



# Another perspective

How journalists can promote children's human rights and equality



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# Foreword

Children's rights. Equality. These are not words to stir a news editor's heart. Or so the theory goes. But the specialist, and non-specialist, journalists at whom these guidelines are aimed know differently. Human rights, far from being the dry dust of reportage, are enmeshed with the human interest stories that form the lifeblood of print and broadcast media. Hope, happiness and opportunity are forfeited for the lack of basic rights. So, sometimes, are lives.

Thirty children have died in custody since 1990; two after being forcibly restrained. Levels of wellbeing in a rich and privileged nation are depressed. In other, comparable, countries children cannot legally be smacked. Here they lack the protection from violence accorded to adults. Our age of criminal responsibility, at 10 (and eight in Scotland), is far too low.

The Government has been slow to act, as a recent report by a UN Committee shows. It issued more than 150 recommendations relating to the UK's lack of compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the international standard for a happy and fulfilling childhood. Such shortfalls may seem to have little public traction but the British people are not blind to rights.

When an infant dies at the hands of cruel and neglectful parents, no one buries their head in the sand. When terrible events emerge, the public do not shrug and turn away. Instead, there is an outpouring of national grief. Why, citizens ask, was a child stripped of the ultimate human right; that of life?

The role, I believe, of the journalist is to connect with what is too often seen as an abstract campaign: the wishes and the dreams of all children. It is to relate a lack of rights to the compromised or squandered lives of too many young people. Not by coincidence is a country so liberal with its ASBOs, punishments and jail terms so frugal with the rights it accords the young.

These guidelines aim to help professionals in the media to better cover the real stories of children's lives. I commend them to you.

*Mary Riddell, Chair of Children's Rights Alliance for England Council of Management*

# Introduction

November 2009 is the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, described by Nelson Mandela as ‘that luminous living document that enshrines the rights of every child without exception to a life of dignity and self-fulfilment.’ Last year marked the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recently issued its third report on the UK’s compliance with international human rights standards. It made strong recommendations on improving many aspects of children’s lives, including in relation to the media. Unprecedented for a Western industrialised country, the UN Committee urged the UK Government to take ‘urgent measures to address the intolerance and inappropriate characterization of children, especially adolescents, within the society, including the media...’ Research undertaken by the Children’s Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) and others consistently shows that a large proportion of the media’s stories about children and young people are negative. Journalists and broadcasters rarely include under 18 year-olds as witnesses, experts and commentators.

CRAE has produced these guidelines to inform journalists about children’s human rights; to encourage more and better reporting about matters affecting children and young people; and to share the views and experiences of young children’s rights activists. We want the media to play a much bigger role in helping to ensure children’s rights are understood and fully realised.

# 1. Children need journalists

Protecting rights is everyone's business. But journalists can play an important role in helping to bring about change in the way children's rights are perceived and enforced. We believe you can do this in four main ways (these are not mutually exclusive):

- Through investigating and campaigning on issues yourselves
- Through exposing and bearing witness to injustice
- By marking progress in children's rights and providing positive images of children and young people
- By joining forces with campaign organisations.

## Investigative and campaigning journalism

Injustices do not only happen to adults. There are many examples of where children have their rights violated, and where they are subject to discrimination and unfair treatment. Human rights and anti-discrimination legislation applies to everyone from birth, though this is not often understood.

Many wrongs to children would not have been put right had it not been for strong and courageous campaigning by the media. At the time of writing the *New Statesman's* 'No place for children' campaign is calling on the Government to end the detention of children for immigration reasons. There is no upper limit on how many days children can be detained with their families; in September 2008 (latest figures), there were 55 children held in immigration detention, 20 of whom had been held for more than 14 days and 5 more than 28 days. The magazine has featured several stories of children held in UK detention and its website includes children's testimonies narrated by prominent individuals such as Juliet Stephenson and Esther Rantzen. Its online petition achieved more than 3,300 signatures.

In 2007, *Yorkshire Post* journalist Rob Waugh was shortlisted for the Paul Foot award for campaigning journalism following his 18-month investigation into the management of Wakefield children's homes. The campaigning of Waugh and others resulted in six whistleblowers, who had been sacked after talking to the media, winning a £1 million out-of-court settlement; Wakefield Council being downgraded in its annual performance assessment; and three members of staff being disciplined, two members of staff being sacked and six other employees leaving their posts. The *Yorkshire Post's* support for whistleblowers should increase the readiness of others to come forward and expose rights violations. It has already drawn support from the Children's Rights Director for England who, following his independent report into whistleblowing practices in Wakefield Council, is now calling for a national code of practice. Amid criticisms, and in the face of growing public concern about how managers were running children's homes, Wakefield Council decided to close the home where the six whistleblowers had

**"I am outraged to read that so many adults think our streets are now 'infested' with children and we need to be protected from them. I don't want to belittle the fear that many adults clearly feel about their own communities, but what happened to the idea that it's adults' job to protect children? Our sense of childhood – of protecting young children, and nurturing and supporting them as they grow into adolescence and maturity – has vanished somehow. Newspapers and television have in the past demonised and stereotyped young people but the media must now play a vital role in reversing this significant cultural shift."**

*Nick Clegg, Leader of the Liberal Democrats and former journalist*

worked. They did so without consulting any of the children living there, contrary to the Children Act 1989 which gives children in care the right to be consulted before decisions affecting them are made.

Investigative journalist John Sweeney won the Paul Foot award in 2005 for helping to uncover injustices in the cases of parents of cot death babies who had been wrongly convicted of killing their children. Some of the surviving children had been removed from their family – under human rights and domestic law such separation is extremely serious and only justifiable in very limited circumstances. Sweeney's work resulted in a review of all criminal cases involving cot deaths. Convictions were overturned and practice in relation to investigating cot deaths changed. As a result, far fewer children should be removed from their families on the basis of unfounded suspicions that their parent is responsible for the death of a sibling.

## Bearing witness to injustice

Reports about injustices against children frequently expose information that was not previously made public, even though it was clearly in the public interest to do so. These reports often shame the authorities into doing something to change the situation, or trigger a public demand for change. The children's homes scandals of the 1980s and 1990s, such as Frank Beck in Leicestershire, "Pindown" in Staffordshire and the abuse of children in North Wales' children's homes, led to greater rights for children in care, thanks in no small part to the probing of local and national newspapers and documentary film makers.

In 2007, the *Plymouth Herald* sent one of its reporters to participate in a simulated cross-examination by a barrister in



a crown court. This small step gave an important boost to a campaign to provide child witnesses with a remote video link.

The media has played a major role in influencing the public debate on whether children should remain with their families or, at times, be removed. The Cleveland scandal, in which 121 children on Teeside were removed from their families on suspicion of sexual abuse and placed in care between February and July 1987, was brought to national attention by the *Daily Mail* in 1987 and became a major media story for many months. Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, who led the Cleveland public inquiry, famously remarked, **'the child should be treated as a person and not an object of concern.'** Media coverage of this case, as well as of the violent deaths of children like Jasmine Beckford, Tyra Henry, Kimberley Carlile, Victoria Climbié and 17 month-old "baby P" brought very necessary attention to urgent changes needed in child protection policy and practice.

However, we must not overstate the positive role of the media: its capacity to torment, provoke and force policy makers into taking action can also result in ill-judged policies that do little to help children, or even actions that make matters worse. Were all the children returned to their families following the Cleveland scandal sent back to non-abusing parents (over 20 children remained in care)? Ongoing vigilance is necessary; and the media itself must show integrity and intelligence in the proposals it puts forward.

Furthermore, media coverage of children's deaths or horrific abuse is not predictable or uniform. For example, the media has barely covered the lives and circumstances of the 30 children who have died in custody in England since 1990. One of these was 15 year-old Gareth Myatt who died in 2004 following restraint at Rainsbrook secure training centre, a privately run children's prison in Warwickshire. A child of mixed heritage, Gareth was given a custodial sentence after stealing a bottle of beer and assaulting a residential social worker in his children's home. He was restrained after he refused to clean a sandwich toaster that others had also used. Gareth weighed less than seven stone and was barely five feet tall; three members of staff forcibly held him down, using a hold that contributed towards "positional asphyxia". They ignored his warnings that he could not breathe.

#### **Acknowledging progress and promoting positive images**

The media is news-driven and the news is dominated by stories of conflict. Campaign organisations contribute to this: there is always much more we want those in power to do (or stop doing). But the media is an incredibly powerful means of raising public awareness of progress in children's rights, to children and adults alike. When the Swedish Government banned smacking in 1979, their Ministry of Justice ran a television campaign and distributed information through other mass media. Major opportunities can be lost if the media is not used in this way. For example,



at the end of 2008 the Government introduced changes to the law that will require school governing bodies to invite and consider the views of children in the running of their schools. This brings English schools in line with Wales and Scotland and other European education systems. Yet only four newspapers publicised this exciting news, and three covered the story negatively.

Adults and children alike can learn from children who demand their own rights. In 2008, 13 year-old Hannah Jones asserted her right to decide for herself that she would not undergo life-saving heart surgery. National media coverage of her story no doubt raised awareness among the general public that children can be mature enough to make decisions, including in life or death situations, about their own medical treatment.

Between 2004 and 2006, the national print and broadcast media covered Shabina Begum's campaign for the right to wear a full-length gown called a jilbab to her Luton school. She won her case at the Court of Appeal although the law lords later overturned this. Nonetheless, the media coverage of her case raised awareness of the issues nationwide – helping to create the climate that is necessary for a cultural shift. In 2008, Sarika Singh, from Cwmbach, south Wales, won the right to wear a Kara bangle in school. She had been excluded the year before after she refused to remove the bangle, a symbol of her Sikh faith. The High Court found that the 14 year-old had been subject to indirect discrimination under race relations and equality laws and was unfairly excluded from school.

In 2003, the national media reported on the discrimination faced by a six year-old disabled boy, Lee Buniak, who was excluded from a school play as well as a museum trip and other activities. In December that year, a Special Education Needs and Disability Tribunal ruled that he had been subject to disability discrimination and ordered the school to apologise in writing to Lee and put all its staff through disability equality training.

Ten years ago, 14 year-old Jo Hale sought the right to wear trousers in school. Her campaign was helped by widespread coverage in the local and national media, and in 2000 she won an out-of-court settlement against her school in Gateshead.

By holding up role models like Jo Hale and the other young people mentioned here as protagonists in realising their own rights, stories like this help give young people the confidence to challenge unfair and discriminatory treatment.

**“The media can highlight abuses of children and the denial of their rights. Children are often voiceless in society, especially the most vulnerable children, the very poor, neglected or migrant children or young offenders. The media can act as a witness that records children’s lives and provides a platform for the defence of their rights. Children are often unable to speak out and the media can give them a voice.”**

*Sally Keeble, Labour MP and former journalist*

### Joining forces with campaign groups

Another way in which the media can play an important role in protecting children's rights is by supporting charity and pressure group initiatives to change public attitudes and behaviour.

The *Birmingham Mail* is now in the fourth year of its award-winning ‘Speak out stop bullying’ week, which it runs in partnership with ChildLine. As well as a series of features highlighting the issue, the newspaper offers free stickers and other materials promoting ChildLine's services to children.

In 1999, the NSPCC launched its ‘Full stop’ campaign to persuade the public to report cases of suspected child abuse. An alliance with the *Sun* newspaper at the time of the campaign launch ensured that millions of readers became aware of the extent of the problem and the importance of ordinary individuals taking action to combat it.

In April 2008, the NSPCC's then chief executive Dame Mary Marsh said, ‘We know from experience that we are in a much stronger position to be able to change the lives of vulnerable children and young people when we work with various partners at a local level, including the media. The support that regional media has given us in raising awareness and driving change has long been a heritage of which newspapers can be rightly proud.’

More poignantly, perhaps, are the words that appeared in the *Leicester Mercury* leader article on the day that children's home manager Frank Beck was given five life sentences on top of 24 years' imprisonment for the abuse of children in his care. The newspaper asked in November 1991, after children living in children's homes had been subject over a period of 13 years to rape, violence and other grossly abusive treatment:

**‘Why did someone, anyone, not speak up and go on speaking and shouting up until those who would not hear took notice?’**

## 2. How journalists can show they take children and their rights seriously

Journalists have a vital role to play in both defending the rights of children and in making children and young people's experiences and concerns more prominent in wider society.

The UK ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, just two years after it was adopted by the United Nations. Having taking 10 years to draft, the Convention sets agreed international standards for all aspects of childhood (see page 20). It has been accepted by all but two countries (Somalia and the USA) making it one of the most established human rights treaties in the world.<sup>1</sup> Given America's new Secretary of State started her career as a children's rights advocate, maybe the USA will soon move us closer to universal ratification.

**"Media reporting of children is mainly hostile. Children are always worse at everything than previous generations in a society where an ageing population regards their very existence as anti-social behaviour. The only good child in the news seems to be a dead child. It's time the media took a good look at children as they are, and learned to like the future."**

*Polly Toynbee, Guardian columnist*

Under international law, when a State ratifies a treaty it is agreeing to be bound by it. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has examined the UK on three separate occasions, in 1995, 2002 and 2008. As well as welcoming progress, each time Committee members have issued strong advice on the action needed to protect children's human rights. In October 2008, this group of international children's rights experts issued Ministers with 124 recommendations on the Convention generally – nearly 50 more than in 2002 – and a further 35 recommendations relating to the Optional Protocol on armed conflict (rules agreed by the UN in 2000 to protect children from the effects of war and conflict). There have been several Government promises, going back to at least 2001, to ratify the Convention's Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The latest undertaking was made the day before a delegation of high-level civil servants gave evidence to the UN Committee in Geneva in September 2008. In a press release from the Department for Children, Schools and Families, three Secretaries of State – Jacqui Smith, Jack Straw and Ed Balls – said they would agree to the international rules by the end of 2008. This did not happen<sup>2</sup>.

Children do not vote and have virtually no political influence. It is now increasingly common for children to sit on advisory groups and politicians to make regular visits to schools, colleges and youth centres. But the presence of children is not a guarantee that children's interests will shape policies affecting them. This is the first generation of children that have had access to central and local government machinery and it will take many more years before children have a fraction of the influence that adult interest groups have.

In our efforts to improve children's lives, campaign organisations like CRAE use many of the same investigative tools as journalists – Freedom of Information requests, close scrutiny of legislation and official publications, relationships with Parliamentarians and civil servants, and networking with other human rights defenders, here and abroad. In addition, what we have, which most journalists don't, is direct contact with children and young people from many different backgrounds and circumstances. We undertake research into their lives, work with them to bring about change, and reach out to those children and young people who suffer discrimination and other rights violations. Using internationally agreed standards, we establish how the law should be framed to give greater protection to children and young people and lobby for these changes.

The media is essential to our campaigns to improve the lives and status of children. But this isn't about how CRAE and the media get along. Our hope is that journalists can have children's rights as part of their own mindset.

Whether you are a veteran journalist or just starting out in a media career, there is a lot you can do to bring us closer to being a country where children are much better respected as people with their own feelings, individual personalities and views. You can help increase understanding and accountability of Ministers' obligations and the duties of those who work with children. You have the power to nudge public attitudes towards the 21st century and the cultures of many other European countries where the Convention's values and provisions have been welcomed and children are respected as individual people with evolving capacities. Alternatively, your words and tone can give support to Victorian norms that cast children as the property of their parents and mere people-in-the-making. Alongside politicians, you have an enormous role to play in reversing or confirming 'the general climate of intolerance and negative public attitudes towards children [in the UK]' criticised by the UN in October 2008.

1. The Geneva Conventions, providing humanitarian rules for conflict and wars, have been ratified by all the world's nations.

2. Just before we went to print, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office informed us that the UK has notified the UN of its intention to ratify the Optional Protocol and has deposited the instrument of ratification with the UN Office of Legal Affairs.



### Make space for children

One in five of this country's population is aged under 18. Every adult has been a child and most adults have frequent contact with children – as parents, relatives, neighbours or in a work role. It is surprising, then, that children and young people are so invisible in the media, other than when being projected in a passive or negative context. There are plenty of stories concerning children and young people, indeed disproportionately so, but there are very few where children and young people are themselves at the centre as commentators and contributors. Fewer still make explicit reference to children as holders of rights that should be defended and enforced. Action you can take:

- Include children and young people in your story in a variety of ways. Don't interview children and young people simply as victims; include them routinely as witnesses, neighbours, friends, siblings, daughters and sons and as commentators, panellists, reviewers and campaigners
- Aim for diversity – children and young people are no more homogenous than adults; this applies to photographs and images as well as the spoken word

- Wherever possible, give some control to children and young people over how their views and experiences are represented (see page 17).

### Legal background

It is difficult to imagine a story concerning children and young people that does not have some human rights or equality law behind it – poverty, violence, climate change, education, health care, parental separation, immigration and so on. Knowing the legal aspects of a story makes for more robust interviews with Ministers and others in power. It gives context and allows comparisons to be made with conditions for children in different parts of the UK, across Europe and internationally. Action you can take:

- Consider whether the story should include legal references – human rights, anti-discrimination law, important judgments and the legal situation in other countries for example
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child covers all aspects of childhood: it will be relevant to virtually all stories about children and young people
- Ask Ministers or local politicians how their proposals fit with their international obligations and the recent UN recommendations.



**“[Journalists] don’t portray children and young people very well – they portray us as if we walk around all day with weapons.”**

*Nathan Giles, young children’s rights activist*

### Make connections

A child dies in custody, a refugee family is forced to leave their home, traveller children have nowhere safe to play, young people have limited access to sex education, teachers warn of exam stress – these and countless other subjects have attracted the attention of national and international human rights bodies. Even where they are not legally binding, the advice and proposals made by these bodies should be followed. In some situations publicly funded inquiries have been established, also making recommendations. The late children’s rights advocate and leading child law expert Allan Levy QC explained: **‘It is a little short of scandalous that the Climbié Inquiry [into the horrific death of eight year-old Victoria Climbié] had to make over a 100 recommendations in the year 2003, bearing in mind everything that has previously been urged upon respective Governments and their departments of state ... Once the inquiry report is completed and handed over, matters are then left in the hands of central and/or local Government and so often seem to get lost.’**

Journalists are unique in their power to keep the recommendations of official bodies in public view – for as long as is necessary. Action you can take:

- Check whether an equality or human rights body, in this country or internationally, has issued relevant recommendations, advice or findings
- The parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights has issued many recommendations relating to children’s human rights, as has the Prisons Inspectorate and the Children’s Rights Director for England. 11 MILLION, the office of Children’s Commissioner for England, regularly publishes research with recommendations and UN and Council of Europe human rights bodies have between them made hundreds of recommendations concerning children’s well-being in our country
- NGOs like CRAE have child policy experts that can give you information about commitments previously made by Government, outstanding obligations and examinations that are coming up.

### Images of childhood

Ten years ago, Save the Children’s Andy West noted that newspaper stories featuring children focus on those individuals that are “out of place” – **‘children not behaving**

**in accordance with the idealised and Western-centric conception of childhood, which strongly emphasises innocence ... This ideal is supported in the press, although it is largely constructed in the negative, through references to children involved in crime, teenage pregnancy, of the world turned-upside-down where teachers are scared of their pupils, and where children ‘divorce’ their parents.’** Children and young people who disturb these deeply entrenched and negative images of childhood – that time of life when people are expected to be empty, passive, needy, dependent, and ignorant – frequently evoke strong feeling and hostility. “How dare they” is the undercurrent in much reporting of children that do not conform to the innocent ideal.

In 2009, the “out of place” children are those who commit crimes, refuse to attend school, paint graffiti, annoy their neighbours, binge drink, get pregnant, or come to this country for a better life. The level of vitriol suggests the disturbance is received personally. It seems journalists, like ordinary members of the public, do not want their illusions shattered by the messy lives of real children and young people. At the other end of the spectrum are those who believe children are innately bad and in need of (often harsh) control.

It is not easy to tell apart these two camps – those who cling to childhood as a time of innocence and those who believe children are the bearers of original sin – as their responses and “solutions” are often remarkably similar. Anger, contempt and retribution are commonplace. Some find children’s behaviour so unpalatable that they convince themselves they are not children at all. The Justice Secretary Jack Straw’s remarks in Parliament in June 2008 illustrate this starkly: **‘The bulk of those young people who are put into custody are aged 16 and 17 – they are not children; they are often large, unpleasant thugs, and they are frightening to the public.’** Action you can take:

- Think whether your piece challenges the status quo by presenting children and young people’s thoughts, experiences and rights in a serious and respectful way
- How does it portray children’s rights – as amusing, offensive or as the means of ensuring every child enjoys a safe, happy and fulfilling childhood?
- Does your piece denounce all children and young people “these days”, just as previous generations of commentators have done, or does it reflect the more complicated reality of young lives?
- Think about how it relates to the behaviour of past generations. It is likely that **‘what the youth of today get up to’** is no worse than what we did when we were young.

### 3. Media portrayal of children and childhood

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recently expressed concern ‘at the general climate of intolerance and negative public attitudes towards children, especially adolescents, which appears to exist in the [UK], including in the media, and may be often the underlying cause of further infringements of their rights.’ This is the first time the UN Committee has issued a statement like this to a Western industrialised nation. It recommended ‘urgent measures to address the intolerance and inappropriate characterization of children, especially adolescents, within the society, including the media...’

An expanding body of research and commentary on the media portrayal of children and childhood is giving new depth to our understanding of its impact on society. Academics, journalists, editors, activists and children and young people all contribute to this widening debate. The content and tenor of newspaper articles have been audited and analysed; consent and privacy issues, the best interests of children and the potential for child exploitation by the media have all been explored; children’s ability to make informed decisions about media participation have been considered. Many codes of conduct (compulsory and otherwise) have been published, attempting to achieve the appropriate balance between the right to privacy and the right to freedom of expression. The International Federation of Journalists has developed guidelines underlining the importance of accurate reporting in relation to children, the necessity of avoiding stereotypes and giving children the right to express their views; in short, guidelines which recognise children as individuals in their own right, capable of contributing to debate and entitled to protection of their human rights and personal dignity.

Yet for all this, sensationalist reporting is charged with fuelling disrespect for and intolerance of children and young people. The overwhelming focus by the media on the child as law-breaker or the child as victim presents a distorted view of the role and experience of children in British society. A study by Headliners (an agency producing news by children and young people) in 1998 identified seven stereotypes of children in the national media, with that of child as victim dominating coverage (in nearly a third of articles about children). Earlier in the 1990s, a publication from the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People categorised 11 different popular images of disabled people, including children, with only one of these veering towards positive. The author, Colin Barnes, summarises, ‘Disabling stereotypes which medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people abound in books, films, on television, and in the press. They form the bed-rock on which the attitudes towards, assumptions about and expectations

**“I’ve always believed that the media should try and report on children and young people in a fair and balanced way. Negative coverage about involvement in anti social behaviour and crime should be well balanced with the positive contributions of the vast majority of young people within our communities. This includes media stories on children’s rights and equality issues.”**

*Boris Johnson, Mayor of London*

**of disabled people are based. They are fundamental to the discrimination and exploitation which disabled people encounter daily...’**

CRAE itself has recently conducted a study of newspaper articles on children’s human rights and equality issues (and how accurate this reporting is). Our policy team analysed over 2,500 newspaper articles concerning children that appeared in 10 national newspapers between October 2007 and March 2008 (the first six months of the Equality and Human Rights Commission). We found only 48 stories (2%) that made explicit reference to children’s human rights or equality. Of these, 62% had an overall positive tone about children’s rights, 52% were positive about equality and 52% were positive about children. Less than a quarter of stories were accurate about children’s human rights and only a third were accurate about non-discrimination and equality. Only 6% of the human rights stories featured a quote from a child or young person. Of the 2,500+ articles concerning children, less than 40 newspaper stories concerned discrimination against children; 17 of these were about religion or belief, 9 race, 4 disability, 3 gender and there were 2 stories each about discrimination relating to sexual orientation and age.

In the broader media, television especially, where explicit coverage of children’s human rights and equality issues does appear, it is usually in relation to global development, child exploitation and child abuse. Even here, the actual experiences of affected people, children included, is not always shown in the media. For example, a team of researchers from the Scottish Poverty Information Unit and Glasgow Caledonian University examined UK media coverage of poverty in a week in 2007 and found 297 articles or broadcasts. Of these, poverty was the main focus in only 38% of stories relating to UK poverty and 56% about stories of poverty abroad. The lives and experiences of people living in poverty in the UK, including children, featured in only 13% of stories,



with the majority of journalists relying on statistical data. Coverage of poverty abroad, conversely, included real people's stories in 17% of reporting. The authors explain, 'UK poverty is largely anonymous in the UK media. [When reports do describe people's circumstances], it is very uncommon for references to be made to disabled people experiencing poverty; it is more likely for mention to be made of men than women; and it is, marginally, more likely for mention to be made of the working poor than the non-working poor. In each of these cases, groups with a higher risk rate of poverty are reported with less frequency than those with a lower risk.'

Research to determine the balance of reporting on children and young people has consistently found that negative stories dominate. A study published by *Young People Now* in 2006 reported that 71% of stories about young people in national newspapers (taken over a one-week period in August 2004) were negative. When revisited a year later, the percentage of negative stories had decreased to 57%, but the corresponding increase was in "neutral" stories (which doubled) rather than in positive coverage (which in fact decreased). In 2007, just under half (48%) of stories were negative, with nearly a third (29%) neutral and 23% positive. CRAE believes that the lack of reporting restrictions on children subject to anti-social behaviour

**"One of the sadnesses of the way the media portrays children is that it tends to be very uniform. It is frequently not recognised that many of the same differences that exist in adults, such as disability and different sexual orientation, exist in children too."**

*Ben Summerskill, chief executive of Stonewall and former journalist*

orders has had an insidious effect on respectful reporting, with newspapers featuring even very young children as worthy of society's disdain.

A study by YouthNet and the British Youth Council in 2006 found, unsurprisingly, this overwhelmingly negative portrayal has had an effect on its subject – children and young people. The vast majority of young people consider the media represents them as anti-social (98%) and a group to be feared (97%). This is reflected by research carried out by CRAE with children and young people, where 76% of those asked felt that the media did not portray a balanced view of children and young people. One child commented: 'the papers only



pick up on bad stories about children ... people would definitely get the wrong impression but most kids are nice.’ Recent research conducted by young people for the Young Researcher Network and the National Children’s Bureau found stories in the media to be overwhelmingly negative and focused on unusual children and young people – those that commit crimes and those that have extraordinary skills or talents. The young researchers noted: ‘Some of the young people we spoke to during the focus groups felt that these negative stereotypes were impacting on their daily lives: making them more conscious of how they dressed, how they presented themselves, and where they could go with their friends’.

The picture is not entirely bleak. Intelligent, nuanced stories about children and young people exist. Many journalists pride themselves on accurate, sensitive reporting. Some give children and young people the opportunity to contribute their own perspectives, and most children working with CRAE who have participated in newspapers stories feel they have been fairly represented. *Children and Young People Now* magazine has been running its ‘Positive images’ awards since 2005, celebrating the work of national and local media, as well as young people, in promoting positive images of children and young people. Organisations such as Headliners support children and young people to produce their own news from their own perspective. But this is not the norm. Children are seldom recognised by the “traditional” British media as the voracious consumers and producers of media that they are. It is in the forum of new media where children and young people consistently seize the opportunity to express their views. Yet this active and meaningful participation in the world of blogs and social networking sites, where children are subjects, users and producers of media, rarely transfers to print and broadcast media, despite the fact that children are ever-present in stories about health, education, crime, international development, social care and community involvement. Children remain either the subject of a story or an incidental inclusion; space is rarely given to the presentation of their world in the way in which they perceive it.

Taking an ethical and human rights-based approach to reporting does not entail the sacrifice of incisive, newsworthy copy. A child represented as an individual in his or her own right – not as a victim or social pariah, but as a fully formed human being who has the right to expect dignified treatment – is a story. Evoking rights as a lived experience engages the reader and viewer. Considerations of accurate and sensitive reporting must not only be confined to stories about the individual. The effect of broad assumptions about groups of children

**“It feels like every day there is another news story denigrating young people. It’s time that the oft-ignored majority of this country’s youth – hardworking, law-abiding and full of aspiration – were highlighted above the folk devil of the ‘hoodie’.”**

*Shami Chakrabarti, Director of Liberty*

(those in conflict with the law, young asylum seekers, or young travellers, for example) can be far-reaching and immensely damaging. The language and imagery used by journalists and editors, especially when reporting on marginalised children, has a pervasive and powerful impact. It can embed or challenge prejudice. Children and young people recognise this, and have themselves linked simplistic and sensationalist reporting of children as angels or demons to many of the negative attitudes they have encountered in their day-to-day lives. John Naughton perhaps summed it up best at a Society of Editors conference in 2006, when reflecting on children’s thirst for new media: ‘[They] are the future, my friends. They’re here and living among us. They’re not very interested in us, and I’m not sure I blame them.’



## 4. Journalists engaging with children and young people

The day before the 2005 general election, something very unusual happened on BBC Radio 4's Today programme. A 17 year-old was invited to give his views on one of the main issues of the day.

Damilola Ajagbonna, representing CRAE, told BBC's Sarah Montague why the voting age should be reduced to 16: 'It's the old revolutionaries' cry, "no taxation without representation". If we're not allowed to vote to decide who lowers or raises the tax, then why should we be taxed?' When presented with statistics that show young adults are the least likely of all ages to vote, Ajagbonna replied, 'To a certain degree that's partly the reason why we want to lower the voting age. Because politics is seen as this obsolete thing over there. It's them and us.'

**"I chose to take part in media interviews because of my own experiences as a young person in care and to do what I could to open people's minds up to some of the situations young people from a similar background to my own may face."**

*Jay Sweeney, children's rights activist*

The following year, young children's rights activist Hannah Couchman wrote a comment piece for *The Guardian* newspaper on the right to be heard in school. Referring to a report from the Institute for Public Policy Research and a recent education White Paper, Couchman said: 'Encouraging student participation is as beneficial to staff as it is to students ... the more student voice we have in school, the more enjoyable it becomes. Often, classroom behaviour is dependent on the degree of respect held for the teacher. Teachers who encourage mutual respect in the classroom experience less bad behaviour from students. Unfortunately, there is an underlying problem that prevents effective student voice - the belief that adults know what is best for young people ... It is not unusual for students to be told to use a side door to school, while only visitors, governors and teachers use the main entrance.'

In June 2008, 12 year-old Nathan Giles gave evidence to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva. As a result of this, both broadcast and print journalists have interviewed him. He describes these as positive experiences but still advises journalists to 'get their facts right' and 'don't patronise us'. Giles has written an account of his experiences in Geneva, including the physical barriers he faced as a wheelchair user. None of the journalists asked him in any

detail about his experiences in Geneva. Had they done so, they would have been able to make the point that even children selected to represent their country at the UN face discrimination; they could have shown that less favourable treatment offends children just as much as adults.

**'We then went out to the taxi rank and discovered that there were no accessible taxis – luckily the driver of one could put me in the back of one of them, but the older lads from the delegation had to help lift me in. I felt a bit sad and patronised as I was also patted!'**

**"The media can support young people who are campaigning for change ... by giving them a regular platform for the stories they write on issues that concern them."**

*Fiona Wyton, Director of Headliners*

### **Your contact with children and young people**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledges children as fully-fledged citizens at the same time as confirming their status as a group of human beings entitled to strong protection.

Many of the rights in the Convention mirror those in other human rights instruments, applying to people of all ages – for example the right to freedom of expression and the right to an adequate standard of living. Other rights have emerged to meet the particular circumstances of childhood – a time of huge human potential but also extreme vulnerability. These include the importance of the family and rights to maintain contact with both parents; rights to protection from all forms of violence and exploitation; the right to play, rest and leisure; and rights to be protected from the harmful aspects of the criminal justice system.

Some long-established human rights, such as the right to privacy, have been bolstered for children – for example, in the European Convention on Human Rights (and the UK's Human Rights Act), the right to respect for private and family life can be interfered with in certain circumstances, such as for public security or the protection of the rights of others. In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the child's privacy rights are guaranteed unless interference is justified in law (Article 16); in relation to criminal proceedings, the child's privacy rights are absolute (Article 40). The Convention also sets out detailed aims of education, with the child's full development and respect for human rights at the centre.

Article 3 of the Convention requires that children's best interests are a primary consideration in all actions concerning them. Journalists can act in the best interests of children by:

- Showing respect to the individual children you have contact with
- Being vigilant about not exploiting children in any way
- Listening, understanding and taking into account children's views about how their personal stories, as well as stories about children in general, are used
- Making more information available and accessible to children.

### Showing respect to individual children

Children like all other human beings notice and welcome decent behaviour – politeness, telling the truth, showing interest, not judging people and being reliable. Whilst few people, young and old, may turn down the opportunity to appear in the media, this does not justify a lowering of standards in common decency.

One of children's common criticisms in relation to speaking with journalists is 'they didn't call'. If you say you will ring a child at a given time, and there is no call

from you or from someone apologising on your behalf, this conveys a lack of respect. Unexpected events always occur and stories move on. Consider how you would deal with not being able to meet a commitment with, say, a Government Minister or the chief executive of a local company or a visiting dignitary. Use this as your template for communications with children; arguably children's lack of experience in dealing with media let-downs demands even greater care than that given to "important" adults.

Children can tell when you expect (and want) them to be cute and amusing, when you are surprised by their knowledge and insight, when what you want is a grim photograph or heart-wrenching story rather than intelligent dialogue and strong-mindedness. This can be deeply upsetting and may leave children feeling used.

This is not to say that children will always refuse to participate in one-off photo-shoots or turn down the offer of sharing overwhelmingly negative information. The important point is that children know what the aim of the story is, what you are trying to achieve, and the scope of their influence on the story. With this knowledge, they can decide whether they want to be involved and on what terms.



Journalists often want to talk to children about personal or sensitive issues. No matter how tempting it can be to skirt the issue of consent in order to get a good story, children should be clearly informed that they can decline to answer any questions and can change their mind and stop the interview process at any time.

It is crucial that journalists undertaking interviews with children try and build up trust before anything goes on the record. This can put the child at ease and make for a better interview. Techniques that experienced adults may use, such as knowing what the first interview question will be, should be offered to children. CRAE has experience of children doing live broadcasts being overcome with nerves and interviewers resorting to inane questions. These children were expecting to be asked about serious children's rights matters, yet to their surprise were asked about their favourite school subject. Had more time been taken to check out their expert knowledge and prompt questions been agreed in advance, these children might not have left television studios feeling demoralised and embarrassed. Journalists may need to raise their expectations of the contribution that children can make.

Every child is different. Their circumstances, responses and the levels of support they need from others differ. There are no rules that cover exactly how the media should deal with every person under the age of 18. But journalists must take responsibility for investigating and giving due consideration to each individual child's personality and environment when they make decisions about how to obtain and use their stories.

### **Not exploiting children in any way**

Children do not always have enough experience to anticipate the consequences of their attributed comments or photograph appearing in the media. If their parents or carers have limited experience of media exposure, they too may not be in a position to anticipate the consequences for their child. A child may be bullied or victimised at school if details about their circumstances (poverty or mental illness for example) are made known. Journalists must take responsibility for ensuring that children and their parents / carers are fully aware of the potential consequences that may result from any dealings with the media.

The media has a duty not to exploit children for commercial purposes or otherwise. Using sweet or emotive (and even

### **Children's best interests**

**"Governments - or individual adults - have sometimes misused the 'best interests of the child' to justify actions that in reality have violated the rights of the child. Corporal punishment has been defended with the argument that it teaches children necessary limits and is therefore for their own good in the long run. Adopted children have been prevented from knowing their biological family 'in their own interests'. Children of indigenous peoples have been forcefully removed from their families and placed in boarding schools so that they could be introduced to 'civilization', again in the name of their 'best interests'.**

**Though necessarily general and incomplete, a reasonable first building block towards the definition of what is in the best interests of the child is the sum total of the norms in the Convention. This means, for example, that it is in the best interests of the child to: receive education (Art. 28); have family relations (Art. 8); know and be cared for by his or her parents (Art. 7); be heard in matters concerning**

**him or her (Art. 12), and to be respected and seen as an individual person (Art. 16). In the same way, the Convention states what is not in the best interests of the child: for instance, to be exposed to any form of violence (Art. 19); to be wrongly separated from his or her parents (Art. 9); to be subjected to any traditional practices prejudicial to the child's health (Art. 24); to perform any work that is hazardous or harmful (Art. 32), or to be otherwise exploited or abused (Arts. 33-36).**

**There is another important aspect of the Convention that is relevant to this discussion: the emphasis on respecting the evolving capacities of the child. For the best interests of the child to be determined, it is important that the child himself or herself be heard. With increased age and maturity, the child should be able to influence and decide more. This obvious point is often forgotten. Adults tend to discuss what is best for children without seeking their opinions or even listening to them."**

*Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Warsaw, May 2008*

sexually revealing) photos of children when the main reason for doing so is to boost sales is one of the more obvious ways in which children could be exploited.

**“Well, I think that the media portrays children and young people positively where I live... However, overall the country does not portray young people very well as there are many negative incidents which are reported in the media every week. [Young people’s] talents and achievements even if they are small should be recognised.”**

*Shamila Arif, young children’s rights activist*

It may be helpful to arrange for a trusted adult to be present during an interview. This is especially important for children who are separated from their parents as public disclosure could expose them to unanticipated risks, such as a family member tracking them down. There may be legal consequences or other reprisals for certain children, for example, a child who has overstayed permission to live in this country or a child who is involved in harmful behaviour such as drug-taking or prostitution. In all situations, the impact on any participating children should carry more weight than the needs of individual journalists or media outlets. As the European guidelines for health correspondents, drafted by MediaWise, warn: **‘Beware of vested interests. Ask yourself ‘who benefits most from this story?’**

Children have reported feeling exploited if they are asked to contribute a great deal of time, information and opinion which then results in a few seconds of air time or a handful of words on paper. Media professionals need to make sure that children fully understand that once they have said ‘yes’, the editorial content of the piece, as well as the places it may be published, will be out of their control. They should explain why a story might not be covered at all, even if a lot of time and energy has been spent on it. Campaign organisations also have a great deal of responsibility to not inadvertently “set up” children in our desire to have issues covered.

### **Taking into account children’s views about how their stories will be used**

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child gives all children the right to express their views and have them given due weight in all matters affecting them.

It goes without saying that the media should not publish or broadcast children’s photographs, names, addresses

or anything else that might identify a child without the child’s consent; if the child is under 16 agreement from their parent or guardian will also be necessary. Children need to understand what they are consenting to and, wherever possible, should be given the opportunity to say ‘no’ to anything they do not feel happy about. As an interview progresses, relying on children to say outright they do not feel comfortable talking about an issue is unrealistic; you should proactively look for cues and react sensitively. This may seem obvious good practice but CRAE has been witness to children being asked inappropriate questions in live interviews and not having the experience or skills to evade them. Conversely, children can reveal in the heat of the moment personal information that should have remained private. Journalists who help children avoid these pitfalls show compassion and integrity. However, some broadcasters deliberately set out to expose children’s most private emotions and circumstances. This too attracted criticism from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child when it concluded that children’s appearance in TV reality shows **‘may constitute an unlawful interference with their privacy’**. The Committee called for increased protection for individual children and greater regulation. It therefore goes without saying that the media should always respect children’s right to privacy.

**“Once when I was trying to publicise a campaign I sent out a press release that contained a quote from an MP. But the MP’s quote wasn’t used in the [local] newspaper article, so it didn’t show that it was a national campaign.”**

*Usman Ali, young children’s rights activist and deputy member of UK Youth Parliament*

A child might want to decline the opportunity to be interviewed on local radio if they are aware that listeners will be invited to phone in and agree or disagree with their point of view. They might not want to feature in a newspaper story if their views will be picked apart in an online discussion, a format that seems to invite very personal and frequently unpleasant “debate”. It is therefore essential that media professionals invest as much time and effort as possible into making sure children fully understand what they are being asked to agree to as well as all its implications (probable and possible). Everything should be explained to them, however obvious, and they should be given the opportunity to ask questions or respond to the information they are given.



## Making more information accessible to children

Children are not simply media consumers or bit parts in stories created by others; they also make media. Increasingly, children wish to have access to the media as a means of sharing information and ideas with others. Besides quotes and case studies, there are other ways in which children can have their say in the media. There is a boom in demand for user generated content in the media. The media invites members of the public to submit content such as letters to the letters page, photographs, pod casts and online comment. It is likely that more under-18s would take advantage of these opportunities if more was done to make them aware that they exist and that their submissions would be welcome.

Article 17 of the Convention stresses the importance of the media to children's positive development. It requires governments to encourage the media to take into account the linguistic needs of children from minority communities and they must protect children from harmful material. At the time of writing, there is much concern about the decrease in the number of children's television programmes made in the UK; in parallel, the restriction of certain advertising material on mainstream (adult) television looks likely. These are policy matters that individual journalists have little control over. However, a lot of the advice contained in this document would, if followed, increase children's access to the media: positive and varied depictions of children, reflecting the richness and variety of their lives and experiences; routine comment from children, as subjects and experts; and a tone and language that respectfully engages them. Ofcom research undertaken in 2007 shows that 9 out of 10 children watch television almost every day, nearly 4 in 10 read printed material, including newspapers, almost every day and over a quarter (27%) of 12 to 15 year-olds listen to the radio almost every day (compared with 18% of 8 to 11 year-olds). These statistics relate to children's use of media that is only marginally geared towards them. Imagine how much more engaged children could be were their needs and rights at the centre of media activity.

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## 5. Useful organisations

### Children's Rights Alliance for England

94 White Lion Street  
London N1 9PF  
+44 (0)207 278 8222  
info@crae.org.uk

### Equality and Human Rights Commission

Arndale House  
The Arndale Centre  
Manchester M4 3AQ  
+44 (0)161 829 8100  
info@equalityhumanrights.com

3 More London  
Riverside Tooley Street  
London SE1 2RG  
+44 (0)20 3117 0235

### 11 MILLION

(office of Children's Commissioner for England)  
1 London Bridge  
London SE1 9BG  
+44 (0)844 800 9113  
info.request@11MILLION.org.uk

### International Federation of Journalists

IPC-Residence Palace, Bloc C  
Rue de la Loi 155  
B-1040 Brussels  
BELGIUM  
+32 2235 2200  
ifj@ifj.org

### The MediaWise Trust

University of the West of England  
Canon Kitson  
Oldbury Court Road  
Bristol BS16 2JP  
+44 (0)117 939 9333  
info@mediawise.org.uk

### National Union of Journalists

308-312 Gray's Inn Road  
London WC1X 8DP  
+44 (0)207 278 7916  
info@nuj.org.uk

### Ofcom

Riverside House  
2a Southwark Bridge Road  
London SE1 9HA  
Complaints line: +44 (0)20 7981 3040  
or +44 (0)300 123 3333

### Press Complaints Commission

Halton House  
20/23 Holborn  
London EC1N 2JD  
+44 (0)202 7831 0022  
complaints@pcc.org.uk

### The Prince's Trust (Change the record alliance)

18 Park Square East  
London NW1 4LH  
+44 (0)20 7543 1234  
webinfops@princes-trust.org.uk

# Summary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

## Article 1

This Convention applies to everyone aged 17 or under.

## Article 2

All the rights in this Convention apply to all children and young people without any discrimination.

## Article 3

Adults should always try to do what is best for children and young people. Governments must do everything to make sure children and young people are safe and well looked after.

## Article 4

Governments must do all they can to make sure children and young people's human rights are upheld.

## Article 5

Parents can give children and young people advice and help about children's rights. The more a young person knows and understands, the less advice and help a parent needs to give.

## Article 6

Every child and young person has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to make sure every child and young person has the best possible life.

## Article 7

Children and young people have the right to a name and a nationality. Children and young people have the right to be cared for by both parents.

## Article 8

Governments should do everything possible to protect the right of every child and young person to a name and nationality and to family life.

## Article 9

If a court is thinking about who a child or young person should live with, everyone affected by the decision should get the chance to be heard - including the child. Every child and young person has the right to keep in regular contact with both parents, so long as this is the best thing for the child or young person.

## Article 10

If a child or a parent wants to live in another country, the decision about this should be made quickly and positively. A child or young person whose parents live in another country has the right to keep in touch with them.

## Article 11

Governments must work together to stop children and young people being taken illegally to another country.

## Article 12

- Every child and young person has the right to express his or her views freely – about everything that affects him or her
- The child's or young person's views must

be given 'due weight' depending on his or her age and maturity

- The child or young person has the right to be heard in all decision-making processes, including in court hearings
- The child or young person can speak for him or herself, or someone else can speak for him or her.

## Article 13

Every child and young person has the right to freedom of expression, including the right to all kinds of information and ideas (unless there are legal restrictions).

## Article 14

Every child and young person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (unless there are legal restrictions). Governments must respect the right of parents and guardians to give advice to the child and young person about this right. The more a child or young person knows and understands, the less advice parents need to give.

## Article 15

Every child and young person has the right to meet people and to gather in public (unless there are legal restrictions).

## Article 16

The law must protect every child and young person's right to privacy.

## Article 17

Governments must make sure children and young people have access to lots of different information. Governments must encourage the media to give information to children and young people and protect them from harmful information and materials.

## Article 18

Governments must do all they can to help parents look after children well. Parents are the most important people in children and young people's lives. Parents must always do what is best for children and young people.

## Article 19

Governments must do everything to protect children and young people from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and mistreatment. Help must be available for children and young people who are hurt by violence, abuse, neglect and mistreatment.

## Article 20

Children who are separated from their parents have the right to special protection and help.

## Article 21

The child's best interests must be the top priority in adoption. Governments can support adoption between countries. Children and young people who are adopted by people in another country must have the same protection as children adopted by people in their own country.

## Article 22

Governments must give protection and humanitarian help to children and young people who are refugees, or who are trying to be accepted as refugees.

## Article 23

Every disabled child and young person has the right to a full life and to active participation in the community.\*

## Article 24

Every child and young person has the right to the best possible health and health services.

## Article 25

Children and young people who have been placed away from home by the authorities have the right to have their care reviewed regularly.

## Article 26

Governments must support every child and young person's right to benefit from social security, including social insurance. Child benefit is for every child, comes from taxes, and is part of social security. Family benefits, including allowances for children, come from weekly social insurance contributions made by employers and employees.

## Article 27

Children and young people have the right to a standard of living that is adequate for them to develop fully (this includes physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development). Parents have the main responsibility for making sure children and young people get this right. Governments must support parents. The amount of help the Government gives depends on how rich the country is.

## Article 28

- Every child has the right to free primary education
- Governments must encourage secondary education, making it available and accessible to every child and young person
- Access to higher education must be based on the ability to benefit from it
- Governments must make sure children and young people get information about education
- Governments must encourage regular school attendance
- Governments must make sure that school discipline protects the dignity of children and young people, and is in line with their rights in this Convention – so no hitting or humiliation.

#### Article 29

Governments agree that the aim of education is to help the fullest possible growth of the child or young person's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities.

Education must help children and young people:

- Respect human rights
- Respect their parents
- Respect their and others' culture, language and values
- Have self-respect
- Respect the environment.

#### Article 30

Children and young people from minority communities must not be stopped from enjoying their own culture, religion and language.

#### Article 31

Every child and young person has the right to rest, play and leisure. Governments must promote children and young people's involvement in the arts.

#### Article 32

- Every young person has the right to be protected from harmful work and economic exploitation
- Governments must do everything to protect this right
- Governments must set a minimum age at which young people can work, and they must introduce rules to protect young people in work.

#### Article 33

Governments must do everything to protect children and young people from illegal drugs.

#### Article 34

Governments must do everything to protect children and young people from sexual exploitation (including prostitution) and sexual abuse.\*\*

#### Article 35

Governments must do everything to protect children and young people from being taken away, sold or trafficked.\*\*

#### Article 36

Governments must protect children and young people from all other exploitation.

#### Article 37

- Governments must do everything to protect children and young people from torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. This is an absolute right, with no excuses for any breach of it
- Children and young people must not be given a death sentence or life imprisonment without the possibility of release
- Children and young people who are locked up should be able to challenge this quickly in court
- Children and young people must only be arrested or locked up as a last resort and for the shortest possible time

- Every child or young person who is locked up must be treated with respect
- Every child or young person who is locked up must be separated from adults, unless it is better for him or her to be with adults
- Every child or young person who is locked up has the right to keep in contact with his or her family, through letters and visits.

#### Article 38

- Governments agree to abide by international human rights law in relation to wars
- Governments must do everything to stop children under 15 from being involved directly in a war
- Governments must do everything to protect and care for children who are affected by war.\*\*\*

#### Article 39

Governments must give good support to children and young people who have been hurt, abused or exploited. This support must promote children and young people's health, self-respect and dignity.

#### Article 40

- Every child or young person accused, or convicted, of committing a crime must be treated with respect and in a way that helps him or her to respect the human rights of others
- Every child or young person must be treated as innocent until found guilty
- Every child or young person should be told as soon as possible why they have been arrested and charged with a crime
- Every child or young person accused of a crime must be given immediate access to a lawyer
- No child or young person can be forced to give evidence in a court
- Every child and young person has the right to an interpreter if they do not understand the country's main language
- The child and young person's right to privacy must be fully respected at all times
- Governments must set up a separate criminal justice system for children and young people
- Governments should promote a minimum age of criminal responsibility
- Wherever possible, children and young people in trouble should not have to go to court
- Courts should always try to avoid sending children and young people to institutions
- There must be many ways to help children and young people in trouble with the law, including care, guidance and counselling.

#### Article 42

Governments must make sure everyone gets information about this Convention.

Articles 41 and 43 to 54 say how adults and governments must work together to promote and protect all the rights in this Convention.

\*The emphasis on children's rights to inclusion is significantly stronger in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The UK has not yet ratified this Convention.

\*\*In May 2000, the UN introduced stronger protections for children and young people subject to sexual exploitation and trafficking (the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography). The UK has not yet ratified this part of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

\*\*\*In May 2000, the UN introduced stronger protections for under 18 year-olds (the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict). This requires that no child or young person should ever be forced to join the armed forces, and no child or young person should ever be involved directly in a war. The UK ratified this part of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2003.

The Children's Rights Alliance for England protects the human rights of children by lobbying government and others who hold power, by bringing or supporting test cases and by using national, regional and international human rights mechanisms. We provide free legal information and advice, raise awareness of children's human rights, and undertake research about children's access to their rights. We mobilise others, including children and young people, to take action to promote and protect children's human rights. Each year we publish a review of the state of children's rights in England.

We are very grateful to the Equality and Human Rights Commission for funding our work on promoting positive messages about children's human rights and equality in the media. Thanks also to those who provided supportive statements. Our greatest thanks goes to the children and young people who gave advice for this document and to all those young children's rights activists working in CRAE who take the plunge and engage with the media on the things that matter to them.

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ISBN 978-1-898961-23-9

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