Binary/Gender Neutral	18	2.4
			Total	682	100
			Not disclosed	70	9.3

Table 2: Participant age and urban/rural breakdown

Age bracket	Number	%	Age bracket	Number	%	Area	Number	%
All respondents			Under 18s only			Urban	483	70
11-14	337	39	11-14	337	44.8	City	232	33.7
15-17	415	48	15-17	415	55.2	Town	251	36.5
18	14	2	Total	752	100	Rural	205	30
19 and over	20	2				Village	75	10.9
Not disclosed	78	9				Countryside	130	18.9
Total	864	100				Total	688	100
						Not disclosed	64	9

¹ NI Census, 2011, available at: http://www.nisra.gov.uk/Census/key_report_2011.pdf

The majority of the respondents (95%) identified as White British, Irish, or Northern Irish, which again aligns with the NI population as a whole where 98%² are categorised as white (see Table 3). Religious breakdown was used to assess both religious and community backgrounds. There were more respondents from a Protestant background (53%), than those from a Catholic background (36%, see Table 3), which is also in line with the population as a whole, although the difference is smaller (Catholic 45%, Protestant 48%)³.

Table 3: Ethnicity, religion and political views breakdown

Ethnicity	N	%	Religion/ Community	N	%	Political views	N	%
White British	143	19	Catholic	268	36	Rep/Nat	160	21.5
White Irish	196	26	I'm a Catholic	216	29	Republican	72	9.7
White - Northern Irish	378	50	I'm not religious, but I come from a Catholic background	52	7	Nationalist	88	11.8
White other European	9	1	Protestant	401	53	Un/Loy	206	27.6
Asian or Asian British/Irish Indian	1	.1	I'm a Protestant	303	40	Unionist	98	13.1
Black or Black British/Irish - African	6	.8	I'm not religious, but I come from a Protestant background	98	13	Loyalist	108	14.5
Chinese	2	.3				Other	17	2.3
Irish Traveller	5	.7	Other	83	11	Not sure	221	29.6
Other Asian background	2	.3	I am a Hindu	1	.1	None	142	19.0
Other Ethnic background	2	.3	I am Jewish	2	.3	Total	746	100
Other Mixed background	2	.3	I am an atheist	48	6	Not disclosed	6	.8
Prefer not to say	4	.5	Other	20	3			
Not disclosed	2	.3	Prefer not to say	12	2			
Total	752	100	Total	752	100			

² NI Census, 2011, available at: http://www.nisra.gov.uk/Census/key_report_2011.pdf

³ NI Census, 2011, available at: http://www.nisra.gov.uk/Census/key_report_2011.pdf

Additional characteristics of the survey sample are available in the main survey report.

Children and Young People's Research Workshops

The research team facilitated 11 research workshops involving children and young people to:

- supplement the findings of the survey;
- provide more in-depth insight into the experiences of a representative range of vulnerable groups of children and young people; and to
- draw on the experience of NI Youth Fora engaged in issue based peer advocacy projects.

Between December 2014–May 2015, a total of 145 young people aged 7 – 17 years participated in workshops to inform the Report. Approximately 20 workshop participants were aged 18 – 23 years. The views of some older young people have been included in the Report, as views expressed were retrospective i.e. referred to childhood experiences which occurred within the UN Committee's reporting timeframe (2009 – 2015).

Children and young people who participated in these workshops were encouraged to discuss their experiences within the context of the survey themes outlined above and where possible their self reported experiences of enjoyment of rights have been presented verbatim, in conjunction with views expressed through the survey. With the exception of LGB&T young people (who participated in mixed youth forum workshops), children and young people with disabilities, who are NEET, in detention, BME children, and young people living in rural areas participated in separate workshops which focussed on the extent to which their particular circumstances affected their enjoyment of rights. Appendix 2 contains workshop methodology and ethical considerations.

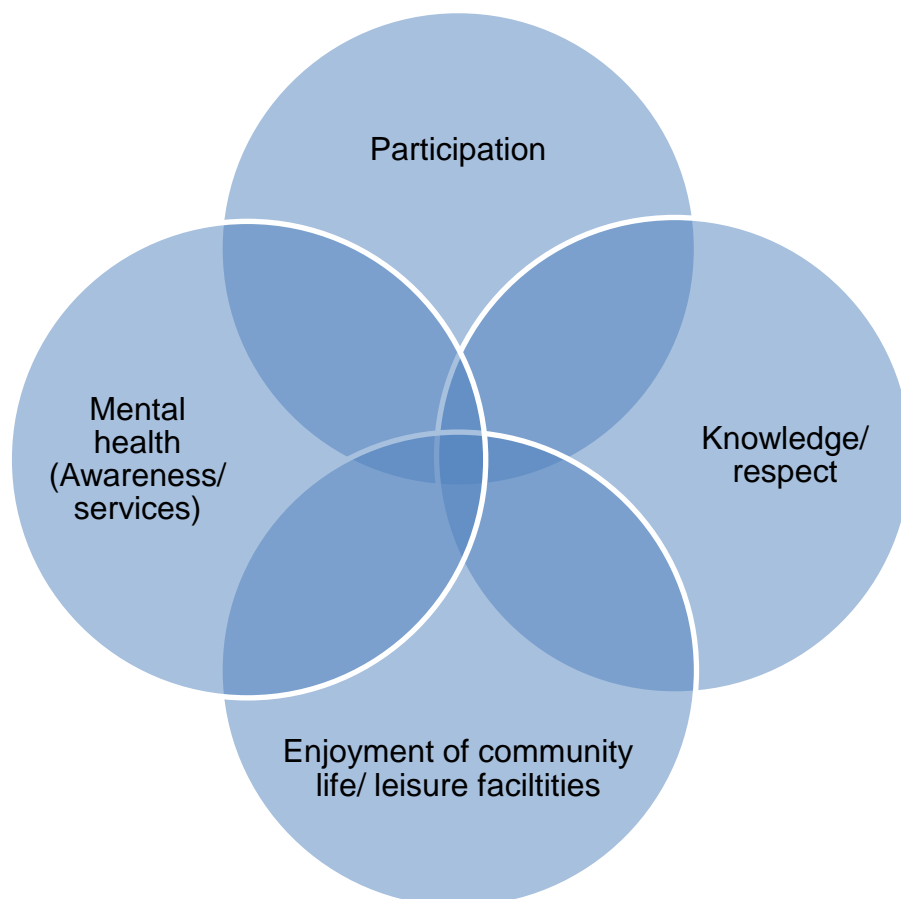
Key Research Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall research findings

Overall results from both the survey and the children and young people's research workshops demonstrate that some young people are enjoying some of their rights more than others and that certain groups of vulnerable young people experience less enjoyment of their rights than others who are not disadvantaged by the particular circumstances of their lives. For example older teens and those suffering mental health concerns enjoy community life less than other young people.

Additionally, more marginalised young people (young people who are LGB&T, disabled, in detention, NEET) tend to report lower enjoyment of most rights, but for the most part, report higher awareness of mental health issues, which may be due to having experienced, or because they are currently experiencing, poor mental health. The findings of the survey clearly demonstrate that rights are inter-dependent and indivisible as illustrated by Figure 1 below. For example, a young person enjoying their right to participate in education decision making, is also enjoying their right to participate in community decision making. Likewise, a young person who is not enjoying rights in one area of their life is less likely to enjoy their rights in another, e.g., a young person not enjoying equal treatment in leisure facilities, will not enjoy their community life. This suggests that a more ‘holistic’ approach by duty bearers to promoting engagement with rights is necessary, to guarantee to every child both equal and maximum enjoyment of all rights across all domains in their lives.

Figure 1: Inter-relationship of rights



Participation – Article 12; UNCRC

In 2008 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child asked Government to;

‘...Promote, facilitate and implement, in legislation as well as in practice, within the family, schools, and the community...the principle of respect for the views of the child...’⁴ and to;

‘...support Forums for children’s participation such as the UK Youth Parliament, Funky Dragon in Wales and Youth Parliament in Scotland...continue to collaborate with civil society organisations to increase opportunities for children’s meaningful participation, including in the media’⁵

Overall young people in the survey report highest enjoyment of their participation rights in their home life and lowest in Government decision making. From the survey findings, one notable exception to young people experiencing good participation ‘at home’ is children who are living in supported accommodation, who report feeling disengaged from decisions made by adults which impact on their lives. The combined findings from both the survey and the workshops indicate that children and young people are keenly aware that their right to participation under Article 12 of the UNCRC has not yet been fully realised, despite being able to clearly demonstrate (as evidenced by their participation in this research), that they have both the desire and capacity to be agents in their lives and provide valuable contributions to decision making at all levels.

Children and young people want adults and duty bearers, to not only listen to their views on issues affecting their lives, but to also afford them more opportunities to have their views routinely taken into account and where possible acted on, within more rights respecting democratic decision making processes, particularly in schools, in their community and by Government.

Through the research young people have said they want schools councils to be more democratic and available in all schools and they want access to a range of other mechanisms for participating in school matters, as ‘one size doesn’t fit all’. Young people want their voices to be heard through existing local youth councils and for their views to be valued and taken into account by local authorities on all community matters affecting their lives. As reported in discussions with NGOs, who have been promoting youth participation for many years in NI, young people want the establishment of shadow youth councils to be a mandatory requirement for all local councils and for shadow youth councils to be afforded a meaningful role in decision making.

⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008, Para 33a.

⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008, Para 33b and 33c.

Young people also support the establishment of a youth-led NI Assembly to provide them with a real voice in the NI Assembly and parity with young people from other UK jurisdictions who currently have access to their own youth-led regional youth assemblies.

In terms of examining the extent to which Government have implemented ‘...**the principle of respect for the views of the child...**’⁶ in legislation, whilst public authorities in Northern Ireland have a statutory duty under Section 75, Northern Ireland Act 1998 to directly consult with children and young people in the development of policy and legislation⁷, recent research carried out by the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) found that no Department undertook engagement with children and young people systematically⁸. It also found that very few Departments were able to provide evidence that engagement between departments and children and young people, had an impact on the development of policies, strategies, legislation and services. Findings from one of the workshops for children with disabilities who have engaged in Government consultations, support NICCY’s research by indicating they were disillusioned by having their views continually misrepresented by public officials or simply not taken into account in the planning of services which affect their lives. Furthermore there has been no adequately funded, systematic mechanism for supporting the involvement of children in decision making at either community or Government level since 2012.

It is also concerning that NGOs can evidence, through their experience of lobbying for rights compliant participation over many years, a lack of political will on the part of Government to fund mechanisms to build the capacity of public authorities to consult with children and young people in a meaningful way. Similarly, some NGOs would support the view that Government appears to have made the establishment of a NI Youth Assembly a low priority and have expressed concern that ongoing austerity measures will make the prospect of a NI Youth Assembly even less likely in the foreseeable future. It follows therefore, that it seems unlikely that the NI Government intend to action the 2008 recommendation to ‘...**support Forums for children’s participation such as the UK Youth Parliament...**’⁹ in the near future, without it

⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008, Para 33a.

⁷ Under Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, public authorities are required to produce an equality scheme, which is a statement of the public authority’s commitment to fulfilling its Section 75 statutory duties, including the public authorities arrangements for consulting on the impact of its policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The scheme should conform with guidelines issued by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and as a result should outline the public authorities arrangements for consulting with children and young people on the likely impact of policies on equality of opportunity. The Equality Commission can investigate where a complaint is made that a public authority has failed to comply with its’ equality scheme, or can undertake an investigation where it believes that a public authority has failed to comply.

⁸ Participation in Government: Walking or Talking Participation, Paula Keenan, Commissioned by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, October 2014

⁹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008, Para 33b.

either being a statutory requirement to do so, or without a strong independent monitoring mechanism holding them to account for their obligations to children as duty bearers under the UNCRC.

As a result, politically motivated and capacious young people, who have clearly demonstrated their desire to be active in political life and the democratic process (as evidenced in both the survey and the workshops which informed this Report), and thereby influence Government policy in the interests of all children and young people and NI society as a whole, have been denied their right to do so, until they are 18. There is strong evidence from the research findings, that whilst opinions were mixed about getting more involved in political life in NI, many older teens from the workshops in particular support the lowering of the voting age to 16 in this jurisdiction. These young people feel that voting at 16 and 17 should be accompanied by widely available political awareness raising programmes, to increase young people's motivation and capacity to vote at 16. One young survey respondent captures the general frustration experienced by many young people with regard to voting age and presents irrefutable logic supporting voting at 16;

"It's not fair that we can marry are (our) MLA and have children are (with our) MLA but not vote for them."

Rather than collaborating with civil society organisations (NGOs) '**...to increase opportunities for children's meaningful participation...**'¹⁰, evidence provided by some NGOs, suggests that Government have effectively delegated responsibility to NGOs to discharge Government's duties under both Section 75 Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the UNCRC for, without providing NGOs with the sufficient level of support and resources to do so in a fully rights compliant manner.

The research findings and other existing research provide strong evidence that, whilst mechanisms for listening to children exist in NI, '**...the principle of respect for the views of the child...**' has neither been routinely or systematically promoted, facilitated or implemented to any meaningful extent in schools, community or at Government level.

With respect to children and young people's participation rights under Article 12 of the UNCRC, this Report concludes that duty bearers have failed to give effect to the UN Committee's 2008 recommendations on Article 12 of the UNCRC. In light of all the research findings, and within the scope of this Report, the NI Young People's

¹⁰ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008, Para 33c.

Report makes the following recommendations with respect to action needed by Government to help incorporate Article 12 into legislation, policy and practice in NI;

The Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) and Executive should:

- **Make school councils and/or a range of mechanisms for pupil participation a mandatory requirement for all schools in NI;**
- **Ensure that all mechanisms for pupil participation are democratic, fully inclusive and enable pupils' views to be given due weight in decision making;**
- **Appoint and adequately resource a high level independent body to ensure that all public authorities and Government Departments fulfill their obligations to promote equality of opportunity in respect of children and young people and their multiple identities including under the NI specific equality duty - Section 75 Northern Ireland Act 1998;**
- **Lower the voting age to 16 in NI and educate young people to increase their capacity to vote;**
- **Resource and develop the capacity of shadow youth councils and support the establishment of a fully inclusive NI Youth Assembly to further ensure that young people's voices are heard and taken into account at community, council and Assembly levels.**

Knowledge of Rights and Adult Respect for Rights – Article 42

In 2008 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child asked Government to;

'...ensure that all of the provisions of the Convention are widely known and understood by adults and children alike, inter alia by including the Convention in statutory national curriculum and ensure that its principles and values are integrated into the structures and practice of all schools. It also recommends the reinforcement of adequate and systematic training of all professional groups working for and with children...'¹¹

¹¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008, Para 21.

As evidenced by the research findings from both the survey and the workshops, many young people are still not fully aware of their rights, how to use them effectively and do not feel that they are viewed as rights holders by adults or duty bearers. The research findings also suggest that young people will only experience better enjoyment of all their rights, if they (the rights holders) are made aware of their rights and how to use them and if adults (duty bearers, parents and adults in community) are made more aware of children's rights and are encouraged to respect and value them, to the mutual benefit of both children and adults in society.

In the survey young people had varied views on how Government could increase their knowledge of rights and how to use them to improve their lives. The majority of survey respondents felt that rights education should be provided in schools, and many felt that it should also be provided through the youth sector. Many young people also expressed the view that it should be mandatory in schools and available through social media sites, to make it more accessible to children and young people who are not in school or don't engage with centre-based youth provision.

As evidenced by the NI NGO Alternative Report, which should be read alongside the Young People's Report, while some schools have incorporated children's rights into their curriculum, the CRC is not a compulsory part of the NI curriculum. A review of education policy undertaken by the NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and Queen's University Belfast in 2013¹² highlighted that at Primary school level specific mention of human rights as part of the statutory NI Curriculum appears only at Key Stage 2 (ages 8 – 11), with only non-statutory guidance suggesting that schools refer to the UNCRC. At Post-Primary level, Local and Global Citizenship education at Key Stage 3 (ages 11 – 14) contains as a core theme, 'Human Rights and Responsibilities'. The UNCRC is not a statutory part of this course. At Key Stage 4 (ages 14 – 18) the statutory curriculum for Local and Global Citizenship education makes no specific reference to human rights. The Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy includes the UNCRC. However the Department of Education has recently removed all funding for CRED¹³.

The NI NGO Alternative Report also highlights ongoing concerns expressed by NGOs that adults can perceive the promotion of children's rights as potentially undermining their own rights and suggests that Government needs to emphasise the benefits of children's rights to address these misperceptions. The NI NGO Alternative Report also expresses concern that children's rights training for

¹² 'Education Reform in Northern Ireland – A Human Rights Review' Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Queen's University Belfast, 2013.

¹³ Department Of Education Consultation Equality Impact Assessment Proposal To End The Community Relations, Equality And Diversity (CRED) Earmarked Funding, 3rd February 2015.

professionals in NI is piecemeal and that due to severe budget cuts across public authorities, budgets for children's rights training have been withdrawn.¹⁴

In light of both the research findings and other research, this report concludes that since the UN Committee's Concluding Observations in 2008¹⁵ Government has failed to ensure that the UNCRC is;

'...widely known and understood by adults and children alike...'

by firstly not ensuring that the Convention is part of the statutory national curriculum or made widely accessible to all children and young people by other means, and secondly by not funding;

'...adequate and systematic training of all professional groups working for and with children...'

The NIA and Executive should:

- **Ensure that education on children's rights is central to both the statutory curriculum for primary/post primary schools and the NI youth work curriculum;**
- **Make children's rights education available and fully accessible to all children and young people in a variety of formats (including through social media), and in particular to those who are not in school, education, training or engaged in youth work activities;**
- **Urgently implement an adequately resourced strategy for increasing awareness of and respect for children's rights amongst teachers, lawyers, social workers, other professionals, public authorities, civic leaders, the media and civic society as a whole;**
- **Ensure that training on children's rights is mandatory for all Government Departments and statutory bodies.**

¹⁴ Northern Ireland NGO Alternative Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, June 2015, CLC and Save the Children, Pg. 4.

¹⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Paras.20 – 21

Community Life and Leisure Facilities – Article 2

In 2008 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child asked Government to ensure full protection against discrimination by;

‘...taking urgent measures to address the intolerance and inappropriate characterisation of children, especially adolescents, within the society, including the media...’¹⁶ and by;

‘...strengthening its awareness-raising and other preventive activities against discrimination and, if necessary, take affirmative actions for the benefit of vulnerable groups of children, such as Roma and Irish Travellers’ children; migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee children; lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender children (LGBT); children belonging to minority groups...’¹⁷ and by;

‘...taking all necessary measures to ensure that cases of discrimination against children in all sectors of society are addressed effectively, including with disciplinary, administrative or – if necessary – penal sanctions...’¹⁸

Of particular concern, are findings from the survey and the workshops which suggest that, for many young people their enjoyment of community life is persistently hindered by negative relationships with adults in community and their widespread experience of being discriminated against on the basis of age. The survey results evidence that a key factor influencing children’s enjoyment of their right to enjoy community life in general, is the extent to which they feel adults in their lives respect them, listen to them and take their views seriously, as well as the extent to which they feel their relationships with parents, teachers, community leaders, local business people, neighbours, the police and the media are based on mutual respect.

The majority of young people reported using a range of social venues available to them locally. However many young people in the survey reported feeling that local leisure facilities were not accessible to them, because they were too expensive, due to age restrictions or because they were the victims of negative stereotyping by adults and were often asked to leave. These experiences leave young people feeling they have nowhere to go in the communities they are living in, leaving them with no option but to ‘hangout’ with friends in public spaces, where they become vulnerable to being accused of anti-social behaviour, which in turn leads to further isolation and a sense of disconnection from community life. As evidenced by the survey, this mostly reflects the experience of older teens (15-17 year olds).

¹⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Para.25a.

¹⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Para 25b.

¹⁸ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Para 25c.



Given that the research findings evidence that this has been a very common experience shared by a wide range of young people, both currently and historically in NI,¹⁹ it is not surprising, but very concerning that 61% of all survey respondents said they had been ‘moved on’ by adults in their communities for reasons which in their opinion were unjustified (e.g. while playing football, in fast food restaurants, in the park and in shopping centres). Young people report they are mostly asked to move on by the PSNI, local business employees and local residents and that this mostly happens in urban areas. In addition, it is particularly concerning that the survey findings reveal that those children who reported having a mental health concern are more likely to also report being ‘moved on’ (23% of respondents with a mental health concern reported being moved on ‘all the time’ compared to 10% of those without a mental health concern), indicative of the damaging impact that discrimination on the basis of age may have on the overall well-being of particularly vulnerable young people.

Evidence from other recent research reveals that young people also continue to be demonised in the media²⁰ despite requests from many young people to print stories of young people making positive contributions to school and community life.

In conclusion, despite the Committee urging Government in 2008 to immediately put in place;

‘...measures to address the intolerance and inappropriate characterisation of children, especially adolescents, within the society, including the media...’²¹;

there is little or no evidence, to suggest that any effective measures have been taken by Government or the media since 2008, to action this recommendation. Furthermore there are currently no child accessible and effective measures in place by which young people can hold Government, the police, providers of goods and services, local residents or any other adults including the media to account, through **‘...disciplinary, administrative or ... penal sanctions...’²²**, or by any other means, for discriminating against young people on the basis of their age. Youth@clc, along with many other youth led advocacy groups support the inclusion of children and young people in future Age Discrimination Goods, Facilities and Services legislation currently being proposed in NI, as a means to address the hierarchy of inequalities that exists in NI discrimination legislation which at present places children and young people at the bottom.

¹⁹ Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey 2010 found that 56% of young people were asked to move on, <http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/>

²⁰ ‘Behind the Headlines’ Media Representation of Children and Young People in Northern Ireland , Summary of Research Findings, Queen’s University Belfast (Gordon, McAlister, Scraton) and Include Youth, April 2015.

²¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Para 25.

²² UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Para 25.

Current Government proposals are to exclude under 16s from the protections to be afforded to other ages in the proposed Age Discrimination Goods, Facilities and Services Legislation.

Findings from the workshops also provide evidence that, whilst young people from rural areas are less likely to experience being “moved on” in communities, their right to enjoy play and leisure facilities is compromised by an even greater lack of facilities for young people in their local area as well as a lack of public transport connecting them to leisure facilities in main towns and cities. This in turn makes rural young people feel socially isolated from other young people. In the workshops young people from rural areas have stated that they need access to a better transport system, to enable them to enjoy community life and leisure on an equal basis with young people from urban areas.

Furthermore rural young people with disabilities reported in the workshops that they experience an even greater sense of isolation from friends, because they are more likely to be wholly dependent on parents or specialised transport to access facilities. For some rural young people with disabilities, specialised transport to access facilities is no longer available due to public sector cuts. Young people with disabilities in the workshops also stated that they want equal access to play facilities and summer schemes which are inclusive and suitable for meeting their particular needs.

Young BME children and young people in one workshop, stated that they needed more inclusive recreational spaces and youth provision to ensure that they can fully enjoy community life and leisure on an equal basis with other children and young people.

Although respondent numbers were small, the survey findings also suggest that a number of marginalised groups of young people may not be experiencing either equal or maximum enjoyment of their right to participate, to enjoy community life, to know their rights and be respected as rights holders, and to access appropriate mental health services that meet their needs (e.g. disabled children, LGB&T young people, young people in detention and NEET young people). These results show that particular attention is required by duty bearers to ensure the rights of all vulnerable groups of children who are particularly at risk of having many of their rights denied. In light of the research findings relating to vulnerable and marginalised groups of children and young people, this report provides sufficient evidence to suggest that it is still necessary and essential for Government to;

‘...take affirmative actions for the benefit of vulnerable groups of children...’²³

²³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Para 25.

The NIA and Executive should:

- **Include under 16s in the proposed Age Discrimination (Goods Facilities and Services) legislation to ensure that all children and young people can enjoy protection from discrimination on the basis of age;**
- **Urgently address the UN Committee’s recommendations from 2008 on the demonisation of children, including in the media;**
- **Provide adequate resources to ensure that all children and young people who are vulnerable or marginalised due to their particular circumstances experience equal enjoyment of all their rights.**

Mental Health – Art 6, 24

In 2008 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that;

‘...additional resources and improved capacities are employed to meet the needs of children with mental health problems...’²⁴

The survey results reveal that 27% of children and young people aged 13 – 17 years (mostly 15 – 17 year olds) report having a mental health concern which is significantly higher than the most recent available Government figures from the Chief Medical Officer’s Report, 1999.²⁵ In addition, it is particularly concerning that 63% of those in the survey who said they had a disability (6% of the sample), also said they had a mental health concern, a finding which is supported by other recent research²⁶.

Both the survey and workshop findings show that many young people in NI with a mental health concern, are not comfortable seeking help for mental health problems, possibly due to the stigma associated with mental health (as interpreted by youth@clc), or feeling that their problem wouldn’t be taken seriously by adults. In addition, some young people don’t trust that the service will be beneficial to them, which for many was due to negative experiences of using the service in the past.

²⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Para 57.

²⁵ Chief Medical Officer (1999), Health of the public in NI: report of the Chief Medical Officer 1999: Taking care of the next generation. Belfast: DHSSPS.

²⁶ ‘A Vision for a Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service’ – The Bamford Review November 2005.

This is supported by the survey findings which reveal that, when offered a range of options for where they would seek help for a mental health concern, 21% of young people who reported having a mental health concern said they would go 'nowhere', compared to only 9% of respondents overall, who choose this option. Furthermore, only 37% of young people who had mental health concerns, had received help for their concern and only 66% of those were satisfied with the help they received.

It is also particularly worrying that only 29% of those with a mental health concern said they would seek help from a doctor, suggesting that vulnerable young people, in need of mental health services, feel disconnected from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). It is also concerning that, from the full range of options offered to survey respondents for preferred sources of mental health support, only 25% of the full sample said they would go to see a doctor, with the majority of young people preferring to seek help from family and friends. This suggests a disconnect between young people and medical support services in general, which is concerning, given that some young people, not currently in need of CAMHS, may require this support at some point in their childhood.

Young people with disabilities, as evidenced in the workshops, experience additional barriers to seeking help from doctors. Whilst there is clear evidence from the survey responses to open-ended questions that many young people are indebted to CAMHS for helping them to lead much happier and healthier lives, many young people, both in the survey and the workshops, report experiencing long waiting lists and feeling that the services were not age-appropriate, were unwelcoming or intimidating and/or were not beneficial to them.

From the research, young people who have used CAMHS, have clearly stated that they need a service which is 24/7, accessible in both rural and urban areas, delivered in child friendly and welcoming buildings and spaces and is provided by mental health practitioners who have the skills and qualities required to meet the particular needs of children and young people.

The research findings indicate the need for better resourced and more effective mental health awareness raising activities, for both children and adults (to include better understanding of CAMHS), to encourage children and young people, most at risk of suffering harm, to seek the support they need, and to also ensure that teachers, parents, youth workers etc are more confident in making timely referrals to CAMHS.

It is apparent from the findings, from the perspective of service users (children and young people), that the existing delivery framework for CAMHS in NI is not 'fit for purpose' and needs to be urgently reviewed.

This review should be carried out in full consultation and collaboration with children and young people and in particular with those children most at risk of experiencing poor mental health e.g. older teens, children with disabilities or those who are NEET etc.

In conclusion, it is clear from both the research findings and recent evidence of the historic and ongoing failure by Government to adequately fund CAMHS in NI²⁷, that Government has neither provided '**additional**' resources or '**improved**' capacities for meeting the needs of children and young people with mental health concerns in NI, as required by the UN Committee's 2008 recommendations.

The NIA and Executive should:

- **Urgently develop an adequately resourced strategy to increase awareness of mental health issues to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and encourage children and young people to seek support when they need it, particularly all groups most at risk of not seeking help;**
- **Develop a comprehensive regional framework for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), in full collaboration with children and young people, particularly service users and young people with mental health concerns;**
- **Ensure that adequate funding is allocated to all levels of CAMHS provision to meet the needs of all children, including in schools and in the community.**

²⁷ In NI in 2013/14, £19.4m was allocated to CAMHS, equating to 7.8% of the total mental health expenditure for that period, despite children representing nearly a quarter of NI's population. Information received by CLC from the Health and Social Care Board, dated 17th February 2015.

Conclusions

Overall the research results highlight the value and importance of engaging directly with children and young people on key issues impacting on their lives. Nine hundred children and young people voluntarily and willingly participated in this research, with a view to informing NI decision-makers on changes needed in this jurisdiction to improve their lives. In doing so, they have clearly demonstrated their capacity and desire for meaningful engagement with all duty bearers whose decisions impact on their lives.

This Young People's Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child provides clear evidence that Government needs to develop and implement a more 'holistic' rights-based strategy for improving the lives of all children and young people in NI. In particular, urgent attention should be given to addressing the sense of alienation experienced by many young people in their communities, lack of awareness of and respect for children's rights among adults and duty bearers in general and the worrying disconnect between vulnerable young people with mental health needs and mental health services, upon which an increasing number of young people depend to ensure that they can claim their right to survive and thrive to the maximum extent possible.

In light of these overall findings, this Report concludes that Government have yet to deliver on their promise to guarantee to EVERY child the full realisation of all their rights in compliance with their obligations under the UNCRC. The Report also highlights the failure of Government to give effect to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's 2008 Recommendations.

RESEARCH FINDINGS BY THEME

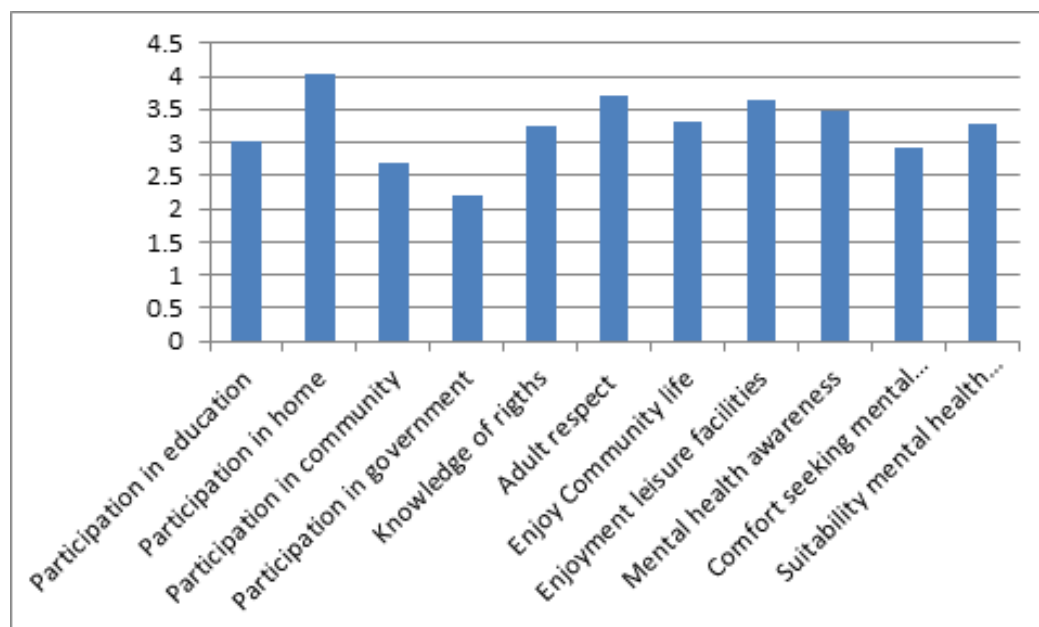
Overall survey findings

The graph below provides an overall picture of enjoyment of rights for the survey sample as a whole. The young people were asked to rate their enjoyment of rights, grouped by theme, as indicated in Figure 2. Each theme consisted of a number of key measures made up of a range of statements on rights which young people could respond to (based on their views/experience) on a five point Likert scale, i.e. the extent to which they agreed with a statement, or the frequency with which the statement is true for them (see Appendix 2).

Overall young people report enjoying their right to participate in decision making at home more than enjoyment of rights in any other area of their lives. Young people report least enjoyment of the right to participate in Government decision making.

Further disaggregated results showing enjoyment of rights by marginalised groups of young people is shown in Table 7 in Appendix 1. Although it should be noted that the number of respondents from marginalised groups are low and therefore comparisons to the overall sample should be used with caution, the survey findings suggest that, for the most part, marginalised groups of young people experience less enjoyment of their rights across each measure except for mental health awareness, where some groups (disability, detention, in care, LGB), score higher.

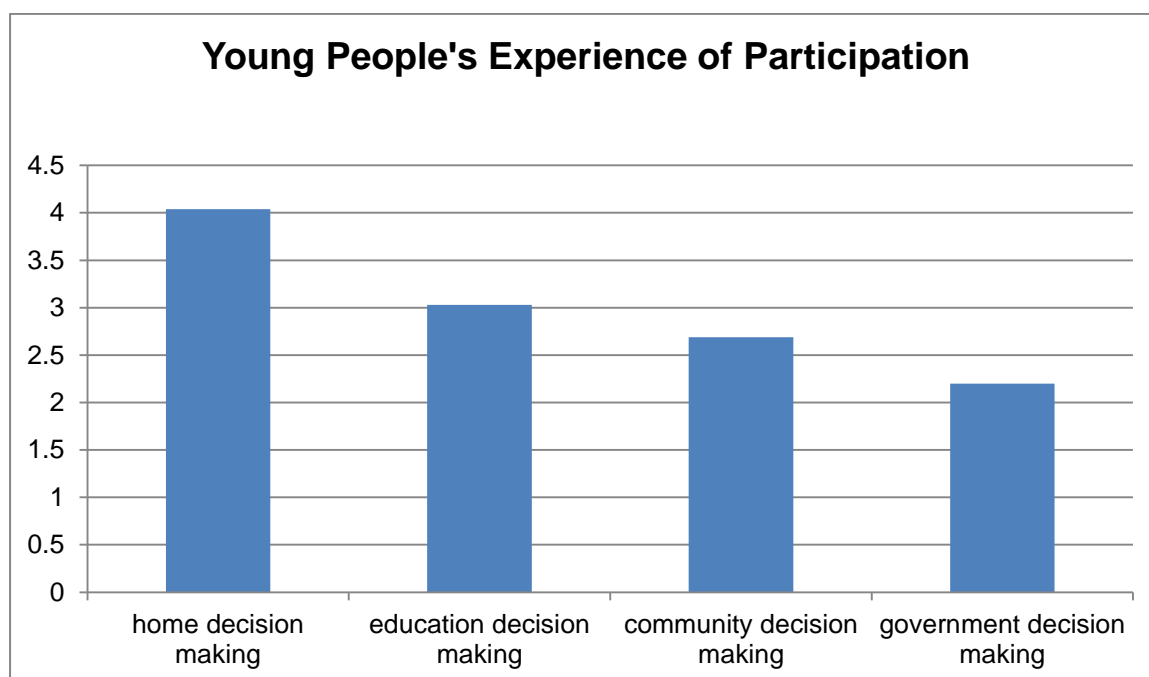
Figure 2: Overall mean scores across each outcome (all respondents)



PARTICIPATION – Article 12 UNCRC

The survey results indicate that overall, young people enjoy their right to meaningful participation, on a sliding scale, where it is best experienced within the home and worst in their involvement in Government decision making, as shown by Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Experience of participation across the domains



*Young people were asked to rate their experience of participation in decision making on a scale of 1-5 (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=quite often, 4=very often, 5=always)

The quantitative results from the survey reveal that young people are generally most positive about their participation at home, where they report experiencing positive participation “very often”, followed by education “quite often”, community “quite often/rarely” and young people reported that they rarely enjoyed participation in Government matters.

Participation in home decision making

Whilst there may be several interpretations as to why young people most enjoy their right to participate at home, youth@clc felt this was due to home life providing better opportunity to express views because relationships tend to be closer between adults and young people. Whilst young people generally felt positive about being able to participate at home, some survey respondents felt there was still room for improvement:

“My parents could explain the reason behind some of their decisions before they make them.”

Some young people living away from home, did not feel that their views were valued or acted on by adults with responsibility for caring for them;

“I live in supported accommodation within the inner city trust, and I believe that as a resident the staff members don't listen to our views and opinions clearly, nor do they take them into account. I feel that the staff should view us as adults, not children or young adults whom are homeless under bad circumstances.” (survey respondent)

Children and young people living in care experience additional challenges and barriers to having their voices heard by the ‘corporate parent’, when living away from family, which are not experienced by children who are not in care. Findings from a recent survey²⁸ of the views and experiences of 105 children in care by Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) in 2013, indicate that only 37% of over 12s know ‘completely’ about their care plans and furthermore only 29% completely agree with decisions made in their care plan;

“I'm not getting a choice if I'm going to fostering or not.” (female, aged 15; Our Life in Care, VOYPIC, 2013)

VOYPIC concludes in its 2013 report that an urgent review of care planning processes is required to identify ways in which children and young people can enjoy more meaningful and effective engagement with their own care plan.

Participation in education decision making

The findings from the survey and research workshops combined, suggest that current participation practice in post primary schools is not enabling young people to fully realise their right to have their views heard and taken into account in matters affecting them under Article 12 of the UNCRC. Where pupils might be asked for their views on school matters, young people do not feel that their ideas and suggestions are routinely taken into account, or acted on in decision making.

Young people in the survey were asked what they thought could be done in their place of education to ensure their views are taken seriously. There were 140 responses to this question, indicating that many young people have strong views on participation in schools. Views and ideas for increasing opportunities for participation were varied and specific in nature, indicating that for many young people ‘one size doesn't fit all’. Young people felt most strongly about the need for their views to be taken into consideration in all school matters, within a school culture that is more

²⁸ ‘Our Life in Care 2013’, VOYPIC, August 2014, p.24

democratic and places equal value on the views of both adults and pupils in the interests of better decision making for all.

In Northern Ireland, school councils are supported by the Department of Education (DE) as a *‘...meaningful way in which pupils can voice their opinions and have their views taken into account in decisions which impact upon them...’* and that,

‘...if supported and nurtured, helps to improve many aspects of school life.’²⁹

A school council is defined by DE as *‘...a formal group of pupils within a school who are elected by their peers to represent them and their views.’*

When asked if their views are sought and taken into account in schools, young people in the research workshops mainly discussed their views on and experience of using schools councils and the extent to which they ensure meaningful and representative pupil participation. Although young people were generally supportive of the idea of having a school council the majority of young people were critical of their effectiveness in reality.

They are not viewed as being effective in every school that has one;

“Some schools have a good framework (in terms of) school councils...It’s not consistent across Northern Ireland.” (youth fora member)

They are viewed as being tokenistic;

“Some schools don’t do anything and are mainly just so the school can tick a box and say they have one.” (school council)

“We might be asked to design something but then the adults design it themselves.” (youth fora members)

They are viewed as not being representative of the whole student body, and that systems for electing pupils to school councils are not fair and equitable;

“...for a select few...not the whole student body...a popularity contest...” (youth fora member)

They are viewed as having no meaningful role in decisions taken by schools;

“Pupils (on the school council) only get to inform school (other pupils) about decisions that are already made.”

“...they are there for show and are not making any difference whatsoever...we don’t see an impact...no feedback...” (youth fora members)

²⁹ <http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/support-and-development-2/school-councils-2.htm>

or powerless in influencing far reaching decisions impacting on the education of whole communities of children and young people;

“I was on a student council but they didn’t take our views seriously...we tried to keep the school open but they closed it.” (young person with a learning disability)

Similar to young people in the workshops, many survey respondents focused on the role and remit of student councils;

“Allow Student Council’s more power, not only can concerns be voiced but real action to then be taken.”

One survey respondent highlighted the value which young people place on their own expertise on issues which they have direct experience of, and how teachers could understand and support young people better by routinely placing value on views expressed by them in the classroom;

“Adults should listen to the views of the children who are actually in the experience, because they don’t know what is really going on, outside of the classroom.”

From the survey results, young people want to participate in a more democratic decision making process in schools where they can have a meaningful say in all school matters, as is their right under Article 12 of the UNCRC;

“Listen to young people’s views and opinions in order to make better decisions for the school, its staff and its pupils. Do not listen to their views just to hear what they have to say.”

“Make sure pupils have a say in absolutely every single aspect of school life. From the canteens to the cleaners.”

and the freedom to choose what they wear to school;

“...let us wear hoodies and other clothing that isn’t a part of uniform...”

One young person in the workshops felt there should be equal opportunity for ALL young people to participate in school matters;

“There is definitely a “pecking order” in school...if you are a teacher’s favourite or play sport you have more say in school.” (workshop with rural young people)

Survey respondents also provided various suggestions on a range of ways (other than school councils) in which all pupils can have their views heard, indicating that “one size doesn’t fit all” and that this should be accommodated by schools.

Some would prefer to share their views in confidential ways i.e. through anonymous forums, such as suggestion boxes, voting mechanisms, and school surveys;

“Surveys could be taken regularly to help the young give their opinions as they may not want to talk face to face with a member of staff.”

Others preferred the opportunity to engage with the issues face-to-face, for example, through class debates and one-on-one meetings with relevant school staff and pupils.

Participation in community decision making

Again findings from both the survey and the workshops reveal that young people in general are not fully enjoying their right to have a say in decisions on community matters which impact on their lives. Their self reported experience reflects the recent findings of a survey of 16 year olds carried out in 2014, where only 15% of young people felt they definitely, or probably had an influence on decisions made in their area³⁰.

Whilst the survey did not ask an open-ended question on participation on community decision making, young people in the workshops provided clear evidence that many young people want to have more say in a range of community issues that directly affect them;

“...we would like to give our opinion on leisure facilities (there are not enough in our area and they are getting too expensive) and all the schools closing down, especially primary schools...” (youth fora member)

Young people in the youth fora workshops in particular felt that in some areas local authority councillors seem inaccessible to them even when they actively seek opportunities to discuss matters of concern to them and other young people in local communities;

“Councillors refuse to meet us as they’re too busy.” (youth fora member)

Young people perceive that the role of local youth fora is not valued or recognised by local councillors:

“...and they don’t really take the local youth councils seriously in areas where there is one...”

“(town) has a youth council but the council bypassed them...more like a youth club

³⁰ ARK Young Life and Times Survey, 2014, www.ark.ac.uk/y/t, May 2015.

now.” (youth fora member)

Young people feel they are viewed by adults as being incapable of contributing to local decision making, because they are young;

“...need to act like an adult to be taken seriously...If you come from a young person’s view you are seen as immature.”

The frustrations expressed by young people in the youth fora workshops at the lack of meaningful participation structures available to them represents the views of many other young people in NI. This is reflected in comments from the NI Youth Forum (NIYF) who have been promoting participation by young people in NI for over 30 years;

“Currently only Belfast, Carrick and Derry have local authority based shadow youth councils ... young people have lobbied for around 10 years for legislation to make this essential.” (Chris Quinn; Director, NI Youth Forum (NIYF))

In addition the NIYF expressed concern that the future of the existing shadow youth councils is under immediate threat due to current austerity measures affecting NI.

Participation in Government decision making

The sample of young people’s views presented below are representative of the 202 survey responses to the question on participation in Government and views expressed in the workshops. Collectively they demonstrate a strong awareness of their right to be heard and taken seriously and their frustration with not being supported by adults and duty bearers to fully claim this right in every sphere of their lives. The comments also highlight a genuine willingness and desire amongst young people to engage with decision makers in education, community and Government, provided that mechanisms for doing so are fully accessible, participatory and inclusive, and place genuine value on young people’s views and experiences.

When asked in the survey what they thought could be done by Government to make sure young people’s views are taken seriously, young people expressed a feeling of being disconnected from Government and the democratic process in general. They felt politicians were not ‘*approachable*’ and that their agendas did not match young people’s concerns. They felt that their views were not important and that the Government was not interested in the views and concerns of young people;

“I feel as though the government does not care about what the younger generation have to say about Northern Ireland.”

Opportunities to engage directly with Government are not readily available to those young people who wish to engage with politicians on matters that are important to them and other young people;

“...you need to actively seek out opportunities to have a say...”

In the survey young people’s perception that Government doesn’t care what they have to say appears to be exacerbated by young people’s inability to vote. It was recognised that the current voting age of 18 effectively excluded them from participating in important decision making affecting their daily lives;

“It’s not fair that we can marry and have children and have an MLA but not vote for them.”

“We also can pay or receive tax money, but cannot decide how much we think we should be taxed and how it should be spend.” (survey respondent)

Similarly in the workshops where the issue of young people’s interest in politics and lowering the voting age to 16 was discussed in more detail, young people generally felt that Government is not interested in hearing their views mainly because they cannot vote until they are 18;

“...the only way politicians will listen is if young people were voting...(at 16)”

“...they don’t seem interested in young people, if you’re not old enough to vote, they don’t care...” (Youth Fora members)

Whilst there were mixed views in the workshops on lowering the voting age to 16, with many young people expressing apathy about ever voting, due to disenchantment with current NI politics, there was general consensus that better political education in schools for all children and young people could be one way of either encouraging some young people to take more interest in politics and/or exercise their right to vote at 16 rather than having to wait until they are 18.

Also recognised by survey respondents was the need for Government to directly approach and seek out young people in places and at times which are more convenient for young people to participate in consultations. Young people demonstrated a strong interest in availing of opportunities to engage with Government representatives on matters affecting them.

They felt that politicians should visit their schools and communities in order to increase opportunities to hear their views;

“They could even come into schools to make it more accessible.”

Aligned with this, some young people in the survey and the workshops recognised a need and willingness to better understand politics in order to maximise their participation. They felt that schools could do more to educate them on political matters, who politicians are and their role, thereby increasing their capacity to participate in meaningful engagements with Government;

“We don’t really know who politicians are or understand what they do.” (workshop participant)

“Educate young people about the government in school.” (survey respondent)

“Give young people the tools, freedom and education to form and present their opinions.” (survey respondent)

Young people in the survey also felt that politicians should recognise the value of working directly with existing youth fora, when seeking young people’s views and be accountable to these forums for action taken as a result of taking these views into account;

“Work with Youth Clubs and Youth Councils. This could mean having meetings with young people and asking them what change they want to see in their community and throughout Northern Ireland. After these views have been recorded visit the Youth Club or Youth Council again after a few months to report on what real action has been taken since.”

Young people in the workshops were disillusioned by their previous experiences of Government consultations, which they felt had little meaning or impact on effecting change;

“...make promises and don’t do it...” (NEET young person)

and where Government representatives did not make themselves either accessible or accountable to the young people;

“There’s a gap between the young people and the people who are running consultations...young people are disillusioned...If adults had to respond (to consultations) it (government) would hold them accountable.” (youth fora member)

Suggestions for improving young people's experience of participation in consultations included;

"...better feedback and follow up...want to see the change that's made as a result..."

Young people in the workshops with learning, sensory and/or physical disabilities expressed their particular frustration at not being able to engage in meaningful consultation with Government;

"Yes they listen to us but they don't hear what we say." (young person with physical and sensory disability)

Within the workshop, this comment was contextualised by an adult advocate for the right of disabled children to participate in Government decision making. The adult advocate supported disabled young people in expressing their views during the course of the workshop. It is clear from their comment that children with disabilities face additional barriers to engaging with Government on matters which affect them;

"They love to come and listen to the young people (with disabilities) but when you see it written down it's not what they say so they didn't actually hear what they said." (adult advocate for participation rights of disabled children and young people)

Recent research carried out by the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) in 2014 on participation by children and young people in the development of policies, strategies, legislation and services, found that no Department undertook engagement with children and young people systematically.³¹ Often NGOs have had to perform this role themselves, in the interests of promoting the child's right to participate, or have in the absence of Government funding, provided funding for young people to set up their own participative structures, despite having little or no resources to do so;

"...the voluntary sector continues to fill the void left by policy makers in terms of promoting the voices of young people in the policy making process - at community; sub regional and regional levels...Young People set up a Youth Congress for themselves in February 2015 and whilst elected politicians have shown support this has been financed purely via NIYF reserve." (Chris Quinn; Director, NIYF)

NICCY's research also found that very few Departments were able to provide evidence that engagement between departments and children and young people, had an impact on the development of policies, strategies, legislation and services.

³¹ Participation in Government: Walking or Talking Participation, Paula Keenan, Commissioned by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, October 2014.

Evidence from the survey and workshops support these findings.

Furthermore in ARK's Young Life and Times (YLT) Survey of 2014, only 9% of 16 year olds felt that they definitely or probably had any influence in decisions made about what happens in NI.³²

Young people in the Youth Fora workshops mainly agreed that there should be a NI Youth Assembly to provide a meaningful opportunity for children and young people to ensure their views are represented at the highest level of Government in NI. Whilst this view is shared by many young people across NI, as evidenced by the advocacy and lobbying work of NIYF and other NGOs who have been continually advocating for more robust and meaningful youth participation structures in Government in recent years, there appears to be an ongoing lack of political will on the part of Government to prioritise the establishment of a NI Youth Assembly;

"...Whilst members of the local assembly widely agree that a youth assembly would add value and bring young people closer to the policy making process it is clearly not seen as a priority despite the fact that young people have lobbied for this for some ten years now and the cost would be minimal..." (Chris Quinn; Director, NIYF)

Young People are asking for participative structures, which reflect the particular circumstances of NI and give them parity with other jurisdictions in the UK;

"...NI is still the only jurisdiction in the UK and Ireland without a regional youth assembly. Young people have called for participative structures to be set up that mirror that of the Good Friday Agreement - i.e. A local Youth Assembly; A North South Youth Forum; and a British Irish Youth Council..." (Chris Quinn; Director, NIYF)

KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHTS AND ADULT RESPECT FOR RIGHTS – ARTICLE 42

Whilst this survey did not measure or test young people's or adults' accurate knowledge of the Convention, it did measure the extent to which young people feel knowledgeable about and comfortable in using their rights, as well as their perception of the extent to which adults they know, respect their rights. Whilst the overall survey and workshop results combined, indicate a general awareness that children have rights (young people in the workshops were able to name a range of rights e.g. to be heard, fair treatment, education, to be protected), discussions in the workshops revealed a low awareness of the UNCRC or the duties it places on Government. This current low awareness of rights among young people in NI, is also reflected in other existing research e.g. the Young People's Behaviour and Attitudes

³² ARK Young Life and Times Survey, 2014, www.ark.ac.uk/ylt, May 2015.

Survey conducted in schools among 11-16 year olds revealed that less than half of the sample had heard of the UNCRC³³. In addition ARK's YLT survey of 16 year olds carried out in 2014, revealed that 80% had not heard of the Children's Commissioner.³⁴

Whilst the survey didn't evidence any significant differences in knowledge of rights, between different groups of young people the findings did indicate that Protestant/British young people report having less knowledge of rights than Catholic/Irish young people which youth@clc suggested may be due to rights advocacy being historically more associated with an Irish/Civil rights agenda.

Additionally, the quantitative results from the survey highlighted a significant relationship between young people knowing their rights and perceived adult respect for rights. This suggests that if young people feel that adults respect their rights they will have more confidence in using their rights to challenge potential rights breaches.

Young people in the survey were asked what they thought Government could do to increase their knowledge of rights and how to use them to improve their lives. There were 186 responses provided which, overall highlighted a current lack of knowledge of rights and confidence in using them among young people. Responses also demonstrated, in some instances, the subsequent inability to address any potential violations of their rights;

"...tell us about our rights or no one knows what to do..."

"The Government could set up information sessions for young people or give leaflets to improve our lives by making us more aware and making us more confident to make a complaint if our rights have been breached."

Responses to the survey also highlight clearly that young people think more should be done in terms of educating them around their rights. For the majority, they recommended school as the potential forum for this education;

"Make it mandatory for schools to provide this information to students not through pamphlets but through workshops and presentations."

Young people in the survey identified a role for the youth sector in rights education, which could be used as a youth-led tool for change in local communities;

"I think the government should ... start funding youth workers to go into an area and show the children/teens/young adults what they can achieve using there human rights."

³³ NISRA (2013) The Young Persons Behaviour and Attitudes Survey, available at: [http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/YPBAS%202013%20Top-Line%20Results%20\(Weighted\).pdf](http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/YPBAS%202013%20Top-Line%20Results%20(Weighted).pdf).

³⁴ ARK Young Life and Times Survey, 2014, www.ark.ac.uk/ylt, May 2015.

Similarly young people in the workshops had an awareness that ‘Rights’ in general could be used to improve their lives, without having any real knowledge of the UNCRC and the obligations it places on duty bearers;

“...Rights give you a better way of life...” (young person with learning difficulties)

Young people in the survey felt better use could be made of social media to make rights awareness more accessible to children and young people;

“Websites, apps on social media such as Facebook. Instagram pages.”

“Have children's rights easily available on relevant websites such as Save the Children.”

These findings demonstrate an appetite amongst young people to learn more about their rights, and in particular a desire to use them to challenge potential violations of their rights. Young people are also clearly expressing a preference for information on rights to be communicated in an engaging and accessible way, whether in school, in the community or via social media.

The overall survey findings support the right based argument that children and young people, as the rights holders, can only fully claim their rights if adult duty bearers fulfill their obligations to respect those rights. The last survey addressing the issue of knowledge and understanding of children’s rights in the adult population in 2002 found that only 43% of respondents had heard of the CRC³⁵. The YLT survey of 16 year olds in 2014 also found that 58% of young people had learnt about children’s rights in school, but 36% had not.³⁶

In light of the survey’s quantitative and qualitative findings, other supporting evidence and the current policy context, it is essential that rights education is given priority by Government and is systematically targeted at both adults/duty bearers who engage with children across all their life domains and children and young people in equal measures. Furthermore, education for duty bearers should specifically aim to reinforce their requirement to meet their obligations to children under the UNCRC. A recommendation made by one survey respondent, probably best sums up the need for education to be twofold;

“Educate young people on the rights we have as individuals and ensure that all adults are aware of these also, so if applicable we can state what are rights are.”

³⁵ Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2002, available at, http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2002/Rights_of_the_Child/index.html.

³⁶ ‘Young Life and Times Survey 2014’ ARK.

ENJOYMENT OF COMMUNITY LIFE WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION – ARTICLE 2

For the purposes of the survey enjoyment of community life was defined as young people's perceived ability to socialise with friends in their area, to feel comfortable using leisure facilities/social spaces (e.g. shops, cinema, leisure centre, restaurants, parks, libraries, music and arts venues), (Article 31) and their relationships with adults (perceived level of trust and respect for young people by adults) within their community (Article 2).

Although in general the young people in this survey reported having active social lives, with 87% going out socially sometimes/ all the time to a range of venues, such as shops, restaurants, cinema etc., the results also reveal that overall, young people are not fully enjoying their right to engage in play and leisure (Article 31). Quantitative findings suggest that enjoyment of community life was dependant on and determined by relationships with adults and could be improved by adults showing more respect for young people and trusting them more. As reflected in some young people's open-ended responses in this section of the survey, young people are more likely to respect adults if they feel adults respect them. In particular the findings reveal that statistically, older teens (15- 17 year olds) and those who reported having a mental health concern, are enjoying their community life least.

The young people were given further open space in the survey (Q34) to add any additional comments on their experience of using social spaces and leisure facilities. Many of them took this opportunity to voice their frustration at the lack of and/or inaccessibility of existing leisure facilities due to cost, not having any say in community planning for provision of leisure facilities and their experience of being treated negatively by adults as a consequence of being left no alternative but to socialise with friends in public spaces;

"There isn't a lot of things to do for young people in my area."

"In my area there are not many leisure facilities, there are actually none at all. The community has left the young people with nothing and then wonder why we hang around the area with are (our) so called ""anti-social"" behaviour. I think the area should have a centre for young people to go to free of charge and just hang about with mates.....there has never been meetings or groups for the young people to decide what happens with our funding and this results in it being spent on irrelevant features to the area."

"Some are very expensive especially at this age when you don't work."

"Make them cheaper!!!!!!!!!! £5.90 for a cinema ticket, flipping rip off!"

Additional barriers to using leisure facilities due to age restrictions were also highlighted e.g. access to gyms for under 16s;



“Some facilities are age restricted i.e. the gym. Anyone under the age 16 has to either be accompanied by an adult or turned away.”

Although health and safety considerations may justify policies on age restrictions in the use of gyms by younger children, there were additional restrictions and concerns voiced, more reflective of unjustified discriminatory behaviour by adults towards young people on the basis of age;

“Staff members do not treat my friends and I with the same respect as they do with older people, Just because we are teenagers does not mean we are “bad.”

This differential treatment experienced by young people appears to be having a negative effect on their enjoyment of leisure facilities, and might explain why young people’s reported enjoyment of facilities is not as high as it could be;

“Attending leisure facilities in my area can cause a lot of controversy when attending in groups..... security guards often follow us around the shops and as a result in this it aggravates us and I tend to find this is the cause of the trouble in the areas.”

“We are not welcome in the local leisure facilities, I think because the workers think of us as “street scum” who have no money and wish to use these facilities for free.”

Experience of BME children and young people

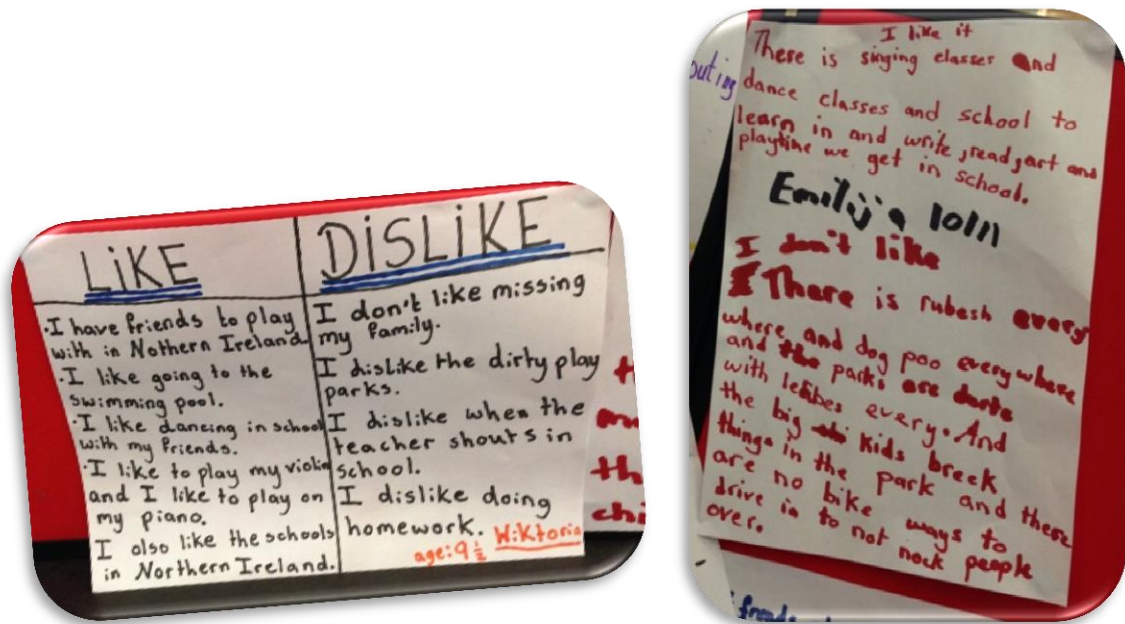
Young people from minority communities in NI (including Somalian and Lithuanian young people), who participated in a BBC Children in Need “Grantee’s workshop” on “Rights and Realities”, collectively expressed a need for more inclusive recreational space and youth provision, to provide them with more opportunity to mix with other young people from different cultures and religions. One young 12 year old Somalian girl described her experience of attending a “Culture Day” organised by her school where;

“...only those children with the same skin colour were invited to attend...my friend was upset because she couldn’t attend and especially as she is my best friend...”

The majority of young people in the workshop agreed that in their experience some schools are better than others at promoting diversity awareness and that fully inclusive learning about other cultures should be mandatory within the curriculum.

Whilst the experience of younger children on their enjoyment of rights was not the main focus of this report - as part of a “Children’s Court” event organised by Belong NI, (see Appendix 3) young migrant children (aged 7- 12), were asked what they did and didn’t like about living in NI and what would make life better for them. Many of

the young children wanted more parks to play in which were safe, clean and in good working order, suggesting that community safety issues were important to their enjoyment of community life, as represented by artwork produced by two children;



Experience of rural young people

In the workshops young people from rural areas reported that lack of public transport connecting them to leisure facilities, restricted their enjoyment of their right to play and leisure, and added to their sense of feeling socially isolated from other young people. This was not experienced by young people from urban areas.

Experience of young people with disabilities

The experience of social isolation experienced by young people in both rural and urban areas is further compounded by having a disability in that young people with disabilities are wholly dependent on parents or specialised transport to either access facilities locally, or to meet up with friends who live in the towns and cities.

One young disabled person in the workshop explained (through the adult advocate), that in her rural area a youth club which had transport for disabled young people, had recently closed down;

“...cutting loads of funding for our youth clubs...” (young person with a disability)

Local play facilities that are available either in rural areas or in towns are often ill equipped to meet the needs of disabled young people. Speaking about their local play park, one young disabled person commented;

“I can’t go to it as there is no activities that I can use...” (young person with a disability)

One disabled young person (through the adult advocate) expressed their frustration at being excluded from a summer scheme, because of her disability, and being unable to socialise with her friends all summer as a consequence;

“...they won’t let children with disabilities go to their summer scheme, they only let her in for one day. All (name) friends were at the summer scheme and she couldn’t access one. She was bored all summer as she was stuck in her house.” (adult advocate speaking on behalf of young person with a communication difficulty)

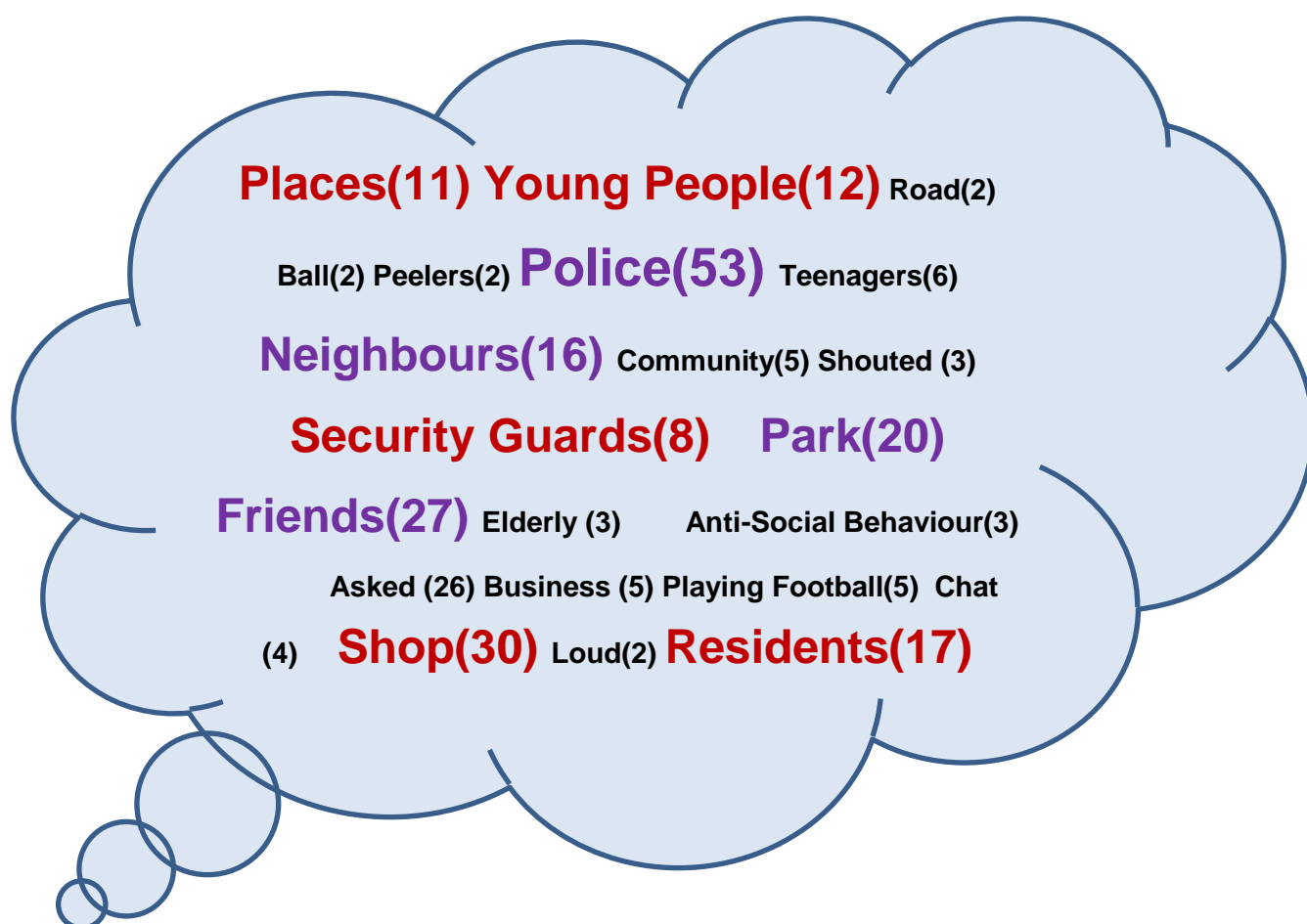
In addition the survey results reflect that currently in Northern Ireland, young people in general feel they are being treated differently and unfairly because they are young. Clear evidence of this can be found in the responses to Q31 in the survey, where young people were asked if they had ever been asked to “move on” from a place when hanging out with friends in their area and if so by who and how often. Overall 61% of respondents had experienced being ‘moved on’ by adults in their communities, 13% experiencing it all the time. Moreover, results highlight that older teens (15-17 years) experience this significantly more frequently (53% reporting sometimes/ all the time) compared to younger teens (11-14 years, 33% reporting the same). Males are more likely to report being “moved on”, sometimes/all the time (49%), than females (40%). These findings are consistent with the 2010 YLT findings which revealed that 56% of 16 year olds in NI had experienced standing in the street and being told to move on.³⁷ The fact that the statistic for 2015 is slightly higher for 13 – 17 year olds is concerning.

Young people reported that often, they were asked to ‘move on’ while socialising in their area, e.g., playing football, in food outlets, in the park and in shopping centres.

They reported being asked to ‘move on’ by a range of adults in their community, particularly, the Police, local business employees and local residents. This is best represented by the “word cloud” in figure 4 below (most frequently occurring words and phrases in the responses to survey Q31- Appendix 2). Additionally, young people living in urban areas experience being ‘moved on’ more frequently (51% of young people reporting sometimes/ all the time compared to 30% of rural young people).

³⁷ ARK Young Life and Times Survey, 2010, www.ark.ac.uk/ylt.

Figure 4: Experience of being asked to 'move on'



There were 230 responses from young people to Q31 in the survey (the highest number of responses to open ended survey questions), suggesting that the persistent demonisation of teenagers in particular by adults in communities, has not been addressed since the UN Committee's last examination in 2008; but rather continues to impact negatively on teenagers' enjoyment of community life. Furthermore, the survey findings reveal that those children who reported having experienced a mental health concern are more likely to also report being 'moved on' (23% reported being moved on all the time compared to 10% of those without a mental health concern).

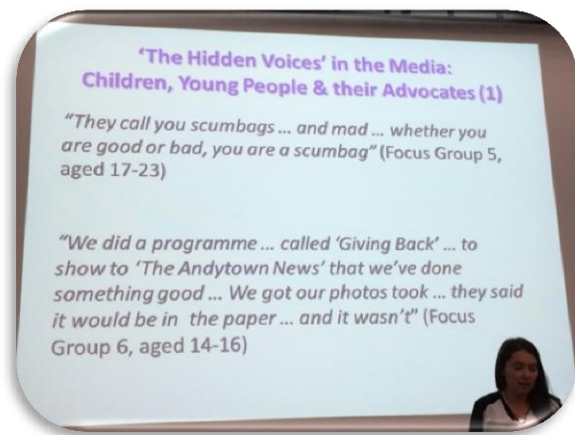
Young people's experience of feeling that their right to freely associate with friends or to simply 'hang out' is being repeatedly denied due to negative and unjustified stereotyping of young people, by the police in particular, the media and other adults in their community, is best represented by the articulate testimony of one young person's response to the 'moved on' question, included in its entirety below;

“The PSNI often attend the location my friends and I 'hang out'...constantly and repeatedly make us move away as we are apparently causing trouble and making others feel uncomfortable...we just sit around and talk...no violence or trouble is caused. But due to the area we are from ... we are categorised as young youth that causes trouble/violence but it's not the case and because of that stereotype set by the media and others we constantly become penalised as others can see that we don't cause trouble and that what they think we do...is not what we do. Due to the PSNI approaching us forcing us to move causes us to retaliate and then cause violence as we tend to get the blame of things we don't do. The media portrays an image to the public that young youth are all undereducated hoods that have nothing better to do and cause trouble...that's not the case. I would classify myself as a 'hood' and i am still in education and persevering in my A-levels to obtain a place at university to study business. I beat that stereotype that people set and because of that, I tend to get annoyed as the public and police service don't see beyond the hood and because of that they won't change thoughts and therefore continue to have the same ideology they always have and segregate young youth that hang about talking to one another...!”

The persistent and deliberate demonisation of young people in the media is further evidenced by recent research carried out by QUB.³⁸

Some of QUB's research findings relating to the views of journalists and young people within the context of the study are represented in the photographs below (a presentation by Dr Faith Gordon, QUB - research workshop on Discrimination; December 2014). The comments from journalists indicate that the media continue to justify their negative portrayal of young people as well as their lack of interest in covering stories about young people who make positive contributions to community life within their communities;

³⁸ 'Behind the Headlines' Media Representation of Children and Young People in Northern Ireland , Summary of Research Findings, Queen's University Belfast (Gordon, McAlister, Scraton) and Include Youth, April 2015



In addition, young people also reported being asked to 'move on' frequently from fast food restaurants, by adults in their neighbourhood and when using public sports facilities;

"In (fast food restaurant) we are always sitting eating and then we finish but sit and chat and they tell us to get out...if only one person is eating at a table of four (like theres 4 people there) they tell you to leave and even though theres lots of tables you arent allowed to stay and chat with your friends the security people tell you to leave which i dont think is fair."

"If we were hanging around on the streets in our local village we can be asked to move by adults nearby because they think that we're trying to cause trouble."

"I was in a 5 a side court in xxx playing football with friends and i was told to get out whenever this is a public facility for young people. All the time I get kicked out of xxx because we are apparently sitting in for too long whenever adults dont get told to leave but we do."

Similarly in the workshops young people provided many similar examples of experiences of being treated unfairly because they are young, because of negative stereotyping or of being asked to 'move on';

"...when I go the shop I have to take my schoolbag off even though I have an iPad in my bag..."

Young people are frequently being stopped by the police because they are suspected of causing trouble;

"...hoodie...track bottoms...suspected..." (NEET young person)

“A friend was stopped all the time because he had a beaten and rugged backpack. He eventually decided just to open it and all there was in it was his games console.”

Overall young people’s sense of belonging in community and level of enjoyment of community and leisure facilities appears to be largely determined by how the adults in the community treat them. The more they feel they are respected by adults, the more they are likely to enjoy community life and the facilities and public spaces available to them. The overall findings therefore suggest that many young people (particularly older teens) would experience better enjoyment of community life, including their right to play and leisure and to associate freely with friends, if mechanisms were in place whereby adults were held to account for treating them differently on the basis of age. It is of particular concern that those young people most likely to feel alienated by and demonized within their own community are also most likely to have a mental health concern and therefore (as evidenced in the next section on mental health) less likely to enjoy other rights and as a consequence are at significant risk of failing to thrive or to realise their potential in life.

In addition disabled young people in particular experience additional barriers to enjoyment of the right to play and leisure and to in particular are being denied access to suitable places for them to meet with friends to socialise.

MENTAL HEALTH – ART 6, 24

In respect of mental health, the focus of the research was on awareness of mental health issues, comfort in seeking help, experiences of using mental health services and views on an ideal mental health service for children and young people.

As evidenced by the NGO Alternative Report, existing Government statistics estimate that 20% of children under 18 years of age suffer significant mental health problems and that this comprises the commonest form of severe disability in childhood.³⁹ Whilst the survey results for the Young People’s Report are not fully representative of all children and young in NI, given that they are based on 752 responses, it does provide a strong indication that current numbers of young people affected by poor mental health may be higher than earlier Government figures suggest. Research also indicates that 10% of children aged 15 and 16 years have self-harmed in NI.⁴⁰ There is an historic and ongoing failure to adequately resource child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in NI. In NI in 2013/14, only

³⁹ Chief Medical Officer (1999), Health of the public in NI: report of the Chief Medical Officer 1999: Taking care of the next generation. Belfast: DHSSPS

⁴⁰ Northern Ireland Lifestyle and Coping Survey Final Report. Belfast Department of Health Social Services & Public Safety and the Department of Education, O’Connor, R. C., Rasmussen, S. & Hawton, K. 2010.

£19.4m was allocated to CAMHS, which equates to 7.8% of the total planned mental health expenditure for that period, despite the fact that children under 18 represent nearly a quarter of NI's population.⁴¹ It is estimated that there will be an £164 million shortfall in the health budget in Northern Ireland for 2015-2016.⁴²

In addition to the evidence presented through the survey and the workshops, the NGO Alternative Report references evidence that the incidence of mental health problems among vulnerable groups of children is disproportionately high; including children with disabilities, those living in poverty, children in conflict with the law, care experienced children and those in need of safe accommodation. In the 2009 Young Life and Times survey 29% of 16 year old respondents reported serious personal emotional or mental health problems, with a much higher percentage (43%) from 'not well off backgrounds' doing so. Children with caring responsibilities or with a longstanding illness or disability were also more likely to report emotional and mental health problems.⁴³

Awareness and comfort in seeking help

Overall results reveal that whilst awareness of mental health issues and young people's experience of using mental health services was measured statistically as "verging on positive", young people in general report a low level of comfort in seeking help when needed. Those who were most positive about the suitability of mental health services for young people were also positive about feeling comfortable enough to seek support if they needed it, suggesting that young people in general are more likely to seek the help they need if they believe and trust that the service will be beneficial or have had positive experiences of using it in the past.

The survey results reveal that 27% of the young people surveyed, reported having experienced a mental health concern, of which only 37% had received help, and only 66% of those were satisfied with the help they received. Of those who reported having experienced a mental health concern, significant demographic differences were revealed:

- 62% were female
- 47% were Protestants (47%), compared to Catholic (35%)
- 76% were older teens (15-17 year olds)
- 77% were from urban areas
- 63% of those who said they had a disability (6% of the survey sample) also said they had a mental health concern

⁴¹ Information received by CLC from the Health and Social Care Board, dated 17th February 2015.

⁴² 'Draft Budget 2015-16', DHSSPS, December 2014.

⁴³ ARK Young Life and Times Survey, 2009, www.ark.ac.uk/ylt.

The most recent Government statistics which date back to 1999 state that 20% of children in NI have a mental health problem.⁴⁴

Further survey analysis also revealed that having a mental health concern and low enjoyment of other rights are statistically inter-dependent i.e. young people with a mental health concern are more likely to experience low enjoyment of their community life, have less knowledge of their rights, feel that adults don't respect their rights and feel that they cannot participate as much in decisions affecting all areas of their lives. Furthermore, 23% of those with a mental health concern also reported being moved on all the time, compared to only 10% of those not reporting a mental health concern.

In addition, when asked to choose sources of support, the results reveal that many young people with mental health concerns in particular, are reluctant to seek support due to, as suggested by youth@clc, the persistent stigma associated with having a mental health problem:

- 21% said they would go 'nowhere' (compared to 9% of all respondents)
- More likely to go online or nowhere at all (compared to most respondents who said they would go to family for support)
- Only 29% said they would go to the doctor

In addition, from the full range of options offered to survey respondents for preferred sources of mental health support, only 25% of the full sample said they would go to see a doctor, with the majority of young people preferring to seek help from family and friends. This suggests a disconnect between young people and medical support services in general.

Many of the young people in the workshops who had experienced poor mental health also felt that the stigma of having a mental health problem, as well as their perception that their "problem" wouldn't be understood or taken seriously by adults, was a deterrent to seeking help and receiving help:

"...diabetes is ok...depression or mental health problems are not..." (NEET young person)

"...there's a lack of knowledge among teachers...they only touched on depression and self-harm..." (youth fora member)

⁴⁴ Chief Medical Officer (1999), Health of the public in NI: report of the Chief Medical Officer 1999: Taking care of the next generation. Belfast: DHSSPS

“...I went to get help with depression and asked a teacher to help, the teacher told me to give it a few months. I told him I’d already given it a few months...and it took a lot to ask for help. He just told me to calm down...” (youth fora member)

In CLC and youth@clc’s 2013 Survey of Young People’s Views on Accessing Counselling in Schools, based on survey findings, youth@clc recommended the need for more training for teachers on mental health awareness to encourage teachers to be more proactive in picking up of early signs of emotional stress, to provide early intervention support and/or information about the availability of schools counselling.⁴⁵

Additional barriers for vulnerable groups of young people to seeking help

Whilst family and friends were the most common source of support identified by young people in the survey, young people with disabilities in the workshops reported that they were sometimes afraid to talk to their families about a mental health concern because of feeling that their physical, sensory or learning disability already places a burden on their parents. This fear of parents knowing they had a mental health problem can also be a deterrent to disabled young people contacting a doctor independently for a referral as their parents would more than likely be notified of this request. It is concerning that disabled children who are highly dependent on adult carers perceive that current referral systems for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) does not guarantee confidentiality of access, and it is therefore deterring some children from seeking help when they need it.

Additional evidence from ARK’s YLT Survey; January 2015, indicates that of the 16 year olds surveyed who had self-harmed in 2013 only 42% had spoken to someone before self-harming compared to 55% in 2008.⁴⁶ The survey results and evidence from other research, suggest that awareness raising initiatives in schools and in communities, aimed at reducing the stigma of having a mental health problem and encouraging young people to seek support when they need it, have not been effective.

Experience of using mental health services

Young people in the survey who reported having a mental health concern and receiving help for this, were offered open space to comment on their experience of using mental health services. A total of 82 comments were made and reflected a mix of both positive and negative experiences.

⁴⁵ <http://www.childrenslawcentre.org.uk/index.php/youth-participation-advocacy/rights-in-action/29-pages/youth/rights-in-action/137-2012-2013-projects>

⁴⁶ ARK Young Life and Times Survey, 2014, www.ark.ac.uk/ylt, May 2015.

Positive experiences of receiving support from a range of sources, including family, counselling services and CAMHS provision are represented below;

“I was able to talk to teachers and my family.”

“I went to CAMHS for suicidal thoughts and depression and was discharged several months after being admitted because of the weekly sessions I attended.”

“I feel my mental health improved after i completed a series of counselling sessions and felt a lot better in general.”

“I could talk to her about some of the stuff going on in my head, that I couldn't talk to my parents about because they were more determined about me getting back to school than listening to the underlying problems. I could talk to her and the rest I figured out by myself.”

“I went to the (name) Hospital where I seen a doctor explaining to me about how I can battle my eating disorder. This happened for a few years 2010, 2011. I feel I can overcome this problem again if it ever becomes an issue.”

“The doctors at CAMHS at (name of hospital) helped me to become healthier.”

Negative experiences of using mental health services suggest that some young people did not feel that the service they used was beneficial to them, that waiting lists were too long, or that some services were unwelcoming and unsupportive.

These self reported negative experiences support the statistical findings of the survey which suggest that young people with mental health concerns are less likely to seek help or use the range of current services available to them than those without a mental health concern;

“It didnt help me the way i wanted it to because i still felt the same way after getting the help for a long time and it had a lasting negative affect on me until only recently this year.”

“I felt that I was unsupported, patronised and intimidated.”

“I felt that those who tried to help weren't fully able to address matters and how to handle some of the situations. It did not feel entirely welcoming which was off putting from the beginning.”

“The waiting list to see autism intervention service was very long. Almost every health care professional I saw thought that they were not the best person to see, so I felt a bit discriminated against because of my autism.”

Young people in the workshops shared similar mixed views of mental health issues and experiences of using mental health services. Additionally, some young people in the workshops felt that the services were not age-appropriate or were intimidating;

“I wouldn’t ask anyone for help...When I was 17 I went to play therapy...I hated it...she just stared at me...” (young person with learning disabilities, a history of being bullied at school, personal family difficulties and mental health problems)

“...not trained to deal with my age group...I realised what I had to say, to get out of it cause I hated it...” (NEET young person)

One young person’s experience from the survey reflects the current concerns of NGOs that in NI, children are still being placed on adult psychiatric wards in direct contravention of the UNCRC;

“At the age of 16 I was admitted into an adult psychiatric ward because the trust couldn’t fund an emergency bed within the only teenage ward for Northern Ireland...”

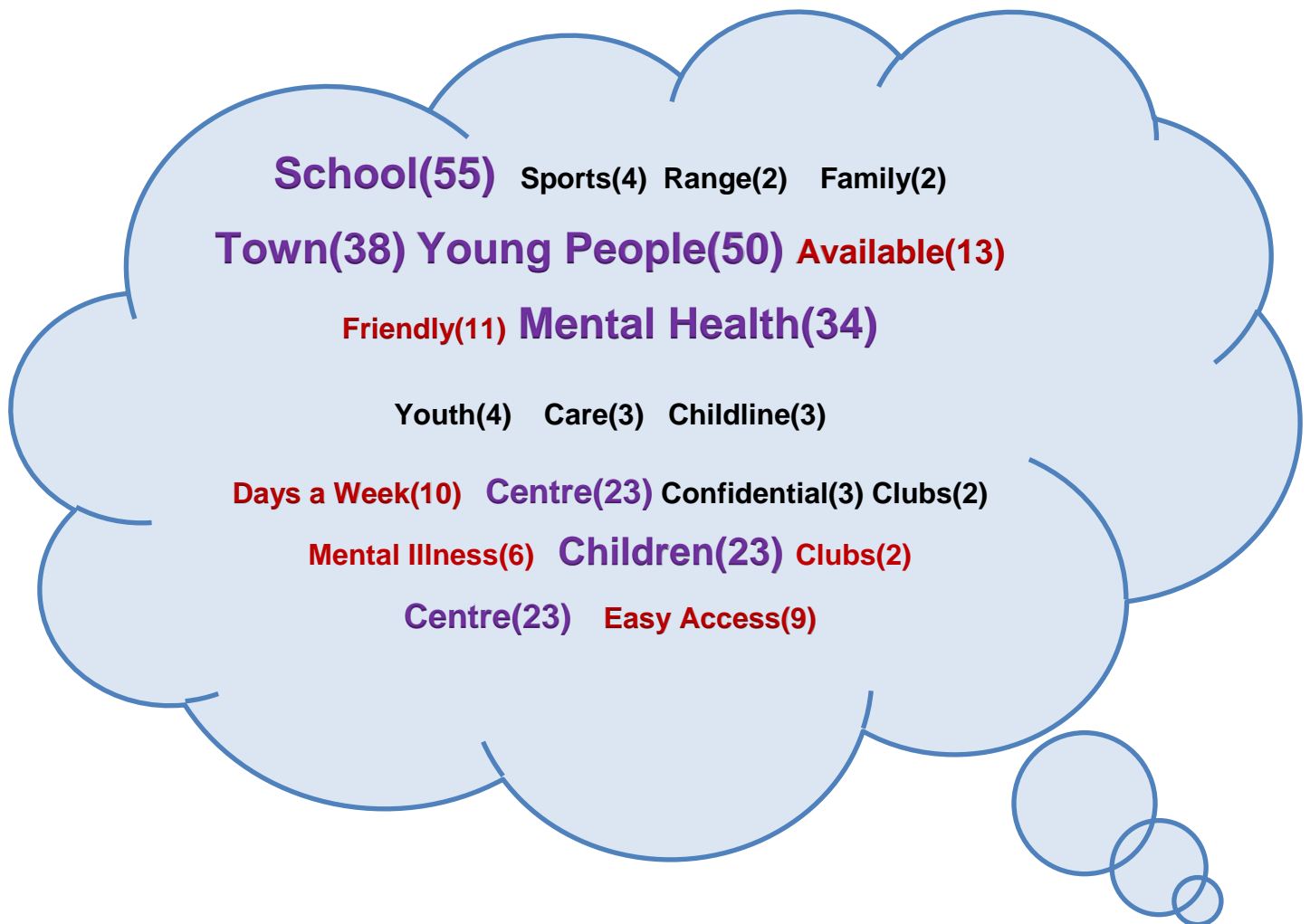
The experience of transgender young people, as a new emerging children’s rights issue, is particularly concerning, as reflected by one survey respondent;

“...the service in place for transgender people is simply a mess in my opinion, I would have hoped that after several years of suicide attempts and a hospitalisation that they would take my transgender issue seriously and give me the hormone replacement therapy I so desperately needed...”

Ideal mental health service

Young people were asked in Q42 (the final survey question), to describe the ideal mental health service for children and young people. As a prompt, they were asked to consider several different factors such as when and where these services would be available, and what kind of services children and young people would be most likely to use. Many of the young people typed full paragraphs of ideas and suggestions. In total 213 respondents completed this section. The word cloud in Figure 5 below captures young people’s views on an ideal mental health service overall;

Figure 5: Ideal mental health service for children and young people



A key theme emerging from the survey responses is that mental health services must be accessible. This spanned issues regarding opening times (beyond school hours), waiting lists, and locality;

“They should be made available on weekends during the day and evening, and after school times during the week.”

“I think there should be more facilities available because if you need to be seen my (by) CAMHS, you have to get referred by a doctor. The waiting lists are very long up to a year! I think there should be more facilities so young people wouldn’t have to wait so long to be seen when they are desperate for help.”

With regard to locality, some young people recognised a lack of mental health support in their area, as well as logistical problems in accessing such services that are not nearby;

“I think there should be more mental health services available to young people who live in rural areas.”

“There would also need to be a chance for some children to get a lift to and from the services because they might not have anyone to bring them and they could be afraid to ask.”

Additionally, young people provided several suggestions about how the physical space should look and feel. For example, confidentiality and discretion were key considerations, noting that such facilities should be housed in ‘*inconspicuous buildings*’;

“(So that it is) not obvious that you were going to see a doctor at a mental health unit.”

“Normal house or building to go to, available all the timemake more young people aware and feel comfortable to talk to someone.”

“Try to make it something young people wouldn't be embarrassed to go to.”

Furthermore, young people felt the physical space should be ‘*a kind welcoming place*’, ‘*bright*’, and ‘*friendly*’ potentially with ‘*separate facilities for minors*’. Aside from the look and feel of the ideal facility, young people also commented on the type of treatment that should be available, e.g., ‘*Emotional support, therapy and advice on how to cope with your mental health disorder*’. Others suggested group counselling/therapy and support from other (young) people who have similar experiences and problems i.e. peer support and group counselling;

“I feel from past experiences that there should be more group work with other young people to help show that young people are not alone and they can relate to others their own age and can discuss situations in a safe, controlled environment.”

“Opportunities to talk to people with similar experience ...peer mentoring.”

Young people felt that that the mental health practitioners should be qualified and trained in working with young people particularly, as well as approachable, friendly, and welcoming;

“...as long as qualified doctors work there and the right type of treatment is provide...”

“...with workers trained in working with young people...”

“...understanding doctors not people that are strict or boring people that are easy to talk to and can give actual practical help...”

Practitioners should put young people at their ease, show young people that they care and the therapy should even be an enjoyable experience;

“...(someone who would say) here’s tea and sandwiches...here’s where you are going to sit...lots of colour like pink (in the room)...young ones together colouring in and having positive parties in their own happy world...” (young person with learning disabilities from a workshop - view was expressed in the context of services being provided through youth centres)

In addition to services provided in the community, some young people also highlighted how mental health support should also be available in schools;

“Mental health services should be available in school throughout the day.”

“There should be more assessments in schools to ensure all individuals understand and are given appropriate attention about the topic!”

Young people’s support for school and community based counselling services that are flexible, fully accessible and “future proofed” by Government is evidenced in youth@clc’s survey of Young People’s Views on Accessing Counselling Services carried out across 13 post primary schools in NI in 2013.⁴⁷ The 2013 survey also evidenced that 90% of year 14-15 year olds are in favour of a “drop in facility” for accessing mental health support in schools.

As well as physical, face-to-face support, online, virtual support was also suggested, particularly for those who might be affected by the perceived stigma of having a mental health problem;

“I feel like services such as Skype would be good for this as some people don’t want to make it obvious that they are struggling with mental health issues.”

“Online help, ...If there was a service available w(h)ere a young person could voice their health concerns through a private online chat room ... then more people would come forward about their concerns.”

Many of the themes raised by young people in the survey were also reflected in young people’s discussions in the workshops.

Many young people in NI feel, that the current frameworks for supporting children and young people with mental health concerns in community, schools and hospitals are falling short of what many of them require to enjoy good mental health in their lives.

⁴⁷ <http://www.childrenslawcentre.org.uk/index.php/youth-participation-advocacy/rights-in-action/29-pages/youth/rights-in-action/137-2012-2013-projects>

These responses demonstrate that young people in general have clear expectations of an ideal mental health service for both themselves and their peers. They require a service which is fully accessible (open 24 hours and more availability in rural areas), discreet, friendly and welcoming, is age appropriate (particularly empathic to teenagers) and is effective. Young people have also demonstrated their capacity to prescribe how and where it should be delivered to ensure better outcomes for all service users, based on their own direct expertise.

As the combined evidence from both the survey and the workshops suggest, by reviewing and remodelling all levels of CAMHS services, as well as early intervention strategies, in direct collaboration with young people (in particular those who are service users), young people are more likely to seek support when they need it, to benefit from the service received, and thereby enjoy their right to lead happier, healthier lives.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Overall Results for Young People's Self Reported Enjoyment of Rights

Table 1: Marginalised group means and full sample group means

	All N= 602- 701	Disabilit y N=37-41	Detention N=4-5	NEET N=3-4	In care N=4	Young carer N=47-56	LGB N=48- 65	Trans N=9-11
Participation in education decision-making	3.03	2.97	2.22	2.19	3.08	2.93	2.81	2.55
Participation in home decision-making	4.04	3.50	2.33	2.89	4	3.95	3.59	3.52
Participation in community decision-making	2.69	2.63	1.67	1.72	3.25	2.73	2.24	1.53
Participation in government decision-making	2.20	2.08	1.23	1.75	3.00	2.26	2.02	1.53
Knowledge and ability to exercise rights	3.25	3.21	1.72	2.55	3.00	3.33	3.08	2.67
Perceived adult respect for children's rights	3.72	3.38	2.53	2.75	3.75	3.51	3.48	2.94
Enjoyment of community life	3.31	2.99	1.69	2.15	3.19	3.32	2.96	2.01
Enjoyment of leisure facilities	3.64	3.26	1.33	2.89	3.75	3.47	3.09	2.32
Mental health awareness	3.47	3.55	3.58	2.75	3.50	3.55	3.68	3.30
Comfort in seeking mental health support	2.92	2.95	2.92	2.17	3.54	3.19	2.66	2.35
Suitability of mental health services	3.29	3.00	1.94	2.46	3.88	3.37	3.13	2.61

Appendix 2: Survey Questionnaire

Introduction to the Survey

We are youth@clc youth advisory panel to the Children's Law Centre. We have designed this survey with the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast and Save the Children. We would like as many 14-17 year olds as possible, to take part in our anonymous survey on Children's Rights in Northern Ireland.

All the questions in the survey are optional.

Everything you tell us is anonymous and held in strictest confidence.

We hope you feel free to answer the questions as fully and as honestly as you can.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says that all children and young people have:

A Right to participate in all decisions which affect your life

A Right to have your rights respected without discrimination

A Right to live in a society which supports you to achieve your full potential

By completing this survey you can tell us if, in your experience, you think this happens in reality.

Your views will be included in a Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2015. In 2016 the Committee will tell our Government what changes are needed to make Northern Ireland a better place for all children and young people.

This is your chance to have a real say in improving children's lives in Northern Ireland.

Thank you for your time.

To begin we would like to know a little bit more about you. This will help us see if different types of young people answer differently to some questions, for example, boys compared to girls.

1. What age are you?
2. How would you describe yourself?



3. How would you describe your religious background?
4. Which word best describes your political views?
5. Are you a young carer? (Is anyone depending on you to look after them, for example a child or an older relative who is unwell or a disabled person).
6. What is your marital status?
7. Which word best describes where you live?

8. Please tick all that apply to you.

- I am in education
- I am in full time employment
- I am in part time employment
- I am currently in training
- I am not in education, training or employment
- I am in detention (juvenile justice centre)
- I am currently "in care" or have been "in care" in the past
- I am currently in a hospital

9. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Yes, No

10. If you answered yes, please tick which option best describes your disability

- Physical disability
- Learning disability
- Sensory disability

11. How would you describe yourself?

- Male
- Female
- Trans (male)
- Trans (female)

12. How would you describe yourself?

13. What is your postcode? (e.g. BT15 1AB)

14. If there is anything else you would like to add about who you are, you can do so here.

We would like to know how much you feel the adults around you listen to you and take your views seriously. We will ask you a series of questions, some of which are specific to



your place of education e.g. school, FE college, training centre, juvenile justice centre or within a hospital setting . If you are not in education or training at the moment, please answer based on your experience of your last place of education or training. Other questions relate to your family, your community and the Government.

In your experience, how often do these things happen?

15. My place of education listens to what I have to say about...(never, rarely, quite often, very often, always)

What we do in class

What I have to say about the rules

How to make our school/FE college/training centre better

16. In my place of education... ...(never, rarely, quite often, very often, always)

I can give my opinions
freely

The adults make it easy for
me to give my views

The adults take my views
seriously

The adults take my views
into account when they
make decisions

The adults talk to me about
how decisions are made

The adults make sure I can
easily get the information I
need about what is going
on in the school/FE
college/training centre

17. What do you think could be done in your place of education to make sure that young people's views are taken seriously?

Now we want to know if you think the adults in your "home life" take your views seriously. When we say "home life" we mean the adults that you live with e.g. parent(s), guardians, foster parents, your social worker in a children's home or others with responsibility for you in the juvenile justice centre, hospital or other settings.

18. Firstly we would like to know a little bit about the other people who you live with. You can do this by selecting one of the following options...

19. If you selected "other" in Q18, you can tell us a bit more about this person(s) in the space below, if you would like to.

20. In my home life... ...(never, rarely, quite often, very often, always)

I can give my views freely

The adults make it easy for me to give my views

The adults take my views seriously

The adults take my views into account when they make decisions

The adults talk to me about how decisions are made in my home life

When I need help, support or information I can easily talk to someone in my home life

21. What do you think could be done in your "home life" to make sure that your views & the views of other children and young people that you live with are taken seriously?

Now we want to know if you think the adults in your community take your views seriously. When we say "community" we mean your neighbourhood or the area/place where you are living. It includes things like the leisure centres or activity centres you go to, libraries, shops, parks, youth clubs, churches or community centres etc.

SECTION 2: Do adults seek your views and take them into consideration in ma...

22. In my community... ..(never, rarely, quite often, very often, always)

The adults ask me for my views

The adults take my views seriously

The adults take my views into account when they make decisions

I can easily find out about activities (like youth clubs, sports activities, church clubs) for young people my age

I can easily find out about what's going on for young people in places like youth clubs, parks, community centres etc

I am asked for my views on
what types of new activities
or services should go in to
my community to make it a
better place to live

I am asked for my views on
how to make my community
a safer place to live for
everyone

I am asked for my views on
how happy I am with the
activities and services
available in my community

The adults make it easy for
me to give my views on the
activities and services
available in my community

23. Now we would like to know how much you agree that politicians in the NI Government (MLAs) listen to young people or ask for your/their opinion. How much do you agree with the following statements...(Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)

I know how to get in touch with my local MLA when I need to with an issue that affects me or other young people

I feel confident enough

to present my views to my local MLA

Politicians in Government

ask for my views on
important issues

I think politicians take

young people's views
seriously

I think politicians make

changes based on young

people's views

Politicians make

information easy to find

and understand for young

people

24. What do you think could be done by the NI Government to make sure that young people's views are taken seriously?

We would also like to know how much you know about your rights. Examples of your rights include:

the right to have your views heard on all matters affecting you

the right to have your views taken into account when adults are making decisions about you

the right to be treated fairly and with respect

the right to get the kind of support you need to be happy and achieve your goals in life.

25. Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree with each... ..(Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)

I know a lot about my rights

I am treated equally



I understand what children's rights means to me and my life

I know where to go to get information on my rights

If I felt my rights were being abused, I would know how to make a complaint

If I felt my rights were being abused, I would feel confident enough to make a complaint

The adults around me to treat me with respect

I feel confident to share my views with adults on important issues

26. What do you think could be done by Government to make sure that young people know more about their rights and how to use them to improve their lives?

Now we would like to ask you some questions about your social life...

27. How often would you go out socially? (never, rarely, not sure, sometimes, all the time)

28. Where do you go out socially? (please tick all that apply to you)

Shops

Cinema

Restaurants

Parks

Leisure facilities

Just around your area

City centre/town centre/public spaces

Clubs

Music venues

Theatres



Friends' houses

29. Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree with each... ...(Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)

I feel comfortable hanging out with my friends in the street

I feel like I am welcome in my area by other residents

It's easy for me to go out socially

There are places to hang out for as long as you want

The places available to me to hang out are safe

We get along well with the adults and feel respected in our community

I feel respected in my area by the police

I am often told to move on from a place when hanging out with my friends

I feel trusted by the adults in my community (e.g. neighbours/police/parents etc)

I trust the adults in my community (e.g. police/neighbours/parents etc)

There is plenty for young people to do in my area

I feel like I am welcome in my area by shopkeepers

I don't feel like I'm treated any differently because I am a young person

Young people in my area have a good relationship with the police

30. Have you ever been asked to move on from a place when hanging out in your area? (never, rarely, not sure, sometimes, all the time)

31. If you have ever been told to move on from a place when hanging out with friends, can you tell us who you were asked to move on by and how often this has happened to you.

Now we would like to ask you some questions about your access to leisure facilities. By "access" we mean that these facilities are available to you for your use.

32. Which leisure facilities have you got access to? (please tick all that apply)

Shops

Cinema

Leisure centre

Restaurants

Parks



Community centres

Clubs

Music venues

Arts/theatre venues

Libraries

33. Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree with each... ..(Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)

I have easy access to a range of leisure facilities

These facilities suit me and my needs

I feel welcome in the leisure facilities available to me

Other users in these facilities treat me with respect

At these facilities, the

staff treat me with the same respect as they treat other users

I can afford to use

leisure facilities whenever I want to

34. Please fill in this box if you would like to add additional comments on your experience of using social spaces/leisure facilities where you live.

Now we would like to ask you some questions about your views on mental health.

35. If you were concerned about your mental and emotional health, where/who would you be most likely to go to for support or help? You can select more than one option.

School counsellor

School teacher

Doctor

Community/youth club

Religious leader

Family

Friends

Helpline

Online

A special support service in my local area



Nowhere, I wouldn't get help
Don't know

36. Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree with each... ..(Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)

Poor mental health is a big issue for children and young people in Northern Ireland

I know a lot about the mental health issues affecting young people today
I have been given information about mental health services that I understand
I think young people are comfortable discussing mental health concerns
In my community young people's mental health is given priority
I would know where to go to get mental health support, if I needed help
I would be comfortable trying to get help if I had mental health issues
I could get to mental health services easily if I needed them

Some young people get help because of poor mental health. Help is available from a range of different places. We would like you to think about the mental health services available to you. Even if you don't know much about mental health services, or haven't used them, please tell us how much you agree with each statement just based on your opinion of what they **might** be like...

37. Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree with each... ..(Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)

I think the mental health services available to me are good
I would know how to get an appointment at these services if I needed one
I trust the mental health services available to me
There are enough mental health services to help all young people who need them
The doctors/staff at these services are supportive of young people
I would be comfortable using these services
I would be comfortable to ask for a different doctor if i didn't like the one given to me
Doctors at mental health services are good at talking to young people
Doctors understand the mental health issues specific to young people
The opening hours at mental health services suit young people
The information provided at these services is appropriate for young people
The treatment is suitable for young people

The treatment is equal, regardless of what type of young person went there
The services help any type of young person with any type of mental health concern

38. Have you ever experienced poor mental health or had a concern about your mental health?

Yes, No

39. If you answered yes above, did you receive help for this?

Yes, No

If you answered yes to Q39 and you feel comfortable telling us more about your experience of receiving help, you can add some comments in the box below.

40. Were you satisfied with the help you received?

Yes, No

Other (please specify)

41. Can you explain your answer to Q40 in the box below.

42. And finally, in your opinion, what would the ideal mental health service for children and young people look like? You might consider... Where should these services be based? When should they be available? What kind of services would children and young people be most likely to use? You can type your suggestions in the box below.

Appendix 3: Young People's Research Workshops

Methodology and Ethics

Children's Law Centre (CLC), Save the Children (SC) and youth@clc ran 11 research workshops with children and young people, between November 2014 and May 2015, to supplement evidence gathered in the survey. A range of children and young people, supported by NGOs, were invited to participate in discussions on the extent to which they felt they were enjoying their rights. The workshops included children and young people; with learning and physical disabilities, who are NEET (not in employment, education, training or employment), who come from BME backgrounds, who are justice experienced, who live in rural areas and who are young peer advocates/youth fora members.

The workshops were facilitated by CLC, SC and youth@clc in partnership with NGOs across Northern Ireland. Consent was gained from both parents and children and young people, where recording devices were used to accurately record young people's views and in the use of photographs for the report. During each workshop facilitators also took verbatim notes to further ensure that the views and experiences of children and young people were accurately represented in the report.

Workshop facilitators were provided with a set of questions, which were consistently used across all the workshops (with the exception of the 'Children's Court' event) to generate discussion with young people on the four themes of the report; the extent to which they were enjoying participation in decision making, community life free from discrimination, knowledge of rights and mental health issues for children and young people. Research workshops also included awareness raising activities to ensure understanding of the UNCRC within the context of the themes of the report, the UN Committee's 2008 Concluding Observations and Recommendations to the UK State Parties and the relevance of the report to young people's lives in NI.

Additional expert facilitators were engaged to support young people with learning, sensory or physical disabilities to express their views and to ensure that these views were accurately recorded and represented in the report. In the workshop for BME children, artists were employed by the NGO Belong to support participation by 7 – 11 year olds in the report. In this workshop the children were asked what they liked and disliked about living in Northern Ireland and what they would change about living in NI to make it better for them. The artists supported the children to represent their views and experiences of life in NI through the medium of creative artwork.

Young People's Research Workshops: Profile of Participants and NGO Co-Facilitators

	Date	NGO	Type of children/young people	Nos	Gender	Age
1	03.12.14	Include Youth	Justice Experienced	3	male	18 +
2	11.12.14	Open Event on Discrimination	Mixed	27	mixed	16-17
3	20.01.15	NEETS Forum	NEET	9	mixed	17-21
4	28.01.15	Woodlands JJC	Justice Experienced	2	mixed	15-16
5	06.02.15	Youth Action NI Dungannon	Rural	4	mixed	18-23
6	17.02.15	Barnardos NI	Physical, learning and sensory disabled	8	mixed	14-22
7	23.02.15	Mencap	Learning Disabled	2	mixed	19 - 21
8	07.03.15	NI Youth Forum	Youth Advocates	8	mixed	16-18
9	11.03.15	Young NCB NI, Belfast Youth Forum Ardoyne Youth Club	Youth Advocates	22	mixed	16-18
10	18.04.15	Belong 'Children's Court'	BME children	30	mixed	7-12
11	6.05.15	BBC Children in Need "Rights and Realities" Grantee's workshop	BME young people	30	mixed	12 – 16