



# CHILDREN AND CARE

This briefing outlines key information about care experienced children and young people in Northern Ireland and calls for a range of actions to be put in place to ensure their rights and best interests are fully protected.

This is the eighth in a series of 12 policy briefings published throughout 2010 to mark the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). These draw from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) report: *Children's Rights: Rhetoric or Reality* (2008) and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations on the UK Government's report (2008).

Campaign briefings will also be released each month. The purpose of these is to support children and young people to campaign for Government action to address child rights violations in Northern Ireland.

**NICCY was established in 2003 in accordance with the provisions of The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The principal aim of the Commissioner, as defined in Article 6 of the Order, is to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young persons.**

*Please note that the use of the term child refers to a child or young person that falls within the remit of NICCY (up to 18 years or up to 21 years where they are care experienced or have a disability).*

While many children and young people in Northern Ireland are able to enjoy a positive and appropriate upbringing within a safe and loving family environment, there are those for whom this is not possible. The UNCRC provides special protections and rights for children and young people who, for whatever reason, need an alternative to family care.

Care experienced young people in Northern Ireland "are one of the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society" being over-represented among those who have poor educational outcomes, are unemployed, are young parents, are in contact with justice agencies, experience mental health difficulties and are at risk of poverty and homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Such patterns of marginalisation and less than acceptable outcomes for care experienced children have been well documented, as have calls for more to be done by Government to enhance the life chances of these young people.

In 2007 the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) launched its draft strategy for care experienced children 'Care Matters in Northern Ireland: Building a Bridge to a Better Future' which received endorsement by the Northern Ireland Executive in late 2009.<sup>2</sup> To date however, no final version of the strategy or implementation plan has been published.

A departmental programme board to take forward Care Matters is currently being established and should prioritise the following:

1. Greater continuity of care for children and young people must be ensured.
2. Improved transition support must be provided as care experienced young people become adults.
3. Childrens participation must be central to care planning.

*Please note that this briefing does not address the experiences or needs of children who are adopted or those who are accommodated in secure care, special schools, hospitals or supported living.*