

## **Speech on the review of Child Centred Care by Barney McNeany, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, on the 26th June 2006.**

Good Afternoon children, young people - and not so young people - and thank you all for coming to this very important event, which I promise you will not last too long.

Today we wish to share with you what we found out when, with the help of VOYPIC, we carried out a review of children and young people's involvement in care planning and LAC reviews.

Now many of you will know that the main role of my office is to be a watchdog for children and young people, to make sure they are being treated as well as they should be. Part of the way we do this, is to compare how they are treated with how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says they should be.

For those of you who have not heard of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child; it is a set of standards about how children and young people should be treated that our Government, and many other Governments from around the world, have agreed to. These standards are called articles and there is one particular one – Article 12 - that clearly states that children and young people have the right to both have a say in things that affect them and be listened to.

There is a group of people at the United Nations – the Committee on the Rights of the Child – whose job it is to check how well governments are meeting the standards that they have agreed to. When they met last year to look at the experiences of children and young people in care, they were worried about how little many of these young people were involved in decisions about their care.

They were worried that young people's voices were not being heard in the care process and that young people's wishes and feelings were not being taken on board in decisions that affected their lives. They asked Governments to try harder to make sure they involved children and young people in decisions about their care. They said children should have decisions made with them, not about them.



Because this is so important, they asked Governments to check how well this is being done – both in individual young people’s lives and in terms of involving children and young people in decision making at a higher level.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is not the only thing that states that children and young people should be involved in decisions about their lives. The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 – which is the law that covers how children and young people in care should be treated – also says that people in charge need to ask children and young people what they think and pay attention to what they say, bearing in mind the young person’s age and understanding.

Research done for NICCY a few years ago found that having a say in decisions about their lives was one of the key issues for children and young people throughout Northern Ireland. The researchers said:

*“Northern Ireland does not listen to children, or worse, it affords them only minimalist, tokenistic opportunities to participate and engage with adults...Not being heard, not being allowed to participate in decisions made about them and not being consulted about changes to their lives, big and small, is the single most important issue to children in Northern Ireland” (Kilkelly et al, 2004) .*

NICCY feels it is very important that all children and young people get the chance to have their say on things that are important to them. NICCY also feel it is very important that adults listen to what children and young people have to say. This review came about because we wanted to find out if this was true for children and young people in care.

Helen will tell you a bit more about what we did and what we found out in a minute but first I want to say a big thanks to all the children and young people who took part in our review. I also want to thank all the adults who took part – foster carers, parents, residential staff, social workers and LAC chairs. And a special thanks to the staff and peer researchers from VOYPIC who helped us during the review.

We are very grateful to all of you for your help and your willingness to take part. We could not have done this work without your help.



My aim, at the end of this, is to see all children and young people in care having more chance to be actively involved in decisions about their lives. I urge everyone here to work with me on this issue. Children and young people have the right to be fully involved in decisions which affect them - I'd like you to help me make that right a reality.

I am now going to hand you over to Helen, who will quickly talk you through how we did this work and what we found.

Thank you for listening.

