

**“SHE’S A LEGEND!”
‘The Role of Significant Adults in the Lives of
Children and Young People in Contact with the
Criminal Justice System’**

**The Mac
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[NB please check against delivery]**

Closing Reflections and Concluding Comments

I’m sure you will agree that the researchers and community and youth workers, a.k.a. the ‘Significant Adults’ have illustrated the issues arising in the research very clearly and eloquently today. It was extremely interesting and valuable to hear the comments and experiences of young people, interwoven through the presentations.

The contributors again highlighted the vulnerability of many young people coming into contact with the justice system, outlining the many challenging issues which impact on their lives. They also demonstrated how positive and affirming relationships can support young people in many different ways, whether that is in promoting their self-esteem and confidence, helping them access education, training or employment or supporting them to make positive choices in their lives.



The benefits of such relationships cannot be underestimated. And yet, it can be easy to take them for granted and to assume that they are commonplace – an integral feature of almost everyone’s life. This is clearly not the case.

For some children and young people, the opportunity to establish a mutually respectful, open, and affirming connection with a ‘significant adult’ – whoever that may be, could be a new experience and could be key to helping them to make significant decisions in their lives.

As the Researchers noted, the Report outlines a series of Recommendations, which NICCY is now considering in detail, and seeking, where appropriate, to take forward. We will continue to engage with the Department of Justice and other key government departments including Health, Education and OFMDFM to highlight issues affecting children and young people who are in contact with, have been in contact with, or at risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. In doing so, we will also highlight examples of good practice in different initiatives and programmes.



The findings of this research will support our call for greater and more effective collaborative, cross-departmental working to address the needs of these children and young people. Clearly, this responsibility does not just lie with the Department of Justice but also involves other government departments. It is vital that early intervention and prevention strategies consider children's and families' social and economic needs and seek to have a 'holistic impact' in order that they can address the many inter-related risk factors affecting children and young people. Very importantly, approaches should aim to divert children and young people away from the criminal justice system.

The research demonstrated how relationships between significant adults and young people can enable young people to access their rights, including education, health provisions, identity and family connection. NICCY is currently working with a range of organizations to support them in incorporating children's rights into their practice. We will continue with this work and also seek to engage with other agencies.

Negative stereotyping of young people has been a priority issue for NICCY for some time. We will continue, through all aspects of our work, to promote positive images of children and young people, to



challenge government and the media to also do so, and to find ways to tackle discrimination against children.

As part of its ongoing work, NICCY will continue to explore wider issues of social injustice and inequality which impact on many children's development and life opportunities in Northern Ireland and challenge breaches of children's rights wherever they arise.

I would encourage you all to read the report. We also have a young person's version of the report and these are available on the NICCY website, along with the other Reports I mentioned in my opening remarks. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Researchers for all their work in completing the research and writing the Report.

I would also like to thank each of the organisations who participated in the project, and especially, all the adults and young people who so generously shared their thoughts, views and experiences with the researchers.

Finally, can I thank you all for attending this afternoon and for supporting this event.

Thank you.

