



# PROMOTING AND SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAST DECADE (2003-2013)



## FOREWORD



**In February 2003 the Royal Seal was put on one of the most significant pieces of legislation for children and young people: The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order.**

This was the result of extensive campaigning by many in the children and young people's sector, and extensive work by the Assembly to make sure children's rights were brought to the fore. The Order ensured the Commissioner had 'due regard' to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as integral to all the work of the office.



By October of that same year the first Commissioner – Nigel Williams – took up post. The journey was started by Nigel.

I have built upon this, working with committed staff and our partners in the children's sector, with our sponsor department and across government, and with colleagues at local, national and international levels.

Some of what we have achieved is covered in this document, with more details on my website, alongside annual reports capturing what we did each year.

Today more people are now aware of Children's Rights and what they mean in reality. From children and young people, to parents and politicians, from the media to professionals, and from those working for and on behalf of children and young people, in the statutory, community and voluntary sectors, awareness of children's rights and how their application can change lives has steadily been increasing.

What strikes me is that 10 years ago the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was almost completely absent from public and political discourse. Now it is part of government's agenda, an agenda which I hope will eventually see the Convention effectively incorporated into domestic legislation.

From day one I have devoted considerable time to listening to children and young people.

During my time the 'URVoice' campaign helped shape the early course of my work. Since then I have continued to reach out to more and more people, both locally and further afield, to explain what I do, why I do it and why children's rights are so important.

We must all remember to take the time, to listen, and to act upon, what children and young people say.

Article 12 of the UN Convention clearly states that children and young people should have a say in decisions that affect their lives. When I took up post in 2007 it would have been hard for me to imagine that just five years later I would be presenting participation awards to a range of government departments and public bodies. It demonstrates in a very tangible way a much greater awareness and appreciation of the importance, and benefits of involving children and young people in the decision making process.

Our calls to government have always been focused on highlighting where change is needed, so that services can better meet the needs of children and young people. More change is coming, as together, we work towards 'incorporation' of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law.

Translating this legislation into reality will be the challenge. As we mark a decade of NICCY, I believe we can all help to make legislation a reality, and make change happen, and make a long lasting difference to the lives of children and young people.

I commend this reflection on 10 years of our work to you. I hope you will find this and indeed the more detailed information on my website informative.

More importantly I hope that you will join me in our vital work over coming years, in making sure that we continue to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of every child and young person across Northern Ireland – by doing this we will together create a society in which children and young people and their rights are truly respected.



*Patricia Lewsley-Mooney*

**Patricia  
Lewsley-Mooney**  
20th November, 2013



# CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHTS



## The creation of a Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) was, in itself, a critical step in ensuring better implementation of children's rights.

Over the past ten years, the Commissioner has provided advice to government, not just in relation to *what* should be done to realise children's rights, but on *how* it should be done. Article 4 of the UNCRC says:

*'States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention.'*

In 2005 and 2008 the Commissioner published extensive reports on Children's Rights in Northern Ireland.

***These reports have helped inform debate on children's and young people's rights, and have been quoted extensively in government documents and in academic papers.***

NICCY also advised government on its Children and Young People's strategy and has provided advice on subsequent action plans.

In doing so the Commissioner has highlighted barriers to delivering rights to children and young people.

Key findings included government departments appearing to work separately when dealing with children. There is a need for a more 'joined-up' approach and a 'Statutory Duty' to co-operate in developing and delivering policies and services.

This also included a proposal for 'Children's Champions' within each government department, as a contact point and to coordinate delivery for children and young people.

***Children's Champions are now in place and the Commissioner has supported and helped train these officials.***

NICCY developed a 'Child Rights Impact Assessment' process for reviewing the impact of policies and legislation, and used this to assess a number of government strategies. The Commissioner has advised that this process of assessing impacts should be integrated into those used by government.

The Commissioner presented evidence on the progress towards children's rights in Northern Ireland to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2007. The report of the committee contained the majority of the issues raised by NICCY.

In 2014/15 the Northern Ireland Executive will have to respond to the United Nations committee, as part of the UK State Party response, on progress in relation to how many of the committee's recommendations have been acted upon or implemented in Northern Ireland. The Commissioner will, as before, be compiling a response, in collaboration with the other UK children and young people's Commissioners.

In 2007 NICCY, the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister, and the Department of Finance and Personnel, published a joint report analysing public expenditure on children in Northern Ireland, comparing this with available data from GB. This showed for example, that less was spent on each child's personal health and social care in Northern Ireland, compared to other parts of the UK. NICCY continues to monitor how money is allocated to children's and young people's services.

In 2011 the Commissioner published a report reviewing the effectiveness of implementing children's rights. The report found failings in delivery for children including: problems in coordination and joined up working between departments; significant time delays in delivering commitments for children; a lack of training and awareness on children's rights;

insufficient information; and, limited meaningful participation of children and young people.

Having observed developments in Wales and Scotland, where the devolved governments have prioritised children's rights by putting commitments in legislation (draft legislation in Scotland) to implement children's rights, the Commissioner is convinced of the need for child rights legislation in Northern Ireland.

This should include incorporation of the UNCRC into law, the Convention's implementation, and use of measures, such as Child Rights Impact Assessments, measures to ensure effective coordination of children's services, and annual reports tracking changes in outcomes for children. Such actions should lead to significant changes in children's lives.

## LEGALLY SPEAKING



### The Commissioner's legislation allows her to act in a variety of legal circumstances - including taking, funding or intervening in ongoing legal proceedings.

An intervention is where a third party comes to legal proceedings where they believe they can add value.

The Commissioner currently has two interventions before the European Court of Human Rights. They are around the child's right to privacy and the child's right to education respectively.

*This is believed to be the first time a Children's Commissioner/Ombudsman has been granted leave to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.*

The case involving the child's right to education is a case in which NICCY also intervened at Supreme Court level.

The child's right to education, was discussed in the context of the child being out of school on suspension and receiving a low level of home tuition. The Law Lords did not find this to be a breach of the child's right to education.

However, Baroness Hale did say:

*“Left to myself, I might have thought that three months out of school in the run-up to important public examinations was indeed to deny him effective access to the educational facilities which the state provides for year 12 pupils. He should not have been relegated to eight hours’ tuition a week for six weeks”.*

Effective access to ‘educational facilities’ has now been appealed to the European Court of Human Rights.

The Commissioner has also intervened at each level of court in Northern Ireland. Interventions included cases concerning the right to privacy, the right to be heard, the right to family life and the right to education.

One example of NICCY’s work in this area is the case JR49, which was a judicial review of a health and social care trust before the High Court. This case was brought by the child and NICCY intervened. In this case the trust had obtained an order authorising the removal of a young person from a mental health unit within a hospital in Northern Ireland to a mental health unit within a hospital in England, which would mean being separated from their family.

However, in doing this the trust had not acknowledged the impact this would have on their right to family life and also had not sufficiently listened to the views of the young person. Such a move would mean that the child would no longer have daily visits from their family and they had stated when asked that they did not wish to go.

This was recorded wrongly as the child being “ambivalent” about going.

The Commissioner intervened, highlighting the rights of the young person in this process, under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The Court said the health and social care trust had failed to consider objections to transferring the young person to a mental health facility outside Northern Ireland, and the possible significant disadvantages of such a transfer, and also did not take into account all the relevant issues before reaching its decision.

***The Trust was directed to look at the decision again, and in doing so they decided the child should remain in Northern Ireland to receive treatment and not to transfer them to England.***

## CASEWORK IN NICCY



### Legal and Investigations staff deal with enquiries from children, young people, and their parents and carers, about potential breaches of their rights by 'relevant authorities'.

***Over the last number of years an average of 650 enquiries were dealt with each year.***

These enquiries encompass a wide range of issues which include: education, health provision, child protection, and social welfare amongst others. By far the largest area is education and this includes the sub categories of special educational needs, bullying, suspension and expulsion from school, school transport, school placement, school closures and complaints about teachers.

Of these sub categories special educational need is the largest.

Many enquiries are from parents experiencing difficulty navigating their way through an extremely complex system on behalf of their child. The staff recognised that a lack of awareness among parents of the system was an issue and developed a 'Special Education Pack', which explains the process in an accessible way. This was piloted at an outreach clinic in a school. The response to this pack was very positive.

***Due to the success of the pack, NICCY now sends this out routinely to parents in relation to the special educational needs of their child and it continues to be provided at outreach clinics.***

There have been a number of positive impacts for children and young people. Some examples of this are:

A child with a number of diagnoses was struggling at mainstream school and developed depression as a result. The Education and Library Board (ELB) refused a statutory assessment. NICCY worked for the child and convened a meeting with the relevant authorities. As a result an immediate referral for statutory assessment was made, which resulted in a recommendation for a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

The parents were entirely unfamiliar with the SEN statementing process and were advised and assisted through the procedure by NICCY staff, particularly in relation to the draft Statement. As a result of NICCY's intervention, the child is now thriving at a Learning Support Unit and receiving the necessary support services.

The Commissioner assisted a child with special educational needs who had been suspended from school. NICCY was concerned that the process the school had followed in suspending the child was not lawful, and acted by writing to the school, attending meetings to discuss the suspension and provided advice. NICCY's Legal Funding Committee resourced a legal opinion, which indicated that there was a case against the school.

The school settled the matter without the need for legal proceedings, by allowing the young person to return to the school, with the suspensions removed from their record. However, further issues arose regarding the child's returning to school, and NICCY again liaised with the school to help overcome these issues, in the best interests of the child.



## SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS – THE CASE FOR ACTION



**The Commissioner has consistently highlighted critical issues affecting children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and called on government and its agencies to provide appropriate support and services.**

In 2012, NICCY commissioned a report on transition arrangements for young people with learning disabilities, moving to adult services. This assessed existing arrangements against international child rights standards, identifying many inconsistencies and weaknesses across a range of areas, including health, education and training.

***The Report findings informed NI Assembly and Committee debates.***

The Commissioner continues to challenge policymakers on the recommendations from the report. These include making sure all those involved work together, to make sure planning for the transition from child to adult services is integrated, and that they listen to young people's views.

NICCY has closely monitored the Department of Education's (DE) Review of SEN and Inclusion, submitting a detailed advice paper to the Department. This contained recommendations on the proposed SEN and Inclusion framework, the roles and duties of key stakeholders and transitions.

In response, the Education Minister and DE provided comprehensive feedback on what they plan to do. NICCY also co-ordinated a joint working approach with other agencies, designed to make sure the Minister heard everyone's views.

***In response to concerns raised by the Commissioner and other agencies, the Minister revised two significant aspects of the proposals. He credited NICCY and others for persuading him to consider implementing in the long-term, a right to appeal to the Special Education Need and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) for young people.***



# PARTICIPATION AT THE CENTRE



**In the absence of government having a specific policy on how children and young people should be involved in having a say in decisions that affect their lives, the Commissioner submitted advice to government and undertook a series of initiatives.**

To encourage and support government to incorporate participation in all relevant aspects of their work, the Commissioner developed a Participation Policy Statement of Intent. This provided government departments with a structure they could use to develop their own specific work.

***Out of 12 government departments, 11 have signed up to the Participation Policy Statement of Intent. In addition 9 local councils, 4 health and social care trusts, and 2 education boards have***

***made this public commitment to the participation of children and young people in decision making.***

While aware of the work of a variety of external organisations, it was also clear to the Commissioner that while there may not have been strategic or departmental level participation policy, there was significant work being undertaken throughout government departments and the agencies that reported to them.

Staff worked with the NICCY Youth Panel who led on all aspects of the process to develop the Commissioner's Participation Awards. These awards recognised good practice from government departments and their agencies. The second awards saw an increase in entries, with five Government Ministers attending and making public commitments to advance work on participation.

A key part of children's lives is their experience in education. Both Nigel Williams and Patricia Lewsley-Mooney have worked to develop participation throughout school life. NICCY worked with pupils themselves to develop school councils and other structures for participation in school, to make sure that pupils would have a voice.

NICCY designed a 'Democra-School' pack as a guide on how to establish a school council.

This guide was commended by government ministers and is on the Department of Education's website as a valuable resource for schools.

***At a conference in the spring of 2013 the Minister for Education made a public commitment to establish a policy on school councils; and recently encouraged the use of Democra-School in a statement to the Assembly.***

Within policing, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) included NICCY's recommendations for the participation of children and young people, by developing Youth Independent Advisory Groups (YIAGs) in each District Command Unit. This was included in their 'Policing with Children and Young People' policy directive. This was further reinforced by a recommendation from the Northern Ireland Policing Board which was accepted by the PSNI.



# YOUNG PEOPLE... AT THE HEART OF OUR WORK





As a result of this combined work, the Commissioner's own work has been informed by children and young people.

- Young people's voices have been heard in key discussions on policy, for example on school councils, the transfer to post-primary education and a government consultation on 'shared education'.
  - Media outlets, ranging from television, radio and print publications have included the views of young people through the NICCY Youth Panel, on a range of topics including negative stereotyping, school transport and nature of reporting of young people in the media.
- As evidenced by the Commissioner's Participation Awards and endorsements of NICCY's Participation Statement of Intent, children and young people's views are increasingly being listened to by government.
  - Young people from the NICCY Youth Panel have also been heard at European level with presentations to the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children amongst other connections across the UK and further afield.
  - NICCY supported young people in their campaign to create a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly. This resulted in the Assembly Commission and the Speaker of the Assembly establishing a youth panel to advise them on the creation of a Youth Assembly.

## HAVING THEIR SAY



**In 2003 it was clear that the voice of children and young people was not being heard in the public domain, despite the right of children under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights to the Child, to have a say in decisions that affect their lives.**

Additionally, the Commissioner has a duty to listen and consider the views of children and young people in her work. Therefore it has been a key priority since 2003, that children and young people are listened to, and have a say in decisions that affect their lives.

***Both Commissioners and their staff have met with more than 40,000 children and young people over the last 10 years; they have engaged with them, heard what is important in their lives, and in return the children and young***

***people have contributed to and helped shape NICCY's work.***

As part of that engagement, NICCY established a Youth Panel which has provided direct input to the Commissioner's work over the past 10 years, as well as leading on activities to make sure their voices were heard at the highest level of Government. Members of the panel have met government ministers, addressing concerns including children's rights, mental health, school councils and LGBT issues.

Members also attended party political conferences to make sure Ministers, MLAs, councillors and others heard the voice of young people directly.

Panel members also challenged media perception of young people, and appeared on television and radio news shows to make sure children and young people's issues were delivered into homes across Northern Ireland. This included the 'We Want The Airwaves' campaign, that highlighted children's rights in the media.

They also developed and led a campaign on negative stereotyping of young people.

***This campaign has been referenced in the 2013 UK State Party draft report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.***

Young people's views were vital in campaigns such as the 'Young Consumers' research and report, when the Youth Panel undertook a role as field researchers. They are also contributing to work that challenges potential discrimination against under-18s, in forthcoming proposals for change in legislation, to outlaw discrimination in access to 'Goods, Facilities and Services'.

In terms of direct input into the work of the Commissioner, young people were involved in the steering committees and planning of two 'Democra School' conferences. There were over 400 schoolchildren who attended these conferences which aimed to encourage the development of school councils.

Gathering young people's views on the work of government was the key focus of the 'Make It Right' campaign, which saw schoolchildren, college students and other young people bring their issues directly to government ministers.

## SPEECH AND LANGUAGE – PROVIDING A VOICE TO CONCERNS



**It is estimated that around 7-10% of children are affected by speech, language and communications difficulties. Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) services are provided to children and young people who need this support.**

The Commissioner is also aware that vulnerable groups, such as those with disabilities or in contact with justice agencies, are more likely to need support.

In its earliest days NICCY received a number of complaints about SLT provision. The Commissioner was concerned that the basic right 'to have a voice' was being denied and initiated a review of services.

The 2004 review concluded that waiting times for assessment and treatment were based on where a child lived and ranged from one month to more than 20 months.

Concerns were raised about resources and poor coordination between health and education bodies. In response to increasing complaints about services, a 2006 follow up review showed more than one quarter of children were still waiting to access services.



In both reviews, NICCY recommended that a regional approach to SLT services was required and that a Taskforce and Action Plan were needed.

Following this, the Health Minister promised to invest in services and establish a Taskforce “to explore in greater depth the relevant issues identified in the NICCY reports”. The Taskforce report was published in 2008 and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety set up a team of relevant agencies to develop an Action Plan, which was launched in 2011.

This noted that NICCY’s reviews resulted in additional funding for services. The Action Plan included commitments to develop a regional commissioning framework, establish partnership agreements between the Health and Education Departments and reduce waiting times to nine weeks.

***The work that has been undertaken by the Commissioner helped improve services for many children and young people with speech, language and communication needs. NICCY will continue to monitor progress.***

## SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



**Since 2003 NICCY has had concerns about children’s right to life and protection from violence, abuse and harm, and have made it a priority.**

NICCY undertook a major review of child protection practices in a ‘Vetting Review’ which was commissioned in 2004. This looked at the way adults were ‘checked’ to make sure they did not pose a risk to children and young people they worked with or volunteered to work with. A follow-up report highlighted government action as a result of the review.

In 2006, as part of a range of measures to improve child protection, the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) started work to develop a Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI). Its aim is to coordinate and ensure the

effectiveness of all agencies in working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The Commissioner had been calling for such a body to be set up for some time.

Following the introduction of the SBNI Bill to the Assembly, the Commissioner provided detailed evidence during scrutiny of the draft legislation. While supportive of most proposals, the Commissioner highlighted areas which needed clarification or strengthening. These included ensuring the Board was independent and membership was from a range of relevant organisations.

This also included making sure that there was engagement with children and young people, and that there would be appropriate reviews of serious cases and investigations when a child dies.

During the Bill's passage through the Assembly a number of amendments and commitments were requested by the Committee. These reflected concerns raised by NICCY and other stakeholders.

For instance, clauses were amended to allow the Board to publish material without DHSSPS approval, and to place a positive duty on the Board so it must promote communication with children.

***NICCY's, and other stakeholders' work, was central in enhancing the legislation and providing a firm foundation that should mean the Board is better placed to safeguard children.***

## PLAY AND LEISURE



**One of the initial things the first Commissioner did was to commission a major report on children's rights. Play was identified as a key area that contributed to a child's development.**

NICCY's 2004 review identified many issues for children in accessing play facilities. The lack of age appropriate activities, rural isolation, access for children with disabilities, and the quality and safety of play and leisure spaces, were all causing real difficulties.

It appeared that the lack of a play strategy was a key issue. In 2005 the Commissioner made play and leisure a priority, with the objective of ensuring facilities for play and leisure were put in place and a play strategy developed.

NICCY provided advice to government on developing a Play and Leisure Policy Statement. Concerns were raised that government had only considered children up to the age of 11, instead of up to 18. The Commissioner therefore stressed the need for clear actions to implement the policy.

***In the final statement, released in 2009, the age range had been extended to 18 and a clear commitment was given to produce action plans.***

The Commissioner's second review of children's rights (2008) found there had been few changes. Indeed, play was the top issue for children and parents, raising concerns in relation to safety, affordability, accessibility and the age range of provision. These issues were reflected in a June 2010 'Make it Right' campaign briefing. This was part of the Commissioner's campaign to deliver the voice of children and young people to Ministers and MLAs.

In 2010 NICCY staff sat as observers on groups set up to inform the development of Play and Leisure Action plans, and presented research including a survey of play provision in local councils.

Written advice was provided, and the final plan was released later that year. Since then OFMDFM have coordinated activities in relation to the delivery of the plan and provided funding to Councils for pilot projects.

The Commissioner has, through research and campaigning, consistently provided advice to government on play. NICCY has been pleased to see, over the past 10 years, the development of the Play and Leisure Policy and plans, and funding for innovative pilot schemes. The Commissioner will continue to monitor developments.

## YOUTH JUSTICE



**Over the past ten years, NICCY has addressed many justice-related issues in its work and consistently advocated for a system that has the best interests of children at its heart, that the health and welfare of the child are paramount, and that the use of prevention and diversionary measures are a priority.**

***The Commissioner submitted oral and written evidence to the Assembly's Review of the youth justice system in 2011, and NICCY is a member of the Youth Justice Stakeholder Forum, which is advising on the implementation of the Review's recommendations.***

The Commissioner welcomed many of the Review recommendations and particularly those aiming to address delays in the system, those placing a strong emphasis on diversion and

rehabilitation, and the proposal to incorporate Article 3 of the UNCRC ('best interests of the child') as the principal aim of the youth justice system.

NICCY has consistently expressed concerns about the detention of under 18s in Hydebank Wood, calling for them to be relocated to more appropriate types of provision. Therefore, the Commissioner welcomed the announcement by the Minister for Justice in 2012 that they would no longer be detained there, although

NICCY is continuing to challenge the proposal to retain young people in Hydebank Wood under 'exceptional circumstances'.

Given the extreme vulnerability of many children and young people in the youth justice system, NICCY commissioned research in 2011 on how positive relationships can make a difference and published the report "She's a Legend": The Role of Significant Adults in the Lives of Children and Young People in Contact with the Criminal Justice System'.

This provided evidence demonstrating how having a 'significant adult' in their life could have a real and positive influence, including their social and emotional development and their engagement in education and training. NICCY has regularly cited the evidence and recommendations in its advice to government.

## ENGAGING WITH OUR STAKEHOLDERS



**Engaging with stakeholders is core to making sure the Commissioner is effective and efficient in meeting NICCY's obligations.**

As part of its legislative duties, NICCY is required to promote children's rights, inform people about its work and how they get in touch. To do this the Commissioner has developed extensive connections to reach out to stakeholders.

This has involved partnership working with key groups, such as children and young people themselves, and their parents and/or carers. Work has also been done to connect with schools, politicians, legal practitioners, community and voluntary groups, and professional associations.

Programmes were designed and delivered to engage with these stakeholders and to hear what they said about children's rights. This work was essential to make sure that those who needed to know about NICCY could be supported and there was added value to the work of all who were involved.



Some examples of how NICCY engaged with stakeholders:

- Schools' awareness campaign reached out to 40,000+ pupils.
- The views of children and young people in the work of the Commissioner(s) were a priority in corporate planning, with the Shout! and URVoice campaigns specifically targeting children and young people.
- An annual publication was produced, which was included as an insert in a daily newspaper, with a circulation at the time of 90,000+.
- An ongoing programme of work on engaging with politicians was undertaken. The Commissioner and/or staff, with children and young people met with Ministers, MLAs, party representatives and others as part of this work.
- The media has attended key launches of the Commissioner's work, and has carried extensive articles, news items and photographs across each of the ten years.
- Training events have been held with a range of professional organisations including nurses, social workers, legal professionals and teachers.
- NICCY has partnered with universities and teaching colleges to work with student teachers, and youth and community workers on children's rights.
- The Commissioner has worked with international bodies including the Council of Europe, the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children and the European Network of Youth Advisers.

Research has shown there is an increased awareness of the Commissioner over the last 10 years, for example a 2011 audit of politicians showed 95% of MLAs were aware of the Commissioner's work and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Also, the Convention and children's rights have been increasingly referred to by Ministers and MLAs over the past three years, in plenary sessions, committee meetings and departmental strategies laid before the Assembly.

As part of the Commissioner's duties, media in Northern Ireland, including newspapers, radio and television, carried stories communicating NICCY's work.

***More than 1,300 student teachers, youth and community workers received training; this training raised awareness of the Convention and will influence their work and practice.***

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



**This snapshot gives a small flavour of our work over the past decade. It has been a time when my predecessor and I, have pushed to the fore the fulfilment of children's rights. That work will continue as my new Corporate Plan is put in place. However, we can all contribute towards this.**

I believe that children's rights are essential for a society that wants to protect children and young people, that wants to support children and young people, and that truly respects them, values their voice, their role and their contribution.

Much has been achieved already, much is being carried forward as I write this, but much more needs to be done in the future to make children and young people's rights a reality.

My hope is that the Northern Ireland Executive, Ministers and MLAs can build on what has been achieved and work with us to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. And most importantly, that they will hear what children and young people say, that they will listen to children and young people and they will act on what they hear from children and young people.

**Patricia-Lewesley Mooney**

*You can read more on the work of the Commissioner at [www.niccy.org](http://www.niccy.org), today and over the past decade, as well as in the Annual Reports on each year's work. You can also follow the Commissioner on Twitter (@nichildcom)*







HELPING CHANGE  
10 YEARS  
CHILDREN'S LIVES  
2003-2013

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