



# COMMUNITY SAFETY

This briefing outlines key information about community safety in Northern Ireland and how it can impact on children's rights and best interests. It calls on the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive to address significant, ongoing issues affecting children and young people within community spaces.

This is the third in a series of 12 policy briefings published throughout 2010 to mark the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). These draw on issues addressed in the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) report: *Children's Rights: Rhetoric or Reality* (2008) and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations on the UK Government's report (2008).

Campaign briefings will also be released each month. The purpose of these is to support children and young people to campaign for Government action to address key child rights violations in Northern Ireland (NI).

**NICCY was established in 2003 in accordance with the provisions of The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The principal aim of the Commissioner, as defined in Article 6 of the Order, is to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young persons.**

Please note that the use of the term *child* refers to a child or young person that falls within the remit of NICCY (up to 18 years or up to 21 years where they are care experienced or have a disability).

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child outlined a number of concerns relating to the safety of children within their communities and the negative attitudes often exhibited towards them when they are visible in communities and other public spaces.

Children divide most of their time between three 'spaces' - home, school and community. This briefing explores the ways children live within their neighbourhoods and questions whether our communities are safe, inclusive spaces for them. It also reflects on how the concept of 'Community Safety' is rarely used in a positive way in relation to children and indeed can limit their freedom to come together, play and live within their communities.

The devolution of policing and justice provides an historic opportunity to review the treatment of children, moving away from a punitive approach, towards a more positive, protective stance. Key to this, is the reframing of the concept of 'Community Safety', so that it is unequivocally about making our communities safe and welcoming places for children and young people.

In 2008, the Northern Ireland Office issued *Together. Stronger. Safer*, a consultation document outlining plans for the development of a new community safety strategy. NICCY calls on Government to address the following in considering community safety for children.

1. As policing and justice are devolved, a more positive focus on children and young people is required.
2. ASBOs should not be used against children and proposals for the introduction of Dispersal Zones which would impact on children should be abandoned.
3. Government needs to increase its efforts to overcome community divisions and address the threats they pose for children and young people.