

# **NICCY Corporate Plan 2008-2011**

(NICCY Corporate Plan)



### Foreword

I am delighted to present to the First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, and to children, young people and their families, our draft corporate plan covering the years 2008 to 2011.

I took up post as the Commissioner for Children and Young People in January 2007 as the office was about to start the third year of its work on the corporate plan 2005 - 2008.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland (NICCY) was fortunate to have started life under the guidance of my predecessor, Mr Nigel Williams. I pay tribute to Nigel for his passion for the rights of children and young people which was so evident in the work undertaken to deliver on the objectives of NICCY's first corporate plan.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the entire NICCY team, who have all worked hard and successfully delivered on a wide range of corporate objectives; delivered against very challenging circumstances. I am fortunate as Commissioner to have a legacy of a solid achievement to build upon.

As a society emerging from conflict Northern Ireland is rightly considered as exemplary in giving children's rights such a clear priority with the creation of the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

I am proud to hold this office and I will endeavour to make the rights of children and young people a reality in their daily lives. To do this I must ensure that NICCY has clear objectives and priorities for achieving real and measurable success in delivering better outcomes for children and young people.

This corporate plan sets out the vision I have for NICCY in the next three years, building on the successes of the organisation and learning from our experience. I believe we must focus our limited resources on the priorities set out below so that NICCY can begin more in-depth work and have a greater impact on the lives of children and young people.



As we want to be more focussed on strategic work that will help children and young people we spoke to the experts – the children and young people themselves. We met and listened to more than 2,300 children and young people from across Northern Ireland, during our Children Rights Review research, as well as almost 1,500 during our public consultation on our priorities

What they told us has been brought together in a review, which we will publish later this year. This evidence, taken together with the experience we have built up since 2003, is set out below as a set of key priorities for our work 2008 to 2011.

There can be little doubt that progress has been made over the past three years, in Northern Ireland Society in general and in the re-emergence of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive. As a society we now have a great opportunity to make the lives of our children and young people better. We can ensure their rights, that is the promises we adults have made to them as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, are realised.

There remain many challenges and problems in the lives of our children and young people. Issues confronting children are changing. There are many new and difficult demands on them and their families which did not exist 10 or 20 years ago. With those challenges we need to invest in our children and young people, intervene early in their lives where difficulties emerge, harness the resources we have at our disposal in a much more combined and joined-up way, particularly for those most marginalised in our society. We must ensure that we act now to take today's children and young people out of poverty so that they don't become the parents of a future generation still experiencing the same difficulties.

As we move forward as a society towards 2011 I want to see Northern Ireland's children and young people happy, confident and respected in our society. Below you will see those areas we believe we need to focus on to make sure this comes about.

Last year we undertook an extensive consultation process to seek the views of children and young people, adults, parents and professionals; to ensure we have focussed on the right priorities mindful that we cannot do everything with the limited resources we have. You can see the results from the Consultation in the Addendum and Appendices at the end of this plan.



I would like to once again thank all those who helped me shape the future of this office.

*Patricia Lewsley*

Patricia Lewsley  
Commissioner for Children and Young People



## **Mission**

In looking to the future our mission as an organisation is to:

**Safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people.**

## **Vision**

Over the lifetime of this plan NICCY will, for children and young people in Northern Ireland:

- Make a real difference in their lives;
- Increase understanding and acceptance of their rights;
- Be well known, accessible and widely respected by them, and
- Lead best practice in implementing their right to participate.

## **Values**

We recognise that much of our work is underpinned by a number of values. We will use these in our day to day work and we will seek outcomes based on their fulfilment. They are to:

- Be centred on and respecting children and young people and their parents/carers.
- Be independent and trustworthy
- Be welcoming, friendly, responsive and accessible, open to criticism and ready to change.
- Serve all children and young people whatever their background and needs.
- Be flexible and innovative, orientated to finding quick and appropriate solutions.
- Work with others in a collaborative and co-operative manner but, where this proves ineffective, to be prepared to use the full range of our powers to bring about change
- Be effective, efficient and an organisation that is accountable and based on clear standards.
- Base our work on objective evidence and research.
- Value and care for staff, invest in our people and to be a family friendly organisation.



## **The context in which NICCY operates**

### **A. Legislative and policy context**

NICCY's powers and duties are set out in the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 ("the NICCY Order"); our founding legislation. We are bound by the scope and remit outlined in the NICCY Order and our experience of the operation of the legislation was reflected in NICCY's review of our founding legislation, undertaken in January 2007 as required by Article 24 of the Order. The review has identified a number of key areas where we believe the NICCY Order could be improved in order for NICCY to better safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people. We specifically wish to see improvements to the legislation in respect of the independence of the Commissioner, the remit and scope of NICCY's powers and the accountability arrangement for the Commissioner. We will work with colleagues in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to make progress on this aspect of our work in the lifetime of this corporate plan.

NICCY welcomed the publication of Government's 10 year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. This strategy which cuts across Government departments and places children and young people at the centre of Government policy seeks to embed many of the values and principles NICCY promotes. We will continue to be watchful that the commitments made in the strategy, and the action plans associated with it, are adhered to in practice and that better outcomes for children and young people are achieved arising from the implementation of the strategy.

The St Andrew's Agreement reaffirmed Government's commitment to a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. We wish to see the full inclusion of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. As a signatory to the convention Government has responsibilities to ensure that the rights of children are a fundamental part of the protections offered by such legislation. We will work with colleagues in Government, the Human Rights Commission and the community and voluntary sectors to ensure the full inclusion of the UNCRC in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Over the lifetime of NICCY's first corporate plan we expressed frustration with Government Departments about the slow pace of legislative reform for children and young people and at the lack of a more joined up approach to policy making. With the welcome return of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive we hope to see significant improvements in this area.

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## **B. Political and administrative**

The restoration of devolution, the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive has made a significant positive change to the political and administrative landscape in Northern Ireland. This has already had a significant impact on NICCY's agenda, with new demands placed upon the organisation to advise Ministers, political parties and the institutions of a devolved administration in order to safeguard and promote the rights of children and young people.

The Review of Public Administration (RPA) remains a key concern for the Commissioner. We have witnessed many welcome changes taking place as a result of the changes to administration in Health and Social Care. We remain concerned that in some instances, practice, resources and services for children and young people appear to be 'levelled down' to the lowest common denominator rather than best practice being spread out across the new bodies. The lack of clarity of the RPA process in the Education and Local Government sectors continues to bring uncertainty and, with it, an unwillingness to make decisions. This has negatively affected services to children and young people and developments in policy and practice in some areas.

NICCY continues to have excellent working relationships with the Commissioners for Children and Young People in England, Wales, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland and our colleagues in sister organisations in Northern Ireland, particularly the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) with whom we have a shared services arrangement for Information Technology services and support. We will continue to seek opportunities with other organisations to share services in order to reduce cost and maximise service resilience.

NICCY has also undertaken shared work on matters of mutual interest with:

- ECNI
- NIHRC
- Criminal Justice Inspection
- Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
- A range of Community and Voluntary bodies
- Office of Social Services



## **C. Economic and social context**

The Commissioner is aware of the significant impact poverty continues to have on the rights and best interests of many children and young people in Northern Ireland. The fact that poverty remains a key determinant in the inability of many children and young people to realise their rights under the terms of the UNCRC is made even starker when it is contrasted against the relative growth in our economy. We will seek to ensure our work highlights and challenges the effects of poverty on the children and young people of Northern Ireland and that we continue to seek improvements in this key area.

The effects of sectarianism continue to blight the lives of many of the children and young people of Northern Ireland and there is growing evidence, from our recent research and other evidence, of the impact of racism, homophobia and discrimination against those who have a disability. These forms of social exclusion will continue to be a significant factor in the lives of children and young people unless a consistent and co-ordinated effort is made across the public, voluntary and private sectors.

## **D. Finance**

We receive £1,853,000 a year as grant-in-aid from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Over the lifetime of this plan, 2008 to 2011, we anticipate that the financial baseline will be in the region of £1.9M a year (taking into effect efficiency savings as directed by the Office of the First Minister deputy First Minister (Department of Finance and Personnel)).

The remit of NICCY is wide, covering as it does all aspects of the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland. We have set out below our priorities mindful of the limited resources available to us ~ both financial and human. We will continue to work closely with the Office of First Minister, deputy First Minister to ensure that the level of resources meets the requirements on the Commissioner to deliver on its work for children and young people and to ensure the expectation that NICCY's role as a Champion for children and young people's rights may require recourse to the exercise of its functions under the NICCY Order, many of which are costly to undertake.

## **E. Value for money**

In the first three years NICCY has established effective governance arrangements, setting in place internal audit procedures and an independent provider of internal audit services; recruiting and developing an effective Audit and Risk Committee whose members provide independent oversight of the activities, including financial (NICCY Corporate Plan)





stewardship, of the Commissioner. In addition NICCY's annual accounts are audited by the Northern Ireland Audit Office and there is a significant oversight of the activities of the Commissioner by our sponsoring department the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister.

NICCY remains mindful of the need to be accountable for, and demonstrate value for money in, its work on behalf of children and young people.

## **F. Review of the Office of the Commissioner**

As part of the requirements set out in the NICCY legislation the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister undertook a review of NICCY over the summer months of 2007. NICCY was pleased that this review of the policy and legislative justification for the Commissioner for Children and Young People and its activities in the first three years concluded that there is a continuing need for an independent watchdog for children and young people's rights, and that NICCY has successfully established itself in its early years. The review contains a number of recommendations for the future work and structure of the office of the Commissioner. NICCY will work with colleagues in Government to agree and prioritise the implementation of these recommendations together with those outlined earlier in respect of the Article 24 review of the NICCY legislation.



## **Our Priorities**

For the past three years NICCY has had 15 priorities to work on. We have achieved many successes under those priorities, but we now want to really focus on areas where we can make further significant impact.

To update our information on the lives of children and young people, we met, spoke to and listened to the views of over 2,000 children and young people in a variety of places. We also heard the views of several hundred parents and professionals who are involved with children and young people.

To help us make sure that we were aware of changes in law, policy and practice we also commissioned external researchers, who produced a report updating us on how children and young people's rights are being met at the moment.

We combined both sets of information into our Children's Rights Review (CRR) to create a rich and wide-ranging source of information on many aspects of the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland. Later this year we will publish the full report of this project so that Government, the statutory, community, and voluntary sectors and all who have an interest in children's rights in Northern Ireland can review the findings.

We decided our priorities using the findings from our Children's Rights Review, complaints we received from children, young people parents and carers, experience gathered since the office was set up and a detailed public consultation.

In agreeing our priorities we used the following criteria (not in any order of importance) to assist us in making decisions about which priorities we wish to focus upon in the period 2008 to 2011:

- Issues that impact on most children or which are very serious breaches of rights (which may affect only a few children in terms of risk to their life or serious harm)
- Issues identified by children and young people in the CRR as most important
- Issues the Committee on the Rights of the Child has made in their concluding observations on the UK generally and Northern Ireland in particular
- Issues that NICCY has received a lot of complaints about



## **Priorities and Action Areas**

### **Play and Leisure**

- This priority is about children and young people having places to go and things to do.
  - **Safe Places**  
making sure that places where children and young people play and go meet the highest health and safety requirements, and that children and young people feel safe when they are there
  - **Affordable Activity**  
making sure places and activities used by children and young people are not too expensive
  - **Accessible Activity**  
making sure play and leisure facilities are close enough to where children and young people live, and can be used by all children, including those with a disability
  - **Age**  
making sure there are things to do, suitable for all different ages of children and young people

### **Having your say**

- This priority is about children and young people having a say about important decisions in their lives, which is part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12)
  - **More of a Say for Children and Young People**  
creating opportunities for children and young people to have a say in decisions affecting them
  - **Being Heard and Making a Difference**  
making sure that children and young people's views are heard to help change things for the better
  - **Marginalised Voices Sought and Heard**  
making sure that children and young people who often don't get a say, because of poverty, their health, their culture, beliefs or other reasons, get a chance to have their voice heard too
  - **Making Policy a Reality**  
making sure Government and public bodies involve and listen to children and young people when making new laws and policies about them



## **Wellbeing and Mental Health Protection**

- This priority is about the services children and young people receive to help their physical, emotional and mental health.
  - **Getting the right Mental Health Services**  
making sure children and young people's mental health services are there when they need them, and where they need them
  - **Improving Wellbeing**  
making sure that children and young people have the support and skills to help them grow as people and cope when times are hard
  - **Acceptance and Understanding**  
making sure that people know and understand mental illness, and that it is not a cause for shame
  - **Social Inclusion**  
making sure that all children and young people are included in society no matter of any illness or disability they may have

## **Equal treatment**

- This priority is about making sure that children and young people are treated fairly.
  - **Discrimination**  
making sure that children and young people are not treated differently because of their age, their disability, their race, their sexual orientation or their community background
  - **Equal Access to Appropriate Services**  
making sure all services for children and young people are right for them
  - **Stereotyping**  
making sure that when people talk about children and young people they keep an open mind and don't make assumptions
  - **Government keeping its promises**  
making sure that when Government says it's going to do something for children and young people it keeps the promises made to them



## **Protection**

- This priority is about making sure that children and young people are protected from risks.
  - **Child Abuse**  
making sure that laws, policies and practice are in place to safeguard children and young people's best interests and protect them
  - **Road Safety**  
making sure Government does as much as possible to protect children and young people whether they walk, cycle, travel in cars or on the bus or train
  - **Community Safety**  
making sure that where children and young people live, play and grow is safe
  - **Bullying**  
making sure that children and young people are protected from bullying in all its forms; whether the bully is an adult or another young person

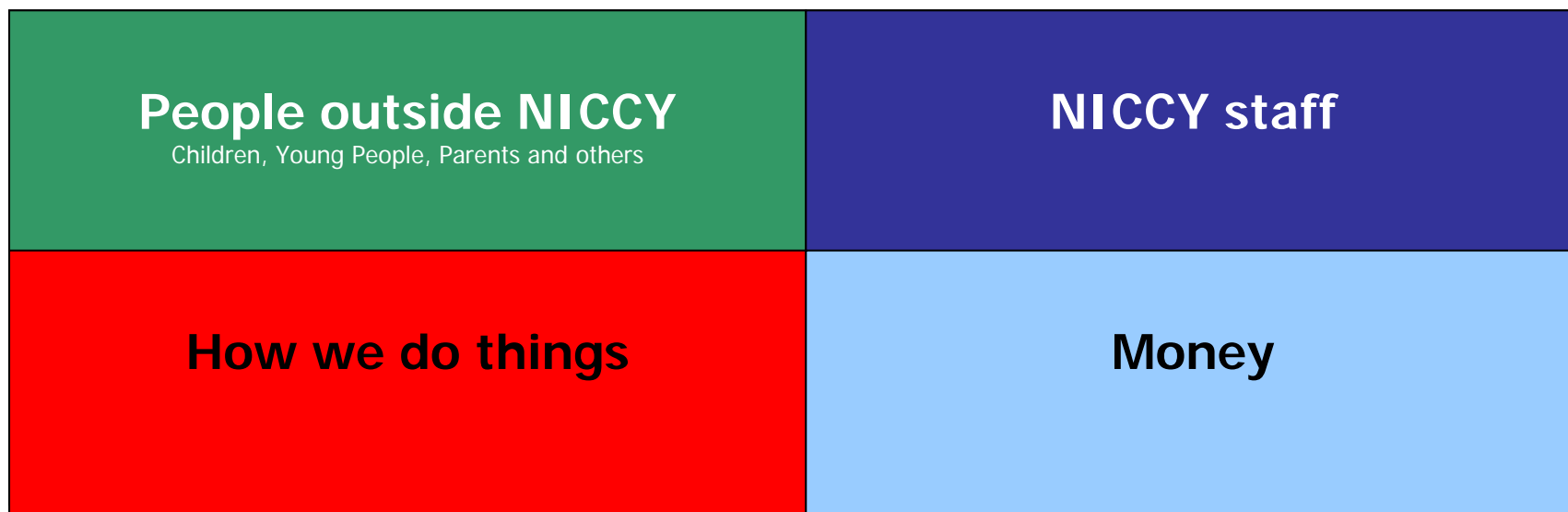


## NICCY Corporate Plan 2008 - 2011

### Corporate Objectives

Set out below are 16 corporate objectives for the organisation over the period of 2008 to 2011. These objectives will guide the work of the Commissioner and, together with the Priorities for Action, will focus our work to achieve our mission and vision. These objectives will form the basis of individual Business Plans in 2008 to 2009, 2009 to 2010 and 2010 to 2011. We will be reviewing these objectives annually with our sponsoring department, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, to ensure we remain true to our value of being flexible and innovative whilst ensuring we have an agreed and widely accepted set of corporate objectives.

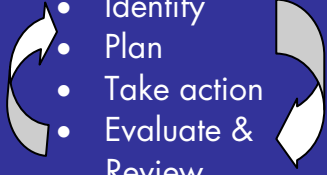
In arriving at these objectives we have used the tool known as the "Balanced Scorecard" which seeks to ensure all aspects of the organisation are in balance so that the most effective and efficient use of resources is made to achieve objectives. We consider the objectives for NICCY are best reflected through the following groupings of the scorecard:



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<b>People Outside NICCY</b> Children Parents Others	Listen to and encourage the active involvement and engagement of C&YP and their parents and promote our work	Influence and improve the law, policy and practice relating to C&YP	<b>NICCY Staff</b>	To have staff numbers and skill levels required to effectively deliver our services	Develop our staff and leadership in line with best practice 
	Provide a responsive, accessible and targeted legal assistance, complaints and advice service to children and young people and their parents	Utilise the powers and functions of the NICCY Order to promote and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people		Value staff and support them to achieve an appropriate work life balance	Develop a child friendly and child centred culture
<b>How we do things</b>	Develop, implement and evaluate strategies for research, service reviews and investigations	Maintain and evaluate criteria for reviews, investigations and legal assistance	<b>Money</b>	Develop, allocate and manage annual budgets to fulfil our priorities	Control costs, make effective and efficient use of our resources within budget
	Develop, implement and evaluate effective internal policies and procedures and governance arrangements	Develop, implement and evaluate strategies for communication and C&YPs participation		Secure funding to maintain & develop our services	Develop and maintain effective governance arrangements in line with best practice



## Addendum – Responses to NICCY Consultation

From November 2007 to February 2008 NICCY undertook a major consultation called UR Voice. Over this 3 month period NICCY heard the views of almost 1500 children and young people, as well as more than 400 parents, carers and professionals (see Appendix 1).

These responses fell into two categories:

- **Prioritizing Action Areas** – finding out which of the four action areas under each of the five priorities people felt were the most important for NICCY to work on first
- **Comments on Draft Corporate Plan** – listening to the views of people who work with children and young people

NICCY will publish the responses on [www.niccy.org](http://www.niccy.org) from those organisations that provided comments on the draft Corporate Plan.

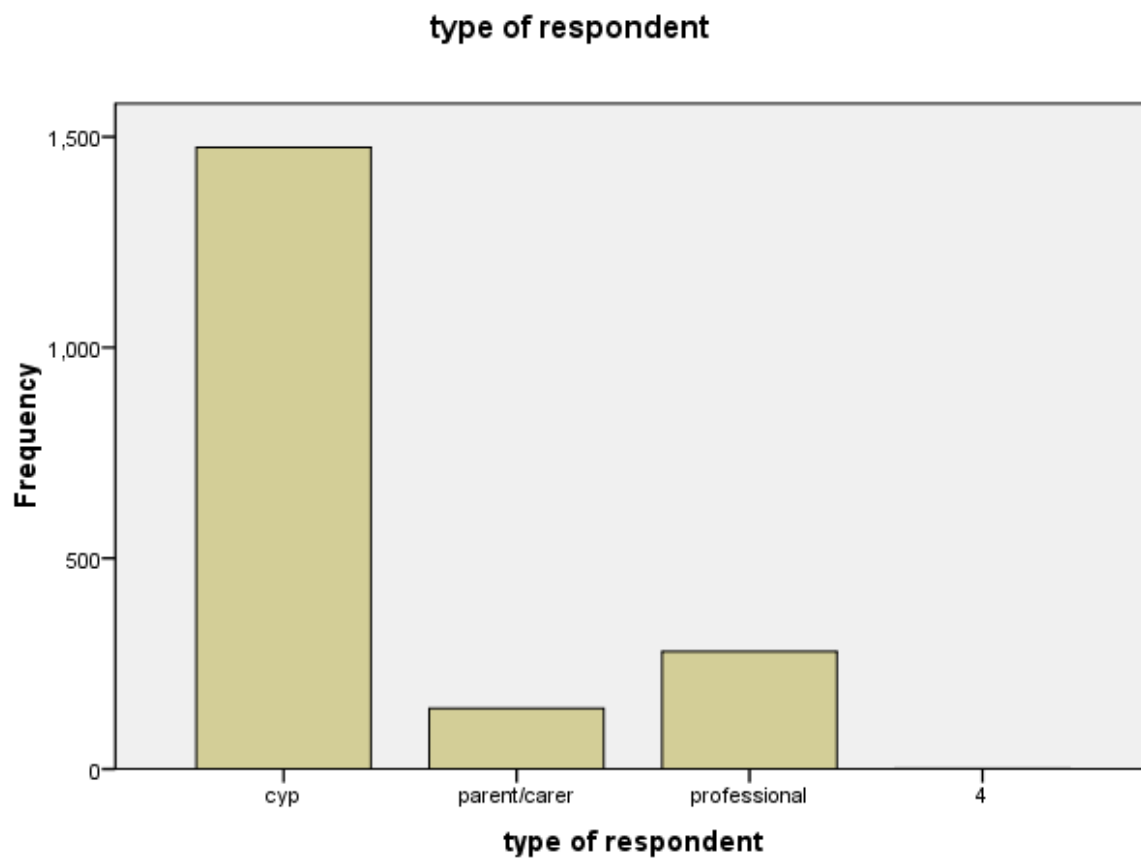
The results showing which action areas were the most popular can be viewed in Appendix 2 below. In summary they are:

- **'Safe Places'** got the most responses in Play and leisure
- **'Being Heard'** got the most responses in Having Your Say
- **'Right Mental Health Services'** got the most responses in Wellbeing and Mental Health
- **'Child Abuse'** got the most responses in Protection Priority
- **'Discrimination'** got the most responses in Equal Treatment

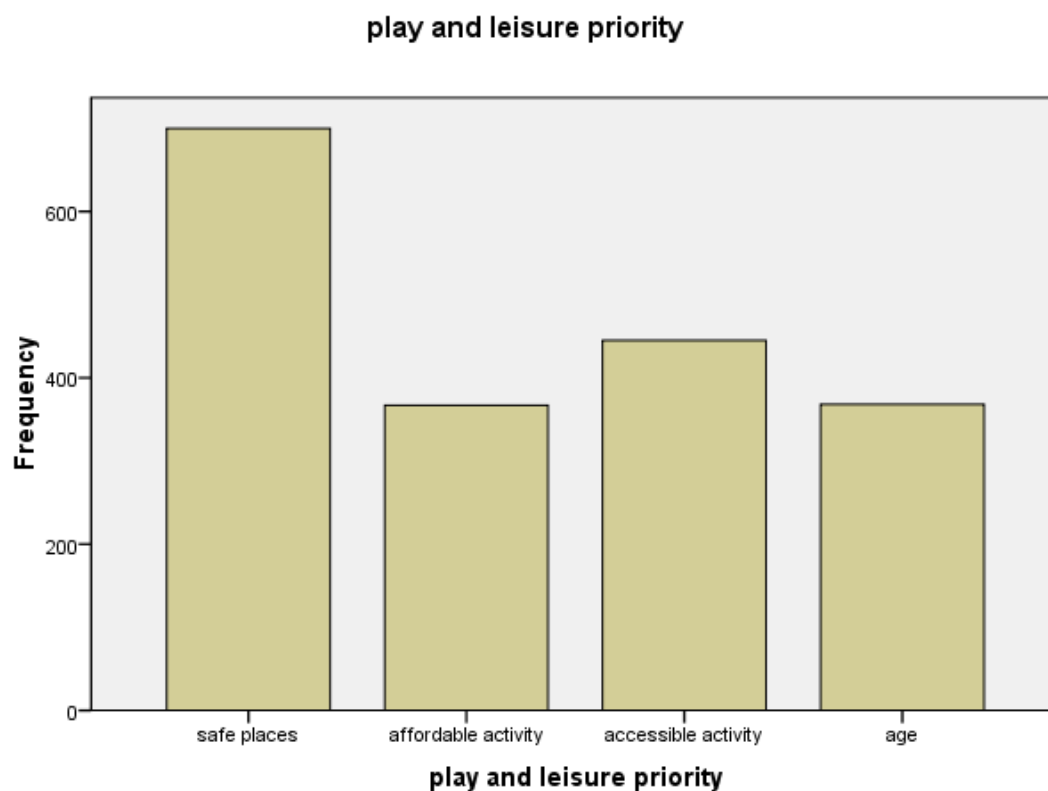


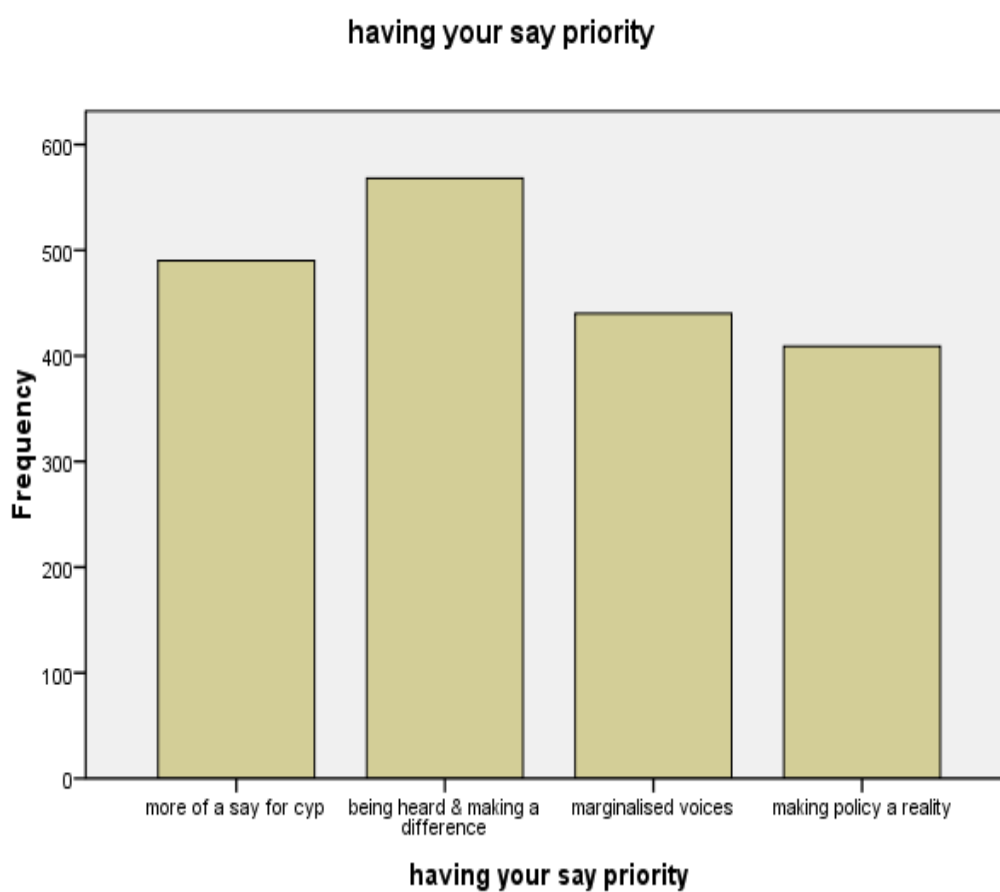


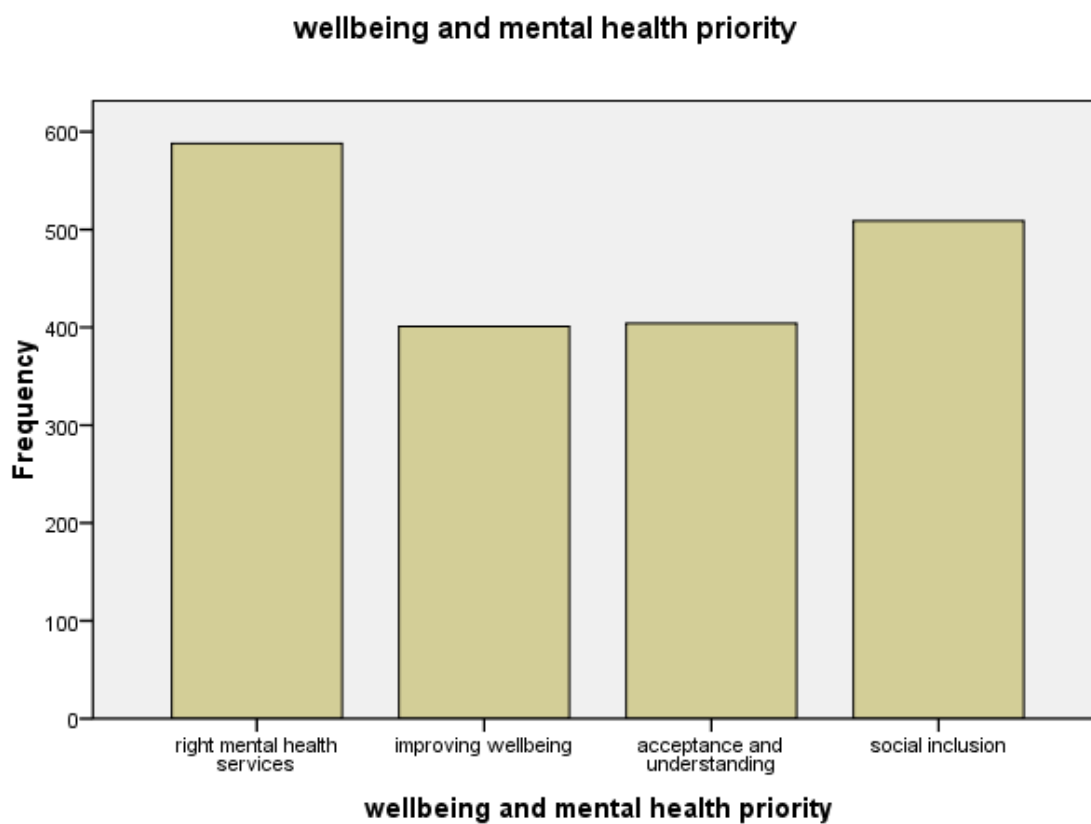
## APPENDIX 1

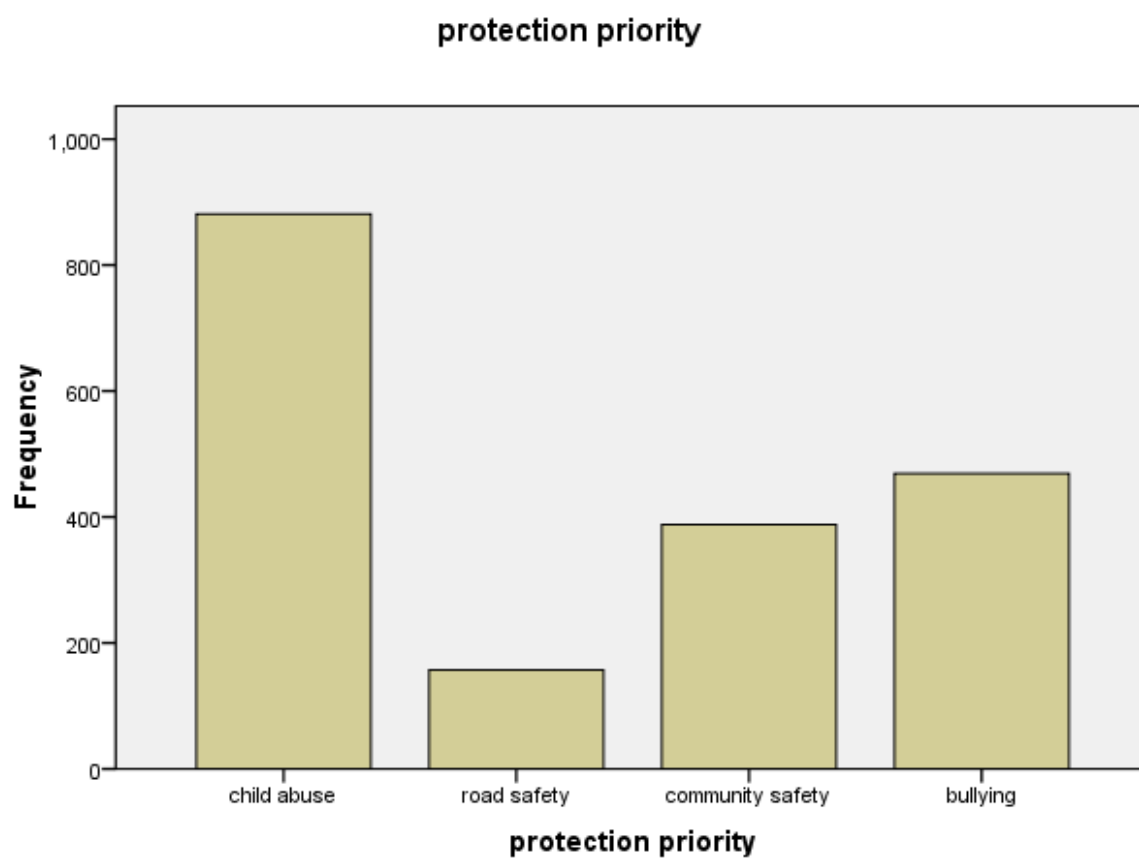


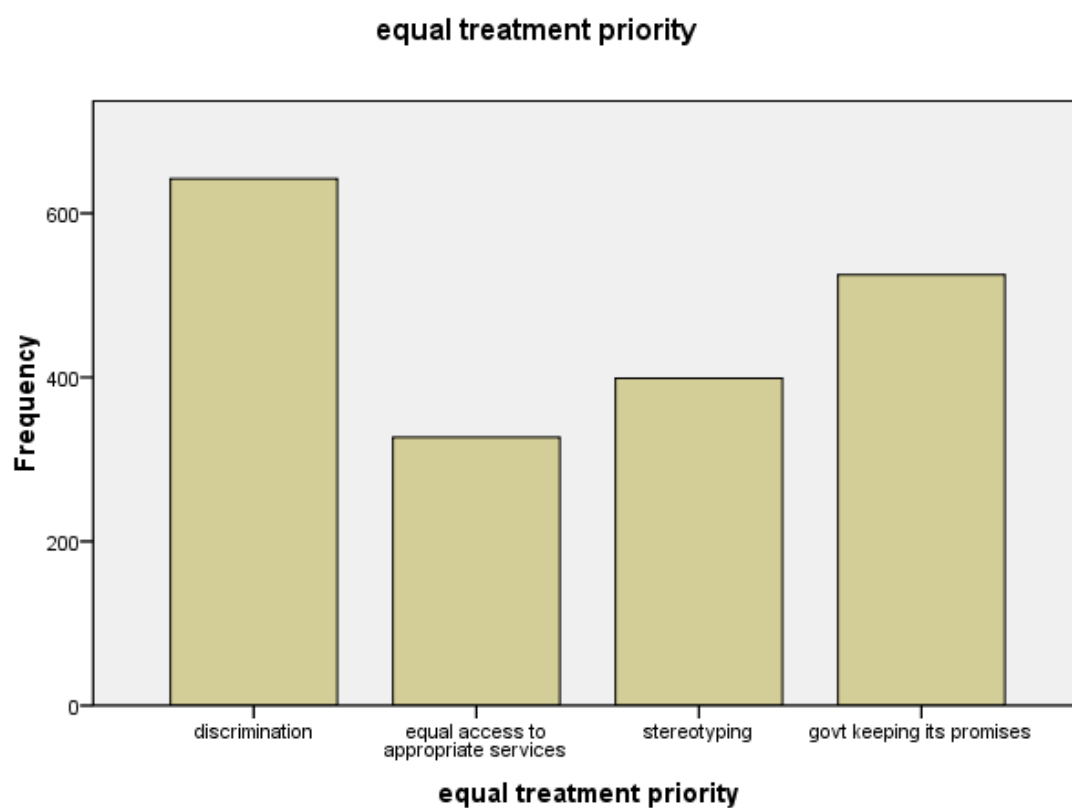
## APPENDIX 2











## Notes:



