Good morning.

My name is Chloe Finnegan and this is my colleague Matt Carlin. We are members of NICCY's Youth Panel. Both of us were very happy to volunteer to speak here today about some of the key issues we think affect children and young people in today' society.

Bullying has been identified in many research studies as one of the major concerns facing young people in the UK today.

Most people don't realise how big of a problem bullying is. Young people are bullied due to their race, faith, culture, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. Bullying can be so common in our lives that at some point, all of us have seen it, have heard of it, and some of us here, might even have experienced it.

Some people might say "They're kids. They'll get over it." And.. "it helps to build character and makes them stronger" or "They can deal with it themselves."

In reality, bullying brakes and rips children and young people apart, **bit by bit!**

Most people, including teachers, don't even realise when someone is being bullied. Even worse, as reported by the National Association of School Psychologists, researchers in the United States found out that 1 in 4 teachers will see nothing wrong with bullying and will only intervene in around 4% of the time[1].

In the United Kingdom teachers face a dilemma. On the one hand, there is a need to raise awareness about this problem in schools, by helping teachers to understand and to be able to know what to do. However, some people think that a teacher's intervention might strengthen the case of the bully and would help to reinforce the problem. But bullying isn't something that should be intervened by a teacher only 4% of the time; it should be intervened 100% of the time.

This is because whilst a child is at school, teachers have a duty of care to all minors. Therefore it is a child's right to be heard and to receive 100% support by all teachers. Now, in my opinion someone should not be a teacher if they are not prepared to intervene when their pupils are being bullied.

All statistics regarding bullying are quite shocking, for instance recent studies in the UK have shown that:

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[1] **http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/bullying_fs.aspx**

- From information collated by the NSPCC[2] inform us that at least 10% of the calls that children, from both genders, make to ChildLine are related to bullying, and that the majority of the boys that phone this children's charity, do so, to talk about bullying.

- The 'Tellus4 National Report' carried out in 2010 by the National Foundation for Educational Research, found out that at least 46%[3] of young people have experienced some kind of bullying in their life.

Bullying can have serious consequences for children, and I learnt this from a young age when I first became aware that my dad had been bullied so badly at his Grammar School - this forced him to quit school before achieving his "O" levels.

Bullying, can not only lead to academic underachievement, but the physical and emotional scars that are left in the affected individuals can have a more permanent effect on them, leading to low self-esteem, eating disorders, crime, self-harm and in the worst case scenario, death.

There are different ways that a person could be bullied. It could be physical, verbal, indirect, social alienation and intimidation.

Unfortunately, the harassment does not end when you step out of the school gates; cyber bulling is becoming common on many popular social networking sites such as Facebook, twitter, ask.fm.

In fact in the UK, cyber bullying is the most common type. According to a report published by the NSPCC in March 2013, 38% of young people have been cyber bullied[4].

For these reasons, NICCY has published a 'Stop Bullying' pack that provides practical guidance, not only for teachers, but also for young people to understand their rights and to help to create a safer environment in schools.

NICCY "Stop Bullying" pack was developed through research and importantly that research involved the participation of young people like myself, who are members of NICCY's Youth Panel on the Steering Committee. So vitally, the information in this bullying pack has taken into consideration the point of view of us, the young people.

And finally on bullying... I think pupils have a right to know how much bullying goes on their school, and parents ought to know how much bullying goes on in their children's school.

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[2] **http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforprofessionals/bullying/bullying_statistics_wda85732.html**
[3] Tellus4 National Report, National Foundation for Educational Research, 2010 (pg.36)
[4] **http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforprofessionals/bullying/bullying_statistics_wda85732.html**

I find it incredible that schools are not required to report the numbers of incidences of bullying to their Education Board or the Department of Education. How can this be? How can we know if we are improving the situation if we don't know how many young people have be bullied today, this week, this month or this year?

Another topic that I would like to talk about today is child poverty.
It is nearly impossible to imagine that today, right here, and in an era marked by foreign holidays, electronic gadgets, fancy clothing and exotic food, some children are living in poverty in Northern Ireland.

As highlighted on by The Campaign to End Poverty, sadly West Belfast has the second highest amount of children living in poverty in the UK, outnumbered only by Central Manchester.

I found it very upsetting to know, that nearly 50% of all the children living in West Belfast[5], in our capital city, in the **country** of my birth, are **poor!**

It is even more upsetting, to have found out that in Northern Ireland, 1 in every 5 children, this means, 20**%** of the entire children population, live in poverty[6].

This poverty is not about the lack of fancy things; the problem is that up to 98,000...yes, think of this, 98,000 **children**[7] go to bed at night time without heat in their houses, without having eaten a hot meal that evening, and without a proper uniform to attend school the following morning.

Why children are poor and how to resolve the problem is a complex one, and young people like myself would like to see all people and organisations working together to change the future for these children.

98,000 children did not choose to be born poor. But I am sure, as a young person, that if the correct opportunities are given to poor children and their parents, they would not choose to be poor.

What makes these statistics scandalous is that the UK is the 6th strongest worldwide economy[8].

Poverty is not a permanent state, but it is a cycle that it is difficult to break, and it has a negative impact on many children's rights, such as our right to good housing, our right to proper nourishment and our right to education.

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[5] The child poverty map of the UK 2013, End Child Poverty (February 2013)
[6] The child poverty map of the UK 2013, End Child Poverty (February 2013)
[7] The child poverty map of the UK 2013, End Child Poverty (February 2013)
[8] World Economic League Table, Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2013

It is a fact that if these children and their families are not supported enough, and children are born poor, will most likely be poor the rest of their lives, and they will then bring up their children in the same poor conditions.

I have to say that I am very lucky I was not born into a poor family, but because my mum's family live in Mexico, a country with high levels of poverty, I have a deep interest in these social problems and how can be helped.

And finally, from the short time I have been involved with NICCY I have felt that my opinions and ideas are fully taking on board.

As a member of NICCY's youth panel in NICCY I am delighted to be working with Patricia as she raises awareness of this problem. I also commend her tireless work to protect and safeguard the rights of all children and young people as she strives to work effectively to reduce poverty in Northern Ireland once and for all.

And last but not least, I admire her for her role in holding the government to account in any failure in meeting the challenge of eliminating child poverty.

Thank you for listening to me and I will now hand over to Matt.

Thank You.