

## **Young Voice**

### **Report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

*Young Voice is an organisation in the process of developing; its aims are to involve children and young people in decision making at a national level and to promote participation and rights at all levels. Young Voice has a group of young people who are central to its running and the way it works. Over the last few years Young Voice has undertaken consultations with young people from across Wales on behalf of the National Assembly for Wales. The purpose of these consultations has been to gather information about issues that affect young people and how things need to be changed. Using the information that has come out in these consultations and in discussions with the central group this report has been written to address some of the articles within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

#### Article 1 – Definition of a Child

Generally young people recognise the fact that by law they are a child until the age of 18 and that the rights outlined in the convention go up to this age. However young people also identify areas where they are considered to be an adult at 16, for example paying adult fares on public transport at 16.

#### Article 2 – Non-discrimination

In principle this right is in place but young people feel that they are not always protected from discrimination. Often young people were able to give examples of where they have been subject to discrimination sometimes just for being a young person and being regarded as a ‘troublemaker’. Young people feel that very little is done to challenge this view. In talking with young people at consultations there is the issue of discrimination in Wales between the Welsh and English and whether or not you are a Welsh speaker. Again although there are policies in place that are not meant to allow this young people were able to describe situations where it had happened. For example young people are not always able to sit exams in their preferred language. So although this right is in place it is not always fulfilled.

#### Article 3 – Best Interests

When talking with the young people at the consultations some have commented on how decisions have been made on their behalf but they have felt that the decision was not in their best interest. Within the education system young people feel that their best interests are often overlooked instead it is the best interests of the school with regards to results that are put first.

#### Article 4 - Implementation of Rights

Young people felt that the government had not done all it could when it comes to rights but that there were already a lot of the rights in place. For the majority of the young people at the consultations they had not heard of the convention and the fact they had rights written down.

### Article 9 – Separation from parents

In talking with young people some were able to speak about experiences where they felt that being separated from their parents had been unnecessary and it would have been better if they could stay with them. Young people felt that those in authority felt their best interests in such circumstances were not always what the young people felt were.

### Article 12 – The Child's Opinion

At all the consultations one of the most common issues to come up is how young people do not get the opportunity to speak out about matters that affect them and even when they do their opinion is not listened to. It varies widely between settings and geographically and between levels of decision making. Generally with regards to issues like moving house the child's opinion is taken into account but then it is not always considered when for example deciding which school to go to. Within schools and the education system young people do not have the opportunity to speak out about decisions which would affect them. Young people said that schools were not interested in what they thought about the school, the lessons or the curriculum. Even where schools did make the effort to ask young people what they thought it was not taken seriously and many young people felt the process was very tokenistic. Throughout the consultation young people expressed that they wanted to get the chance to get their voice heard on a variety of things including education, being involved in the recruitment and selection of staff that work with young people, in youth clubs, transport and at a national level. This opportunity is not always in place but it is getting better. For some of the young people the consultation was the first time they had been asked what they thought about something.

### Article 13 – Freedom of Expression

Some of the young people said that they had found that they were not always able to obtain information about the things they wanted to know and that the information that was out there was not understandable. However otherwise this right is fulfilled.

### Article 16 – Protection of Privacy

Through the consultations the young people have often brought up issues around privacy. Most commonly it is where personal diaries have been read by parents or guardians and the young people have felt that this is an invasion of their privacy. Young people have also drawn attention to the fact that bullying is a big problem and part of this right deals with slander and libel and bullying can take this form. Therefore this aspect of article 16 is not being respected and the government is not tackling it well.

### Article 17 – Access to appropriate information

The information is there for young people to access although it is not always written or presented in a way that is understandable. The information is out there but it is not always easy to get hold of or to know where to go to get information. In the more rural parts of Wales young people have said that it is even harder to get hold of

information. However with the expansion of the internet and access to internet it has been made easier to get hold of information although at the same time it is also easier to get hold of inappropriate information.

#### Article 24 – Health and health services

The main issues to come up in discussions about health are that healthcare professionals and mainly doctors are unsympathetic when dealing with young people. The young people raised things like doctors often don't believe what they are saying and are very quick to say what is wrong without actually spending any time talking to them. If the young people were to visit the doctors with their parents or another adult then young people reported that doctor would talk to the adult in the room and not them. A common complaint was that in general health services available were not appropriate for young people and that young people wanted services that were provided just for them with specially trained staff. Although this is available in some areas it is particularly rural areas that suffer. Health education is also something that is brought up and the young people felt that the health education available in schools was not always any good. It was presented in a boring way whereby nothing was being learnt. Therefore young people have access to free health care and health services but it is not always appropriate. Although the article in general is met and fulfilled.

#### Article 26 – Social Security

Social security benefits are available that benefit children and young people, however many of these benefits are paid to parents/ guardians and some young people have mentioned that this money then does not benefit them in any way. The biggest gap that young people identify within this right is that as sixteen and seventeen year olds who are not in education they are not entitled to social security benefits except in special circumstances. The minimum age is also identify that they are not entitled to and that although they will do the same work as somebody of eighteen and prices will be the same as a child they can be paid a lot less for it.

#### Article 29 – Aims of Education

Children and young people are entitled to free and compulsory education at both primary and secondary levels however young people felt that it does not meet the aims outlined in Article 29. Young people feel that education does not meet their needs and that it does not prepare them for adult life. Throughout the consultations the issue of education comes up, young people comment on what and how they are taught in schools. They also feel that there is little choice about what they learn and especially how they learn it but understand that there are certain pressures placed on the system by the government. At some of the consultations young people have said the kind of things they need to know are how to run a house so things like budgeting, but that this is not taught or even discussed in schools. Young people have said that they are restricted to what they can do because of what the school can offer, certain subject combinations are impossible because of timetable clashes. The other thing that happens is that young people have been told that they cannot do certain subjects because they will not pass the exam, or for other reasons. This they feel is very unfair because this is the subject they want to study and then they just ended up doing a

subject of no interest. As well as this young people have said that there is very little political education or moral education, the only time this is taught is within other subjects. Young people feel that this is some of the most important things that they need to learn and there is not the opportunity to do so. In general young people not receiving appropriate education to develop their skills and talents in many cases and are not receiving education around life issues and citizenship in a way that is meaningful.

*The following articles have not been addressed in any great detail through these consultations and therefore it is not possible to comment as to what the young people would have thought about these rights and how well they are being implemented. With regards to Article 42 though many young people would comment that they knew nothing about the convention and that the government was actually doing very little to promote it.*