Get Ready for Geneva!

Submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Children’s Rights Alliance for England

URGENT

2008
The drafting committee that wrote this report is a group of children from the Get ready for Geneva project. They are from all over England with a range of ages and backgrounds.

- Alex White age 17
- Charley-Louise Barker age 12
- Daniel-Sean Huisman age 15
- Dominic King age 14
- Imogen Walsh age 17
- Iqra Bilal age 17
- Jacob Wells age 15
- Jules Mattsson age 13
- Kat Terry age 12
- Laura Partoon age 17
- Rose Graves age 17
- Sharon Skinner age 17
- Wez Smith age 14

Some important things to know about how this report has been written:

- Where we have used the word children in this report we mean children and young people aged 17 and under
- The drafting committee agreed that we would only change the spelling and punctuation in quotes where the meaning was unclear in the original quote. Otherwise all of the quotes in the report are as they were originally written in the surveys or said in the focus groups
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is referred to as the UNCRC throughout this report
- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is referred to as the UN Committee throughout this report
- The children on the Get ready for Geneva project were given training and support in writing and researching this report.
Introduction

The aim of this report is to review the state of children’s human rights in England. It is about what children think and feel about how well their rights are respected.

346 children took part in the children’s rights investigation focus groups and 1,362 online surveys were completed by children from all over England. This means that a total of 1,708 children participated in our children’s rights investigation.

Every child has a story to tell and opinions to express about their lives. These investigations and online surveys gave them this opportunity to have their say and to be listened to. There were many issues raised by children about a wide variety of subjects which matter to them.

We are going to look at issues that affect children in their everyday lives and show their recommendations for change.

This report asks the following questions:

- Are children’s human rights being respected in England?
- Do children know their rights?
- Is life as it should be for a child in England?

Get ready for Geneva is a 3 year project. It is part of the Children’s Rights Alliance for England (CRAE).

The project is run by 4 groups of children; each person has a specific role within their group. The groups are:

- **Steering group** - helps to make all the important decisions about Get ready for Geneva
- **Website and communications team** - makes sure we have a good website and everything we write is easy to understand
- **Children’s rights investigators** - visited groups of children across the country to investigate the state of children’s rights
- **Children’s rights champions** - push for children’s human rights to be respected where they live

There is also a dedicated team of adult staff working on the project including an experienced social researcher. Their role at this stage of the project is to support children to gather and present the evidence about how well children’s rights are being respected in England.
## Get ready for Geneva project timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>Get ready for Geneva children develop campaigns based on the concluding observations. A network of 240 children’s rights champions (aged 17 and under) will take action on their rights in their local communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>The final report from the Get ready for Geneva investigation will be published.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2008</td>
<td>The UN Committee will release concluding observations made from their examination of the UK.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September/October 2008</td>
<td>The UN Committee will examine the UK Government.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2008</td>
<td>The children’s delegation will go to Geneva.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2008</td>
<td>A residential was held for the children’s delegation to Geneva. The children sent their report to the UN Committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2008</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) sent their report to the UN Committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2008</td>
<td>A meeting was held to analyse the information gathered from the surveys and focus groups. The drafting committee started writing the report.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2008</td>
<td>The Get yourself to Geneva competition was launched! The competition gave children the chance to go to Geneva and say how children’s rights are respected in England.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2008</td>
<td>The Get ready for Geneva website was launched and the children’s rights investigation started.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2007</td>
<td>The Government produced a draft report on all the things they’ve done since the last examination. Children from Get ready for Geneva sent in their comments to the Government.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2007</td>
<td>The Get ready for Geneva project starts! A residential* for the steering group and website team was held.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2007</td>
<td>Competition flyers to get into the Get ready for Geneva project were sent out to schools and organisations working with children across England.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>This was when the UK was last examined and the last set of concluding observations were made.</td>
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* *A residential is a two day meeting with an overnight stay.
How we did the research

The children’s rights investigation was made up of a series of surveys and focus group interviews designed and led by children and young people (aged between 8 and 17).

Surveys

We designed 7 surveys on the themes of education, respect, freedom, family and friends, crime, health and safety, and play. We ran a different survey every month on the Get ready for Geneva website so that children across England could take part.

As children’s rights investigators, we prioritised which issues were most important to find out more about. We did this using our own experiences, and looking at the UN Committee’s concluding observations from 2002. We then helped to write the questions for all the surveys and the focus group interviews.

Focus group interviews

The 2002 concluding observations said some groups of children needed further attention from the UK Government. We tried to make sure we spoke to children from all of these groups, from all over England.

To make sure that the information from the focus group interviews was collected in the same way, we asked each group the same set of basic questions. Some extra questions were added depending on the group we were hearing from. Before we started the focus groups, we also found out more about the life experiences of the children we would be visiting. This helped us to work out what follow up questions we should ask. At the end of every interview, we recorded our thoughts about the interview, and if there was anything that surprised us.

Who we spoke to

We interviewed 346 children in focus groups and 1,362 children answered questions about their experiences in our surveys. The children who filled in the surveys were of all ages, and from lots of different backgrounds.

The children that took part in the investigation were pleased that their views would be part of a report about the state of children’s human rights in England, and hoped that their views will be listened to and acted on.
Who we interviewed in the focus groups

Most people we spoke to were under 18. A small number of young parents and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people who were over 18 spoke about their experiences as children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-18 year olds</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black and ethnic minority children</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children affected by violence, abuse and neglect</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in care</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children in trouble with the law</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children living in poverty</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under 11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled children</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) children</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee and asylum seeking children</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveller children</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young parents</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>167</strong></td>
<td><strong>179</strong></td>
<td><strong>346</strong></td>
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Who responded to the surveys

1,362 children answered questions about their experiences in our surveys.

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**Gender**

- Male: 55%
- Female: 45%
- No answer: 0%

**Disability**

- Yes: 80%
- No: 10%
- I'm not sure: 0%
- No answer: 0%

**Ethnicity**

- White: 50%
- Black: 20%
- Mixed: 0%
- Asian: 10%
- Chinese: 10%
- Other: 0%
- No answer: 0%
Our findings: Respect and freedom

The top issues highlighted in the results of the respect and freedom surveys and focus groups were:

- Stereotyping, respect and discrimination
- Having a say (complaints, contact proceedings and the right to vote)
- Access to information

Stereotyping, respect and discrimination

Many children who responded to the respect survey felt that they are unfairly stereotyped and judged.

We asked:
“Do you think children are judged on the clothes they wear?”

The results showed that 92.4% of children answered yes to this question. One child commented:

“First impressions are everything. People form judgments before they get to know someone. This can lead to false views of a young person.”

When asked to explain why they thought children were judged on the clothes they wore, the majority of respondents said that it was because children wearing hoodies were often linked with some sort of anti-social behaviour. It was suggested that children who wore hoodies were stereotyped as likely to cause trouble and/or to exhibit potentially threatening behaviours. There was also a suggestion that clothes were often used by adults to denote a child’s values and personality. Children wearing bright coloured clothes were perceived to be very outgoing, whereas those who wore black, gothic type clothes were linked to particular types of music and food.

Another factor in the stereotyping of children might be the media. This is because what the media says can have a big influence on all parts of society and it can influence how people think.

We asked:
“Do you think the media gives a fair picture of children and young people living in England?” The majority of children (78.2%) who answered this question said no.

One child stated:
“The older generations generally jump to conclusions about the younger generations through the media.”
This issue also came up in lots of the focus group interviews. For example, some children in care felt that they were stereotyped by the media and were judged as juvenile delinquents. They also felt that their personal views were disregarded in their review meetings. (A review meeting is a regular meeting that takes place when a child is in care. The main purpose of the meeting is to review a child’s care plan. Every child has a care plan which should say what needs to be done to look after the child.)

Discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers was an issue. Some refugee and asylum seeking children criticised the media for presenting them as having a “bad image”.

“Change the media of us, we haven’t done anything wrong…we can’t even reveal where we’re from, everyone hates Afghanis.”

One suggestion for how to deal with this issue was to introduce Government guidelines for the media regarding fair representation of children and other stereotyped groups. Another suggestion was to increase integration between different social groups, increase tolerance and break outdated stereotypes.

In 2002 the UN Committee said that the UK Government must develop plans to stop all types of discrimination against children. This has not been achieved and we would like to urge the UN Committee to consider this as an ongoing problem.

Treatment by adults

We found that lots of children feel that certain adults do not respect children and their rights. The respect survey results showed that 35.6% of children feel that they are disrespected by their MPs and 43.3% of children feel that they are disrespected by bus drivers.

Another group of adults which the survey asked about was shop staff. The survey results show that 37.6% of children don’t feel respected by shop staff. One child said:

“They assume young people cannot afford things therefore, they think they will steal.”

Children in the focus group interviews also had a lot to say about how they are treated in shops:

“Being a young person wanting to enter our local shop is a nightmare. Only 2 young people in at any 1 time, and then you are constantly watched by an increasing number of shop assistants. However, if you are an adult wanting to enter the shop, you can walk straight into the shop (even when several other young people are queuing outside, waiting to be allowed in) and buy what you want without the constant eye of a shop assistant on you.”

“Most (not all) shop assistants you’ll see will sit up when a young person enters their shop usually because of the media saying that we are all thieves and just want to steal things so it’s partly their fault for believing mainly the media.”

We were surprised by the responses of the children who had been in trouble with the police. One child felt that they had been unfairly harassed by the police because of their clothing:

“Unfairly they breathalysed me with no evidence of drinking [and they] gave me a drug test also with no evidence and threatened me all the time because I was wearing a hoody with my hoody up because it was cold.”

It seems from the survey results that the group of children most susceptible to unfair treatment by adults are 15-17 year olds, closely followed by 10-14 year olds. When we looked at who answered this question, we found out that almost half of the children who answered were aged 15-17.
Discrimination because of who you are

We asked if some children are shown less respect than other children because of who they are (for example, if they are disabled, living in care or belong to a particular religion or group). **71.1% of those who took part in the survey said that they felt that some children are discriminated against because of who they are and their circumstances.** Here are some of the things children said in answer to this question:

“Ethnic minorities (e.g. Asians, Africans etc.) – we are generally seen as the ‘lesser’ races in comparison as we supposedly take away British culture etc. Muslims – due to the media and the way in which it portrays them on a whole as terrorists.”

“I think teenage mothers are treated unfairly simple because people tend to think that they have no regard for their future and they don’t think about their actions.”

“I think it differs. Different groups of people will treat different groups of people in a variety of ways. For instance, many adults will mostly frown upon those living in council estates and treat them unfairly, as they believe that living on a council estate means that you are likely to commit various crimes. People living on a council estate assume that children living in middle class homes are constantly out to get them, have a high opinion of themselves and so on.”

Issues around discrimination and respect also came out of the freedom survey. We asked **“How do you feel about the way people treat you?”** One third of children said they did not mind how they were treated, over a quarter said they like the way they are treated and a fifth said that they didn’t like the way they are treated. Several children said they liked being treated with respect.

“I am treated with respect by the people I know, I expect nothing more.”

However, many who do not like the way they are treated spoke about discrimination and stereotyping for reasons such as race, disability, being in care, beliefs and their age.

“Because I am not from England, but I have come to live here, many English people do not like me.”

“I have cerebral palsy and I really hate it when people treat me as though I can’t think for myself.”

“People judge you on what you wear…..”

Children also mentioned how they were discriminated against merely because of their age and dress. For example, shop owners and bus drivers treated them differently and disrespectfully. A number of complaints were also about teachers. This result links up with what we found in the respect survey about how certain adults treat children.

We think these results are really important because they show that there is a lot of discrimination affecting children. Children should be able to feel secure. This is a clear violation of article 2 of the UNCRC. We know that the UK has laws against racism and sexism but it seems unfair that discrimination based on age is not treated in the same way as other types of discrimination.
Having a say (complaints, contact proceedings and the right to vote)

Complaints

The data showed that a shockingly high percentage of children would not know how to make a complaint if they needed to. For example, 63.8% of children who answered this question do not know how to make a formal complaint about their doctor or dentist. 22.5% of children don’t know how to complain about their social worker.

However, 62.3% of children who answered the question would have been able to make a complaint about their teacher, and over half of children answered yes about whether they could complain about their school. Nevertheless, the interviews that took place showed that the complaints were actually made by their parents or carers, not by children themselves.

We feel that there should be more information accessible to children on how to make complaints about public services such as health. There should be better communication with children to make them aware of complaints procedures.

Contact with parents

Lots of interesting information came up when we asked children about their involvement in situations where parents were separating. We asked children if their parents were divorced or separated, and if so “Did you have a say in choosing who you wanted to live with?” 52.3% of children who answered this question had a say in choosing who they wanted to live with. This means that almost half of the children who had experienced parental separation (47.7%) did not feel they had a say in where they went to live.

We think ALL children need to have their views heard about where they would like to live.

We also asked those who had experienced parental separation “Did you have a say in deciding whether to stay in contact with your parent?” 68.2% answered yes. Nevertheless, 31.8% answered no. That’s a third of the children who answered our survey who are not getting a choice about whether they want to stay in touch with the parent that they do not live with.

This is a major issue. Many children may want to stay in touch with a parent that they do not live with but they are not asked whether they want to have contact. We hope that one day all children will have a choice on whether they stay in contact with their parents.
The right to vote

One of the questions in the freedom survey asked “Should 16 and 17 year olds have the right to vote?” 120 children answered the question: out of the 120, 60.8% (a large majority) answered yes and only 19.2% answered no. One of the children who answered yes to this question said:

“We all have a voice, and everyone talks about giving the impression that we are treated like adults. Adults vote. So why can’t we?”

Access to information

We found a lot of interesting information on whether children have access to advice and information or counselling services. When asked “Have you ever been unable to get information because you didn’t understand the way it was written?”, 19.1% said yes. Some of the things children said about this question were:

“Nobody wanted to explain things to me at college and I didn’t know how to ask when I didn’t understand because my English is not good.”

“Because we were shown a leaflet which I felt over simplified a government document. It was patronizing and I was unable to gain any new information from it.”

“Things tend to be written in jargon.”

“I have a learning disability.”

We were really shocked that information on the UNCRC has also been very inaccessible for so many young people. A massive 87.6% answered no when asked whether they have been given information in school on the UNCRC. This strictly goes against the concluding observation made in 2002, which said that the UNCRC should be in the primary and secondary curriculum and in teacher training courses.

This has obviously not happened and we feel that awareness of children’s rights should be compulsory, and information on the UNCRC should be available in all schools, in citizenship classes or in PSHE (personal, social and health education).

Having access to mental health services and counselling in schools was also an important topic in the focus groups. Reasons for this were “so you don’t have any worries” and “to help you cope with anxiety”. However, there were concerns with discretion and their right to privacy over personal matters. Therefore we feel that there should be provision of professional services as well as after-school clubs in order for children to cope with exam stress. This subject is looked at in more detail in the health and safety chapter of this report.
Our findings: **Friends and family**

The top issues highlighted in the friends and family survey and the focus groups were:
- **Smacking, children being humiliated and criticised at home**
- **Supporting families**
- **The rights of children living in particular situations**
- **Children making their own choices about religion and belief**

### Smacking and children being humiliated and criticised at home

One of the questions in our friends and family survey was about how children are treated at home. 14.6% of children said that they were hit in their home sometimes or most of the time. Even though this is not the majority, **it is still 14.6% children too many**.

The survey showed that children of all ages had experienced being hit in their homes, but when children were asked in the focus groups what they would do to help families if they were Prime Minister, it was younger children who were most likely to suggest banning smacking. This was because they thought it was wrong, and that there were lots of other things parents could do as alternatives to smacking.

“Some parents don’t realise that smacking hurts them, because they think it just automatically just stops them, but they don’t realise it’s harmful, it hurts the children.”

This is inexcusable considering that banning smacking was a concluding observation in 2002 and 1995.

A low yet unacceptable percentage of children are always or most of the time criticised (22.9%), ignored (11.5%) and even humiliated (10.7%) in their home. This can have a severe impact on a child’s mental well-being and self-esteem, especially at this vulnerable time of life.

However we are happy to report from the focus group interviews that **most children were very protective of their right to family life** and that being part of a family was important in providing them with the support they needed to grow and develop. We asked the focus group participants “What’s good about living in a family?” Children said that families respected children, and helped them feel included. They also said that families saw children as a special part of the family.

However, on the other hand there were some things that children said were bad about living in a family. Some children didn’t want to talk about their experiences; this may be because they saw this as something private to them. The thing that most children said was bad about families was when arguments and fights happen at home. Another issue was when problems with brothers and sisters caused problems in families, especially if one was favoured more than others.
Supporting families

One of the most important questions we asked in the survey was what the Government could do to better support families. The top things that children thought needed to be done were:

- More help for children that have problems
- More things to do for teenagers
- Reduce the cost of family holidays or days out
- Encourage parents to spend more time with their children

One said:
“Inspire teenagers or young people show them the potential that everyone has if they work hard and believe in themselves, in the hope that they won’t join gangs and fall in with the wrong crowd.”

Lots of children who answered this question also said that more information should be given to parents about children’s rights.

In 2002 the Committee made a concluding observation that the Government should give more information about the UNCRC to children, young people, parents, the public and all other organisations. In 2008, 78.4% of young people either agreed, or strongly agreed that one way that the Government could better support families would be to give them information about children’s rights. The Government seems to have failed to provide this information to parents.

The rights of children living in particular situations

In the focus groups, particular groups of children, including traveller children, stated that some help was needed for sites in nicer places. They thought that the traveller sites needed to have clean water for all caravans, on-site toilets, heating for sheds and skips to dump rubbish. They also said that often traveller sites were hidden from the public because they were thought to be a bad thing.

Children in care had lots to say on the subject of families and friends. Some children thought social workers should be monitored more closely to check they were doing everything they could to make sure children receive the best possible care from social workers.

Children in care repeatedly said that social workers had too much control over when they could visit their families. Some children also said they had no say in who they shared a bedroom with. Children living in children’s homes don’t have the same rights as other children. This could be arranging a sleepover. It has to be arranged months in advance to make sure their friend’s parents can be police checked.

Children in care also said that they were worried about how much support they would receive when they move to independent living at the age of 18.

Disabled children were also worried about getting enough help to live on their own. One suggestion was that more houses should be adapted to take into account the needs of disabled children.

Children making their own choices about religion and belief

In the survey we asked children if their parents have ever asked their opinion on lots of different issues. There was a surprising result revealed by the question asking “Have your parents/carers ever asked your opinion on choosing the religion you want to follow?” 25.2% of children said that they had never been given the opportunity to choose which religion (if any) they wanted to follow.

Article 14 states that every child has the right to have his or her own beliefs and religion. We feel that this article is not being respected. Which religion a person follows is a personal decision; it should not be enforced.
Our findings: Health and safety

The top issues highlighted in the results of the health and safety survey and focus groups were:

- Children feeling stressed out and pressurised
- Accessibility of health services
- Lack of accessibility to counselling services for children
- The high cost of and lack of recreational facilities
- Information about healthy living

Children feeling stressed and pressurised

The survey asked “How frequently do you feel stressed out?” and “What types of things make you feel stressed out?” Over 78.3% of the children said that they get stressed at least sometimes. The majority of children said that school/college and exams cause them the most stress. One teenager said that their college gave them “too much work and not enough me time…”; another said that “workload” makes them stressed.

A small number of children who answered this question said that being a victim of bullying is stressful. A minority of children who answered this question said that they feel stressed by their personal image, weight and appearance. We thought this might be a bigger issue, as so many children who responded to the respect survey (see page 7) said that they are judged and treated because of what they wear and how they look.

Problems with the accessibility of health services

Some vulnerable groups of children are affected by different health related issues. Many lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) children find it hard to talk to their doctors to get information and advice because the majority of doctors make assumptions that every child is heterosexual. This inhibits children from seeking health advice (even if they are not seeking advice about sexual health issues).

Many young refugees that took part in focus groups have said they find it hard to get health care because they had no advocate/interpreter to go with them to be able to translate. A vast majority talked about how hard it is to wait for news on their immigration status: this adds a lot of stress and pressure which they fear is damaging their mental and physical health.

For traveller children it was important to use their personal traditional methods of curing illnesses. They also said that they tended to rely on visiting a particular doctor who would have had long links with their community. This sometimes caused problems if this doctor was not available. This means that many traveller children do not have frequent access to health care and advice.

Children who have been in trouble with the law were worried about the health care they receive when they are in detention centres. Children complained about the quality of drinking water, coldness of cells, and hard and uncomfortable beds which make it hard to sleep.

We think more needs to be done to make sure that ALL children have access to really good health care.
Lack of accessibility to counselling services for children

The survey also asked about professional counselling services for children. 77.3% of children thought that it was important for children to have access to professional counsellors. One child said counsellors were important because:

“...children cannot always go to their parents or siblings therefore there should be someone out of school and home for children and young people to go where their information is kept safe.”

Another respondent said:
“Mental illness is a rising problem in young people, and especially teenagers, yet getting treatment is most difficult for young people! Children’s hospitals only treat people up to the age of 16, yet all other hospitals class adults as 18+. Good luck to any 17 year olds who needs support or treatment.”

The survey asked “Do you know how to contact a professional counsellor if you wanted to talk about something that was worrying you?” 60% of the children who answered this question said they didn’t know how to do this.

This clearly highlights the importance of implementing a system to make professional counsellors more accessible to children.

We also asked where professional counsellors should be based. Children could give more than one answer to this question. 83.7% of children who answered this question told us that counsellors should be based in schools and colleges, 48.8% told us that counsellors should be based in youth clubs and 34.9% thought that counsellors should be based in a doctor’s surgery. One respondent even said that counsellors should be based “in shopping malls (like a private booth)”.

In the focus groups there were mixed views about where counsellors should be based. Some children said that there was a stigma about going to a counsellor, and this might be worse if it was in a very public place.

Children living in poverty and LGBT children that took part in the focus groups raised the issue of homelessness and the need for good services – especially relating to mental health. They asked for children who find themselves homeless to have access to more help. Some children said that homeless shelters and hostels don’t have enough staff at weekends, and more qualified people are needed to help children suffering from depression, or who self-harm. LGBT children said there should be hostels especially for them to deal with the discrimination they often face. One said “there is now a growing epidemic of homeless LGBT young people.”

Since so many children are saying they think it’s important to have access to professional counsellors, it is clear the Government needs to try very hard to provide counselling in as many areas as possible, and promote these services to children.
The high cost and lack of recreational facilities

During interviews with groups of vulnerable children we found that they strongly feel they should be given free or subsidised membership to gyms and leisure centres, and PE lessons should be longer. It was considered that the equipment in many gyms was more suited to adults.

It was also suggested that during PE lessons children should be awarded a certificate when they get to a certain level. This would allow them to swim or do other activities when there isn’t an adult present – this would mean that children aren’t always dependent on adults for opportunities to exercise. Children strongly felt that they should be able to use school playgrounds out of school hours, and there should be more variety in after-school clubs.

Information about healthy living

Another issue raised in both the survey and focus groups was access to information on sexual health. 40.3% of the children who took part in the survey said that they do not have enough access to free contraception; 36.1% of the children who responded did not receive enough information to make informed decisions about their sexual health. On a positive note, 47.8% of children feel that they do have someone to talk to about sex or relationships.

In the focus groups children said they felt that they were generally well informed about smoking, drinking and drugs but they felt that information about these issues should be given to children visually, and by professionals (not teachers or parents).

The survey asked “Do you drink alcohol?” 54.7% of children who answered this question said that they do not drink alcohol, 45.2% children said that they do. The survey then asked those children who do drink to tell us how often they drink alcohol. 66 children answered this question. The majority said that they drink alcohol on special occasions, 9 children said they drink alcohol several times a day. We also asked children how they get access to alcohol. The majority of children (69.8%) said that they get access to alcohol through parents or carers.

One child who answered this question said “steal it”. Another respondent said “I buy it myself.”

We were surprised at the number of children who said they often feel stressed and would like access to counselling services. We were also really shocked that certain vulnerable groups of children do not get good access and health care. We feel that children’s rights in relation to health and safety in England are not as they should be and must be better protected.
Our findings: Education

The top issues highlighted in the results of the education survey and focus groups were:

- Involvement in decision-making and being respected in school
- Bullying and feeling safe in school
- Making education more enjoyable

Involvement in decision-making and being respected in school

Society should be built upon respect. In order to keep peace and harmony within society, individuals, groups and organisations should all have respect for each other. This includes within the school environment.

There were lots of issues in the education survey about respect, being listened to and being involved in decision-making. This is a big issue for children in England.

The survey asked if their school listens to what children have to say. Only 30.3% of children who answered the survey said that their school always listens to them. The majority of children who answered the survey said that their school only listens to them sometimes. 5.4% of children said that their school never listens to what children have to say.

The survey also asked if children feel respected by adults in school. The results showed that 30.4% said that they always feel respected by adults in their school. 13.3% of children who answered this question said that they were hardly ever or never respected by adults in their school. Of these, 4.9% of children, when asked if they felt respected by the adults in their schools, replied that they never feel respected. This may seem like a small number but it is not right that 1 in 20 children who answered the education survey do not feel respected by the adults in their school. A similar figure (4.2%) said they never feel respected by the other children in their school.

We must ask why this is happening. Is it due to a lack of education and awareness from other children, as a result of a gap in the school curriculum? Or is it because the way adults and staff treat children in school makes them feel disrespected?

Another question in the survey asked if children get involved in deciding rules about how people should behave in school. The results show that out of the 426 children who responded to this question, 52% said that they did not have a say in how rules are made about people’s behaviour in school. A third of people said that they did have a say in making rules about behaviour in school.

The top issues highlighted in the results of the education survey and focus groups were:

- Involvement in decision-making and being respected in school
- Bullying and feeling safe in school
- Making education more enjoyable
We asked:
“If you had the power, what three things would you do to improve children’s rights in school?”

The data showed that the top issue raised was that children would like more involvement in decision-making.

Some of the things that children said about decision-making in answer to this question were:

“School councils to be elected more fairly.”

“If I had the power, I would give young people more opportunities to speak out.”

“Make school councils compulsory in all schools across the UK.”

“Take action to ensure that our proposals for improvements in the school are actually taken notice of.”

“Improve the power of the school council, including extending responsibility to interviewing for teaching posts – lots of the bad teaching in our school is due to teachers failing to gain the respect & interest of the pupils – I think that having a say in the appointment, students could resolve this dilemma because they can usually tell very quickly whether a teacher will be able to handle a class.”

We thought that these results were really interesting as they show that so many children are not being allowed to enjoy their rights under article 12 of the UNCRC. We were surprised by the amount of children and young people who are not involved in decision-making on issues that affect them and who feel that adults do not listen to them or respect them.
Bullying and feeling safe in school

One of the questions asked in the focus group was “What don’t you like about your school?”

Bullying was highlighted as one of the major issues that children disliked about their schools. Children who were seen as different were most likely to be bullied. This included homophobic bullying, bullying because of race, or bullying because you’re a traveller. Some LGBT children have told us they have not been able to take their GCSEs as they have been taken out of lessons to protect them from bullies.

We asked: “If you had the power, what three things would you do to improve children’s rights in school?”

The data demonstrated that the second most popular issue raised by children was to “stop bullying and improve pupil behaviour.” 13.1% of children raised this as an issue. Some of the comments from children about this issue were:

“Every school should have anti-bullying policies.”

“I feel that children who cause problems in the classroom get more attention than those trying to learn therefore losing out on their education.”

“Deal with bullies strate away.”

“Stop racism.”

“The bullies should get excluded.”

We also asked: “Do you feel safe in school?”

Out of the 428 people who answered this question, 171 felt safe in schools all of the time, but according to our statistics, 4.2% of the people who answered said they never feel safe in school. The Government must not ignore this vital and crucial piece of information: it is still 4.2% of children too many. We also found it interesting that 49.5% children said they only felt safe sometimes or most of the time.

We found the issues about children being bullied and not feeling safe really interesting. A large number of children in England didn’t always feel safe in school. They also felt that bullying wasn’t dealt with in the right way. Every single child out of the 11 million in England should be free from violence, and should be in a learning environment where they feel safe.

We know that in the 2002 concluding observations the UK Government was told that it needed to do more to check on groups of children that are discriminated against. More needs to be done to protect children from bullying and harm, particularly those from vulnerable groups.

Making education more enjoyable

The research from the focus groups showed that children felt that schools should do “fun stuff, that promotes learning as a good thing about school.”

Throughout the focus groups, children highlighted the fact that the school learning environment is putting too much pressure on them. Teenagers particularly highlighted this issue, saying that it often left them feeling “stressed out”. This issue also came out as a big concern for children in the health and safety survey (see page 14).

Children who liked practical work were especially critical of the amount of homework they got, especially as most of this was written rather than practical.
Children who did have play parks nearby said that the quality of the parks was lacking in most areas. A majority of children found items such as litter or cigarette ends scattered throughout the play park. About three quarters of children said the equipment on the play parks was damaged and almost half said they felt intimidated by other children or adults in the parks. In addition, some visitors found potentially dangerous objects in parks. 82.1% of children said they found broken glass. **Almost 50% said they found things like used condoms and nearly a quarter said they found needles in the grass.**

When we asked children if any of their play or leisure facilities had closed down, 41% of children said they had. The main reasons for this were given as lack of funding (45%) and people abusing the facilities (42%). One child said:

“People keepet breacking it and using it for building other ramps what are dangrous so they didn’t put it back up they also did grafitti on it drinking by it and throwing the glass on the ramps so you couldn’t play on it.”
Having enough free time

When we asked if children had enough free time to enjoy themselves, play or have fun we got the response that almost 46.3% think that they don’t get enough time and an almost equal amount (43.3%) think that they do have enough time. One in 10 children who answered this question were not sure if they had enough free time.

Children were also asked “What stops you from playing outside?” Children could give more than one answer to this question. The top 3 reasons were:

- Adults in their area moaning or shouting at them (46%)
- Parents or carers not letting them (45%)
- Fear of strangers (40%)

Feeling safe

We asked children whether they felt safe in their local area. We were told that most people did feel safe (66%) but still almost a quarter felt unsafe. Some of these issues can also be seen in the crime chapter of this report.

Children made lots of different comments in response to this question. Some were positive:

“Where I live is a very safe area.”

“No crime in this area.”

Some were negative:

“Loads of gangs around.”

“Teenagers smoking and drinking sometimes they set things alight.”

More things to do

A very interesting finding was that the majority of children thought they needed more variety of places to go and for them to be more age-appropriate.

One child said:

“Make them [facilities] useable for all ages, from young to older. Especially in my area there is nothing for teenagers between 13-16 to do. Therefore most of them hang around the streets and loiter in the playgrounds causing fear in the younger children as I became older I realized how to occupy myself, as most people after 16 do, yet there are some unfortunate ones that still feel the need to stand on the street corner and drink.”

Some children said that someone should update or maintain existing facilities and improve the fun element:

“By making there more youth clubs for young people to go because it gets people of the street.”

Other children said that play areas and leisure facilities need better security to get rid of bullies and intimidating youths. One child told us:

“Not let people that bully, drink alcohol, have sex… or smoke drugs.”

Finally, children also told us that making places “a bit cleaner” would help.

One big thing that came up in the focus group discussions was the fact that transport can be expensive and is seen as a major barrier to children getting to and from play and leisure facilities.
Making facilities appropriate for ALL children

We found that youth clubs and leisure centres often don’t account for disabled children’s needs. One disabled child said:

“Physically disabled children and children with special needs and learning difficulties aren’t encouraged to take part in any sport at school. The only reason I get the chance to exercise outside school is that my mum drives me to all my activities. As I am a wheelchair athlete I have to travel 40 miles each way twice a week to train. There is nothing available locally.”

According to the focus group religious needs are also not always taken into account. For example, some Muslim girls want female-only swimming sessions.

We think that it is really important that leisure and play facilities are appropriate for ALL children. It is not fair that many children cannot access certain clubs and centres, particularly if they are disabled, from a certain religious group or from a poorer family.
Our findings: Crime

The top issues highlighted in the results of the crime survey and focus groups were:

- Crime and lack of things to do
- Feeling unsafe
- Feeling discriminated against by the police

Crime is still a major issue and affects thousands of children every day. A growing area of concern is gun and knife crime, with precious young lives being taken every year. We would like to highlight 3 questions which were asked in the crime survey which we feel are of particular importance.

Involvement in crime

We asked:

“What things do you think most influence whether children and young people get involved in crime?”

The data shows that boredom caused by a lack of things to do that young people enjoy in their local area has a significant influence, with 53.5% of children agreeing.

The majority of children thought that parents’ attitudes towards children and parents not spending time with their children had an influence on whether they became involved in crime. One child said:

“That is all they know, the way they have been brought up etc.”

A few people also felt that a child’s perception of the kind of future they have influenced their involvement in crime. They added:

“Got a rubbish life so they want to go and ruin someone else’s.”

“If they think they have no future they think f*** it.”

We found it particularly interesting that there are many different reasons for children getting involved in crime, therefore a variety of different approaches need to be taken when tackling children’s involvement in crime.

Evidence from the focus group interviews with children (particularly those who had been in trouble with the law) suggested that because there were few things for them to do, they tended to go out and do things that got them into trouble. We can see this in the following excerpt from one of the interviews:

Interviewer: What is there for young people to do here in terms of play and leisure?

Child 1: Nothing, really. There’s parks but...

Child 2: No, it’s full of drunks and being vandalised and needles everywhere.

Interviewer: So, what do you do?

Child 2: Nothing. Go to work, go home, go to bed, go to work the next day.

Child 3: That’s the way I do.

Child 1: That’s pretty much it. Since me being in care this past year, it’s the same routine. Either you don’t go to school or you do go to school and then you just trek up and down the streets doing whatever with your mates. Most of the time it’s getting in trouble because you’ve got nothing better to do. Go terrorising neighbours or whatever because you’ve got nothing better to do. I know you shouldn’t do that but... They need youth clubs to open up until dead, dead late because that’s when all the teens are out, instead of closing at 8 and expecting teens to go to bed. That’s not going to happen.
The general lack of play and leisure things for children across England led to requests for more leisure centres and bike parks to be made available to children.

**Feeling unsafe**

We also asked:
“In the last 12 months, have you ever carried a knife or gun?”

87% of children said no. However, a shocking 12% responded yes.

Of those who responded yes, 30.6% carried a knife or gun to protect themselves. Another 22.6% carried a knife or gun to threaten or hurt someone. One child responded:

“Everyone carry a knife, and if you get ganged up by 10 people, you have only a few options, run or fight (which is crazy). If you run and someone happens to catch up with you then the only way out is to get them before they get you, I mean I don’t feel safe walking around when it is dark, even at 8 o’clock unless I am in a group of at least 4 people.”

The crime survey also asked “What factors may encourage young people to use knives / guns?”

The responses to this question show that parents or adults in the area using knives / guns have a huge influence on children, with 45.1% agreeing that children might be encouraged to use weapons because they see other adults in their area, including their parents, using them.

The data also showed that half of the children who answered this question thought that children might be encouraged to use weapons because their friends did. 110 out of the 206 children agreed that friends would influence children to use weapons. For example, one person said:

“Peer pressure, everybody else is so you’ve got to otherwise you could get shot / stabbed”.

90.4% of children said that feeling unsafe might encourage them to carry a knife or gun at least sometimes.

Another interesting observation is that 73.6% of children feel that videos on the internet of other children using weapons would encourage the use of weapons, at least sometimes.

**Feeling discriminated against by the police**

Finally, we would like to highlight another issue raised in the interviews. Certain groups of children felt that they were often subjected to discrimination from the police. Black and ethnic minority children said they were more likely to be targeted in stop and search and felt they were more likely to face racism. Traveller children said that there was a lack of trust between them and the police and felt that the police often assumed they were guilty. Here are some of the things that children said about this issue:

“If an adult reported the crime I think it would be taken more seriously in some cases than if a child did, especially if the child looked like they were a member of a gang or were involved in gang violence.”

“... I think they just believe young people exaggerate or even make up incidents just for laughs.”
Recommendations to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

These are the things that we would like the UN Committee to ask the UK Government to take action on:

- More needs to be done to help make children feel respected in all aspects of their life. Laws should be introduced to ban unfair age discrimination.
- The Government should introduce compulsory media guidelines requiring fair representation of children in the media. More effort needs to be made to put good things about children in the papers and prevent negative stereotyping of children, especially refugees and asylum seekers.
- There must be tougher laws on smacking – we think it should be made illegal. Children should be treated well at home. We think that more support must be made available for families to help them with this.
- More needs to be done to make sure that all children are actively involved in decision-making within their schools and local communities. We would like every school to have a student council.
- Make sure that the UNCRC is a compulsory part of the curriculum for children of all ages and provide more information about the UNCRC to parents and other adults.
- Make sure that all children who are locked up are treated with respect. They must have access to good health care and decent living conditions.
- The Government needs to do more to reduce the high levels of stress placed on children by exams and workload. We should be able to enjoy our education.
- More funding should be made available to support children who need someone to talk to, for example, those children experiencing bullying and exam stress. We think there should be free professional counselling services in schools and more work should be done in schools and with parents and bullies on anti-bullying education and campaigns.
- More training should be given to health professionals about working with children. We particularly think they need more training on issues facing LGBT children. There should be more accessible health advice for all children, especially in schools. We particularly believe that there should be more sex and relationship education.
- More needs to be done to stop police from discriminating against specific groups of children (especially black and ethnic minority and Traveller children) and assuming that they are guilty of committing crimes.
- Children in care must have their rights respected, they should have more independence and have their views taken into account properly when decisions are being made about their lives.
- Disabled children must be more involved in making decisions about their lives.
- More Government money should be spent on providing more, and cheaper leisure facilities and youth activities for children. The needs of all children, including disabled children and those with religious beliefs, must be taken into account when deciding what activities are available at youth and leisure centres.
- Make sure that all parks and leisure facilities are well maintained and that children feel really safe when using them. There should be play facilities that are suitable for all different age groups (ranging from little children to teenagers). These should be well patrolled to make sure they are not being misused.
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