

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **LEISURE, PLAY, RECREATION, CULTURE AND THE ARTS**

## INTRODUCTION

*States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts... States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity (Art. 31, CRC).*

Article 31 of the CRC refers to the child's right to leisure, play, recreation, culture and the arts. Some of these concepts are problematic from the point of view of the established definitions of children's and youth activity in Northern Ireland. For instance, the term 'leisure' is not generally used to describe activities such as youth provision or organised sport. That said, howsoever these matters are defined, it is clear that the right covers all of the various types of activity which children and young people want to engage in during their free time. For the purposes of the analysis, the findings have been categorised as follows:

- General issues
- Play
- Youth Service
- Sport
- Culture and the Arts

## GENERAL ISSUES

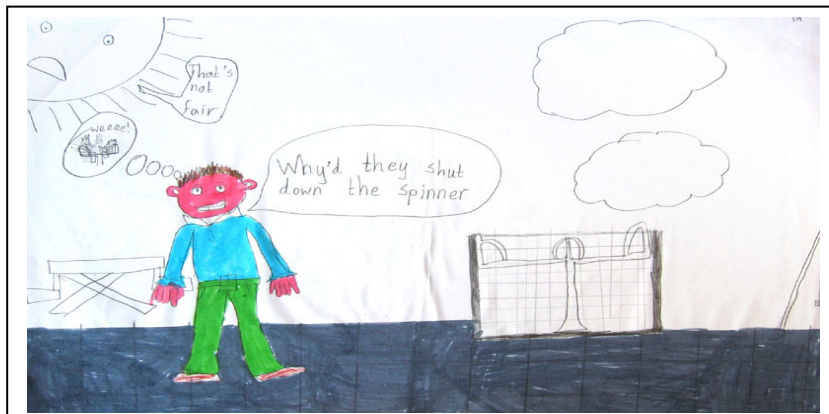
Out of the 620 submissions from children and young people in the NICCY schools research relating to play and leisure, 412 (68%) of these related to being unable to access appropriate 'play', 'leisure', 'sport' and/or 'youth club' facilities where children and young people could have fun and meet friends. One young girl addressed her comments to the Commissioner directly:

"Mr Williams, could you please give us money for the park? The swings we play on, are rusty and dirty and breaking down. There are big holes in the grass and dog's dirt, and on the ground there's glass and stones and rubbish. Every day the bigger ones are on the swings and when they leave, the swings are flipped over and spat on. What we need now is swings, new slides and monkey bars. Please give us money for our Park" (Girl, aged 10).

Other typical comments included:

"We need more sports facilities in our area. We have only a youth club and two football pitches but we are too old to go to the youth club. We need more pastimes in our area. We have a play park but it is mostly aimed at younger children" (Girl, aged 14).

"The facilities in my area are terrible. There is nothing for teenagers at all. There could be a few decent shops put up because my nearest town for shopping is [name of town] and I can't always get there. Things for teenagers should be put up because since there is nothing to do, teenagers generally cause trouble" (Girl, aged 14).

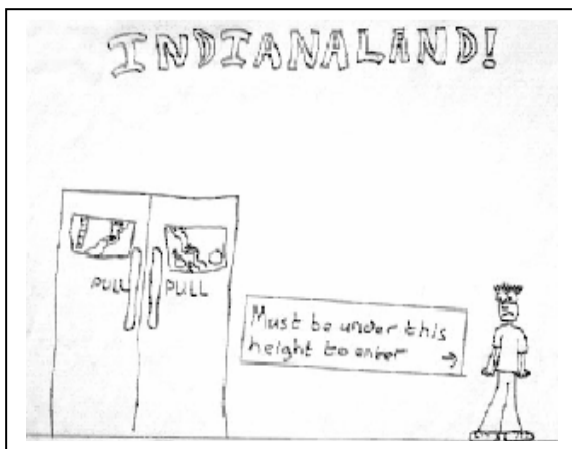


The major themes which emerged across all the various types of activity can be summarised as follows:

### **The Need for Age Appropriate Activity**

Children and young people want access to activities which are appropriate for their age (Youth@CLC, 2004:17). In the NICCY research, many children referred to the age inappropriateness of the activities on offer. For example, younger children often complained about the arbitrary nature of decisions about who should gain access to use facilities:

"Children are denied loads of things because they are under age. Like in swimming you have to be 12 to go swimming on your own. I think we should have some sort of license to let us do it if we are capable" (Girl, aged 11).

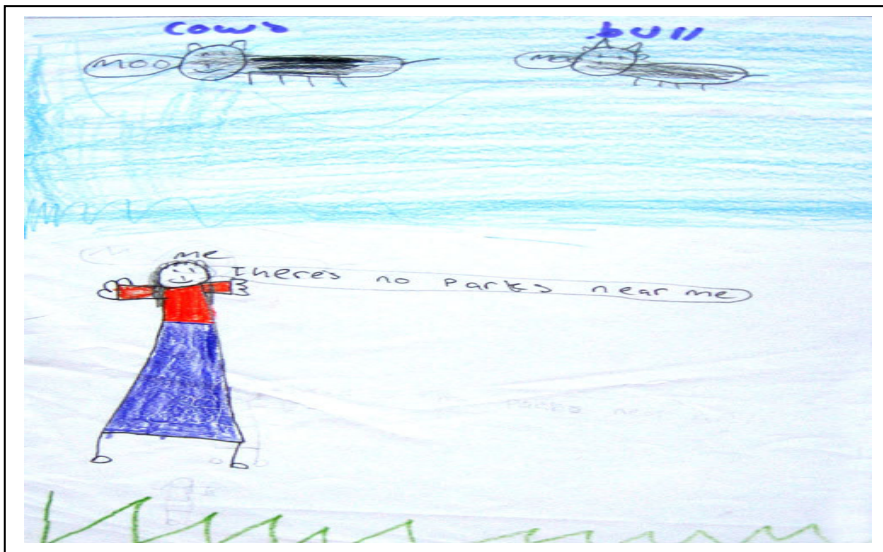


Older children, however, raised issues regarding the availability of age appropriate youth facilities for teenagers. In their comments, young people often made reference to the implications that can arise from having inadequate facilities to occupy their time. One young person remarked:

"There's not enough youth clubs that I would be interested in. Nor is there enough sports facilities, for example, football teams for young boys. There's also no youth clubs on at the weekend to get young people off the streets who are drinking" (Girl, aged 15).

### **Rural Isolation**

Rural isolation was identified as a problem across all activities. The major difficulty relates to the lack of and/or cost of transport facilities to take the child to and from leisure activities. Several interviewees referred to the need for changes to funding policies for play and leisure providers to reflect the additional costs involved in ensuring access to activities in rural areas. As illustrated in the picture and comments below, the lack of appropriate play/leisure facilities affected children of all different ages. Typical submissions received from children living in rural areas included:



"I love the place that I live, it's a small town and everyone knows everyone, but there is absolutely nothing to do for us teenagers. We have nothing to do for fun. We have to travel outside of our town for fun and it costs money. Money that not all teenagers have" (Girl, aged 14).

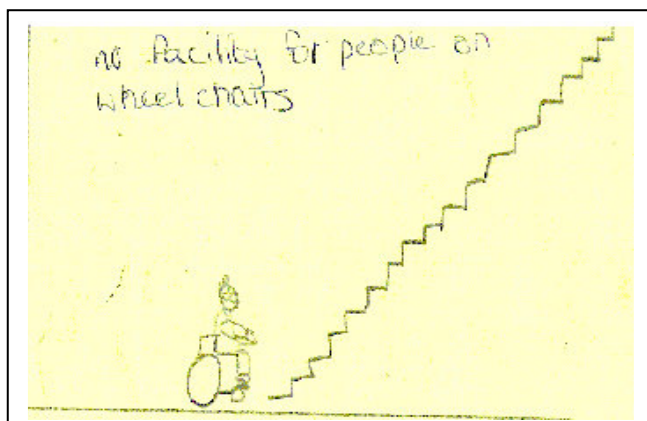
"There's no leisure here as it's out in the country. The only leisure we go to is the cinema and swimming pool in the nearest big town. A bus does come some nights of the week to go to the cinema but it has set times when leaving. It leaves at 10pm and so we can't see a long film or the bus will leave. The bus doesn't even leave us home to our houses. We end up being left at our village and then having to get our parents to get in their cars and lift us" (Girl, aged 15).

### **Access for children and young people with disabilities**

Children with disabilities can be particularly socially isolated. If a child or young person attends a special school, it can be difficult to meet up with their school friends as pupils at special schools are often drawn from a wide area (McConkey and Smyth, 2000; Kilpatrick & Mc Clinton, 2004). Research with children with disabilities indicates that some children find it very difficult to maintain friendships. One young person commented:

'Nothing to do, only play football but that's boring because I have no-one to play with' (Monteith et al., 2002).

In the NICCY research, teachers working with children raised the issue of children's isolation adding that their attempts to encourage children to meet over the holidays had often been in vain. It was suggested that one of the reasons for this might be the over-protective nature of some parents. Moreover, access to out of school activities can be made difficult by the inaccessibility of buildings; the lack of specialist equipment; and the fact that adult workers may not be trained to deal with the needs of children and young people with disabilities. As illustrated in the picture and quote below, young wheelchair users often found it difficult to access play and leisure facilities:



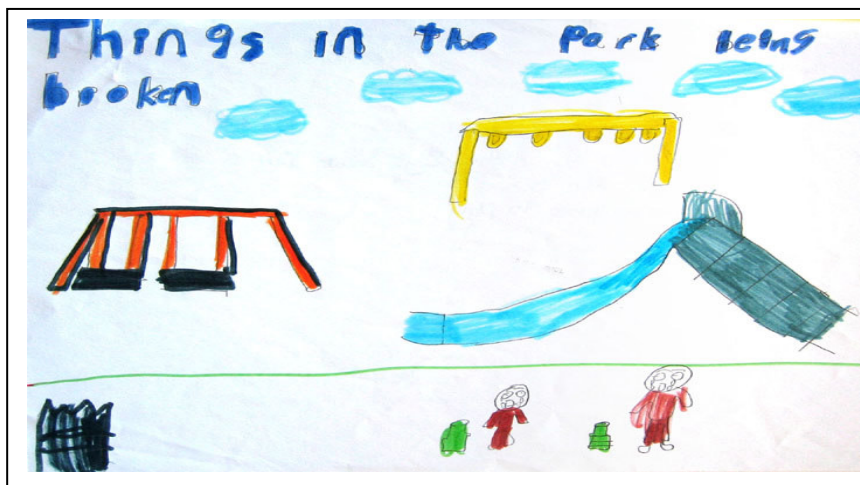
"Just because you are in a wheelchair doesn't mean you shouldn't be allowed to do things" (Boy, aged 16 - Special school).

Another child drew a very detailed picture of all the play and leisure facilities in his area, yet he indicated on his drawing that he could not use any of them. Beside a picture of a sports club, he wrote:

"This is the sports club and there are bullies in it so my mummy doesn't want me in it" (Boy, aged 11 - Special school).

### **The quality and safety of leisure/play space**

Research suggests that many children and young people are concerned about lack of safety in the places where they socialise (Youth@CLC, 2004:20). In the NICCY schools research there were a series of criticisms directed at the quality of play/leisure space. The issue of safety was raised by one in three respondents who identified the issue of play/leisure as a priority concern. Of the 196 children and young people who raised the issue of safety, girls were more likely to voice this concern than boys, with 59% of girls remarking that they did not feel safe when accessing play/leisure facilities. As illustrated in the picture below, younger aged children were particularly likely to refer to vandalised play equipment, joy-riding, needles and broken glass in the grass as the main obstacles jeopardising their right to safe play space.



In addition to these issues, older children remarked that they were often reluctant to access play/leisure facilities in their area because they were frightened of older youths who 'hung' about their streets and their play area. Typical comments included:

"The streets should be safer. It annoys me because you have to be in early at the weekend due to gangs being intoxicated and doing stupid things, so if you make the streets safer then both you and your parents will have no worries about anything happening to you or you getting into trouble. It is all over the news that there are more people (young adults) being attacked (stabbed) due to alcohol. Drugs are being sold at your own street corners, you can't walk anywhere without people doing drugs, abusing aerosols etc. As a kid you would want the best for your kid, and that wouldn't be on the agenda" (Boy, aged 14).

"This is my wish, for a park to be built [in my community] and for the hoods to stop burning things and stop leaving their needles around the park" (Girl, aged 12 - Travelling community).

"Where I live there are quite a few parks nearby, but there's just one problem. Every time I go to one, it's full of people screaming, swearing and drinking. I think it is appalling. And to make it worse they leave beer cans and bottles lying around and it is just so dangerous. They smash them up against the wall and don't clean it up. And they write very rude things all over the playing equipment" (Girl, aged 11).

In addition to these cross-cutting concerns, a number of other issues emerged under the following specific areas of provision: play, youth services, sports and the arts.

## PLAY

*Right to play (Art.31, CRC); right to be safe (Art.23, CRC); right to health; right to an effective education (Art.28, CRC); right to participate in decision-making (Art.12, CRC).*

The evidence which supports the need for children to be able to play freely and safely is overwhelming. Research, for example, suggests that access to play and leisure is important for young people in terms of psycho-social development (Eubanks-Owen, 1999). Moreover, these skills and capacities are considered to be of even more significance in societies which are emerging from conflict. In spite of this, children and young people in NI consider that they are not able to fully enjoy this right. As illustrated in the picture and comments below, the lack of access to safe play space was a major issue which emerged in the NICCY schools research with children and young people.

“Where I play the swings are broken and you can’t even go on them and there’s glass lying everywhere. Like when you’re going to play football you can’t kick the ball or you will bust it” (Girl, aged 9).

“Tá duine ann agus bíonn sé ag ól an tam ar fad agus cuireann se éagla orm. Tá an páirc sugradha salach. Bíonn daoine ag ól agus ag caitheamh toitíní ansin. Bíonn daoine ag déanamh graffiti. Tá an páirc sugradha salach” (There are people who drink all the time and they frighten me. The play park is dirty. People drink and smoke there. People write graffiti) (Girl, aged 10).

Part of the difficulty in the implementation of this right lies in the fact that it struggles to maintain an identity amongst other related children’s services, in particular, formal education and leisure. In NI, play is the responsibility of DE. The issue is further complicated by the fact that many play and leisure facilities are operated by District Councils or by the Forestry Service who are located within DARD. The lack of a single locus of responsibility (or an effective inter-departmental working group) has meant that policy and planning in relation to play is fragmented. In Playboard’s view:

“Play is related through its outcomes to many Departments, so it is essential to create effective inter-departmental structures to ensure and safeguard the right to play”.

### **Key issues**

- Many play facilities are funded on a temporary basis, raising concerns about the quality of both the physical estate and supervision. Much of the play sector was reliant on New Opportunities and Lottery Funding which is now finished.
- The absence of an NI Play Strategy. Moreover, few providers have play policies (e.g. very few of NI’s district councils have play policies).
- The general lack of facilities in school playgrounds.
- The lack of attention given to play in the school curriculum. The pilot Enriched Curriculum in primary schools is seen to be a very positive development because of the emphasis on play through learning.
- School playgrounds are not open after school. Good school playgrounds could increase access to quality play if they were available for community use.
- Play and leisure space is often religiously segregated (Leonard, 2004: 66-67). There is concern that even play areas which are in supposedly “neutral” space can become aligned with one section of the community or fall into disuse because of parents’ reluctance to let their children play there. Related to this issue was a concern raised by some young people who participated in the NICCY research that a lack of appropriate play and leisure facilities can lead to youth getting into trouble with local paramilitary organisations. These young people complained that they were regularly being moved off street corners yet had no alternative place to go because of the lack of facilities available for teenagers in their area. Typical comments included:

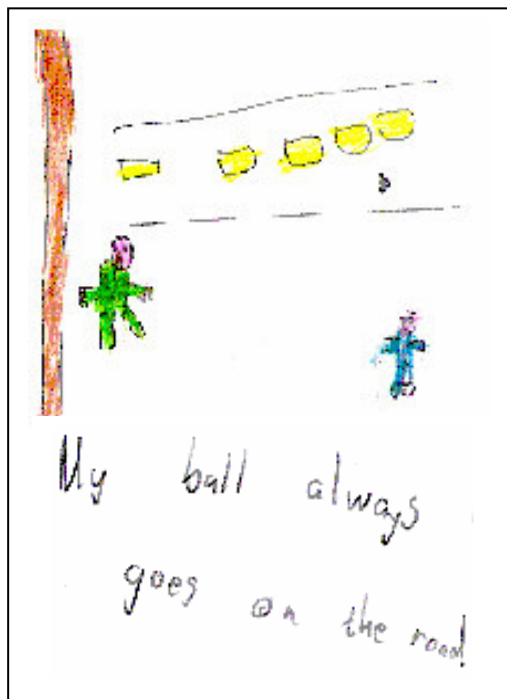
"In my area, there are not many facilities like clubs. There is a very small club which has a disco every Friday for under 18s and all kids go to it. There is also a very small park which no-one is ever allowed into. At the weekend you cannot stand without getting told to move by the RA - even if you are not doing anything, just drinking. If you disagree they chase you and try and beat you although this usually only happens with the boys.... I don't see why we always get told to move on by the RA when there is no-where else for us to go" (Girl, aged 14).

"In my area there is nothing for the kids to do. It is crap and full of graffiti. There is lots of rubbish and stolen cars. The burn marks make the area look stinking. There can be plenty of fights at the weekend when the kids round my age are drunk. There is community watch and they are a bunch of wankers. They don't let us do anything. We are not even allowed to stand on the street corners without getting told to move on even when we are not drinking or making noise" (Boy, aged 15).

- The children we spoke to regularly raised concerns about the safety and quality of public play space. These included: broken equipment, litter, graffiti as well as concerns about 'bad boys' - youths drinking and swearing in their play parks. Moreover, children's play space is often not recognised as such and children and young people are often seen as a nuisance when they play or socialise in public areas. In their submissions to the NICCY research, children and young people remarked:

"Every time we go to play in the park, the park wardens have taken away something else. They told us they were going to bring the equipment back but they didn't. When we try to play on the football pitch we can't because there's glass everywhere and the cleaners won't touch it. And at night at Christmas time when it gets dark early, you can't play in the park. I think there should be lights because you can't see. I also think the park fence should be larger. It's small and easy to break. We always get hurt and it's a really bad play park. No wee children can play, it's a real shame because they all want to play and we can't and we end up having to play on the street where we get shouted at. We can't play no-where" (Girl, aged 11).

- There were also a range of concerns expressed about road danger. These were linked to the lack of space where children could play. Comments included:



"Outside my house there is a grassy area. Me and the other boys who live near it always play football on it. But there's a man who tells us not to play on it or to play beside the road which is quite busy and the ball always goes on the road" (Boy, aged 11).

"My area has no playing facilities or anything to do. There are no places where we can play football or just run about and play something else. It is just all roads and nowhere to play. It could be dangerous for young children who want to play and they would go onto the roads and get knocked down and get hurt or even killed! All the facilities are too far away from where we live" (Boy, aged 14).

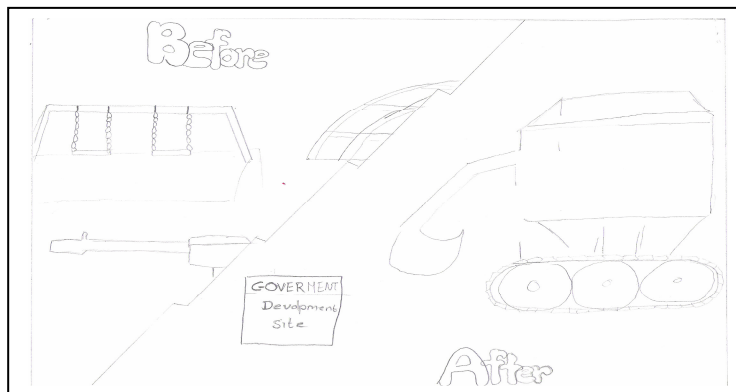
"The road is very busy, isn't it? And sometimes the cars speed up and down it" (Girl, aged 12 - Travelling community).

- Children have limited opportunities for participation in decision-making about play space. Children are rarely consulted about their play space. For example, they often have no involvement in the consultation processes which accompany the decisions about school playgrounds or play areas in new housing

developments. The reactions of children who had been promised improvements to their play space suggested that they were sceptical as to the weight accorded to their views. These children commented:

“I told everybody yesterday that I was going to do this today [participate in this research] and there was about 20 of us who said, “Say to them about a park, we need a decent park” and I said okay. Like this is fucking ridiculous. We were promised a park 7 years ago and we were let down. I know this time it’s going to be the same, we will get let down the same way. Our estate is shit, there is nothing to do. All we do is sit in the house because there is nothing to do. I really want something exciting in my area” (Boy, aged 13).

“When I was in P5 the architects came in and asked us what we wanted and we wrote down that we wanted a football pitch with lots of nets and astro turf and we were promised a big nature trail with a tree hut and a pond with fish and a climbing frame and a better football equipment. But as usual they didn’t build it” (Boy, aged 13).



The importance attached to play in NI can be contrasted with a number of other jurisdictions. For example, the Republic of Ireland has a National Play Strategy and The Welsh Assembly has a Play Policy.

## **YOUTH SERVICE**

*Right to recreational activities (Art. 31, CRC); education (Art.28, CRC); safety and well-being (Art.23, CRC); non-discrimination (Art. 2, CRC); involvement in decision-making (Art.12, CRC).*

Youth service provision is delivered by both statutory (ELB) and voluntary agencies, and includes over 3000 local youth groups in addition to outdoor education centres, specialist projects, detached youth work initiatives and a range of other services such as Youth Information, counselling projects, international schemes etc.

The target age range for youth services is 4-25. However, the majority of young people who attend provision are in the under 16 age range: over a third of all 4-9 year olds currently attend youth provision, increasing to just over half of all 10-15 year olds, followed by around one quarter of all 16-18 year olds (YCNI, 2004). Research has shown that by the age of 25, over 3 out of every 4 people will have attended youth provision (YCNI, 2004).

The Youth Council is currently using geographic information software to provide information to ELBs which will enable them to identify areas which are underserved in terms of youth service provision. A recent survey found that under a quarter of young people under the age of 25 feel that there is sufficient youth service provision in their area (YCNI, 2004). Young people we spoke to also complained about the lack of youth facilities in their areas. When we asked a group of marginalised young people: “In terms of things to do for people your age, what sort of things would you want, to make it better for you?”, one response was:

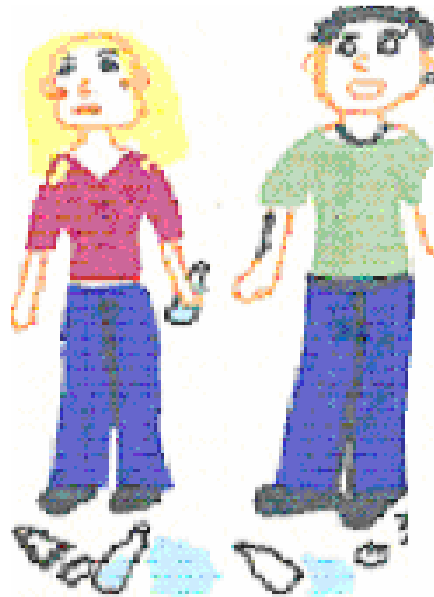
“Somewhere to go, just to sit..... Yeah, somethin' in the area, somewhere to go like a youth club or somethin'. Open up one of the boarded up houses, knock it into two, make it into a youth club or something. Stop us from breaking into the houses then” (Boy, aged 16 - AEP).

Many children and young people who participated in the NICCY schools research suggested that a lack of things for young people to do in their free time led to them either becoming involved in anti-social behaviour, or being viewed as being involved in this, even if it was not the case. Although children and young people have as much



right as adults to make use of public space, their high visibility on the streets, mainly ‘hanging about’, has resulted in “young people being blamed for being a nuisance and seen as a problem to be solved, not as a group of people who need somewhere to meet” (Dibben, 1999: 6).

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Other problems in terms of access to youth services include:

- Children in rural communities find it difficult to access youth provision because of the difficulties in transport. It is intended that the revised common funding formula for the youth service will place greater emphasis on the greater costs associated with rurality.
- Many youth services have been targeted at areas of high deprivation or groups of vulnerable young people. However, there are ongoing problems in terms of access for children from ethnic minority communities (Radford, 2004) and children with disabilities (Mc Conkey and Smyth, 2000). It is widely recognised that access for the disabled is not merely an issue of ensuring that buildings are physically accessible, but extends to capacity building and training for staff. DE established a Working Group on Disability. Disability Action has recently completed research on access to youth services which will be used by the Working Group to identify priority actions.
- There is a need for age-appropriate services for children and young people, The Youth Service Liaison Group has a sub-group which is currently reviewing provision for the under 10s. Similarly there is a current review of how youth services can be made more relevant and attractive to those in the 16+ age range. One young person expressed her concerns as follows:

“My local areas have good facilities for younger people but not for anyone over 10 years old. The GAA club is the only exciting thing in this town and you have to walk 3 miles to it. We just got a new play park and it’s brilliant. Unfortunately, I’m 15 years old and would look like an idiot if I tried to go on it. Why couldn’t they have got this 10 years ago?” (Girl, aged 15).

### Key issues

- Young people are critical of the quality of youth service provision. In a recent survey over 54% of young people under the age of 25 disagreed with the statement: “There is good quality youth provision in my area” (YCNI, 2004).
- The Inspectorate has stated that there is a need to improve “significantly the quality and availability of personal safety programmes on topics such as drugs education and bullying” (ETI, 2000a). One specific gap in the context of bullying is that there does not appear to be a procedure for communication with the formal education sector, in spite of the fact that problems which arise in one venue can carry through to the other.

- All youth organisations which receive statutory support (e.g. from ELBs, the Youth Council or Department of Education) are required to register and to comply with a range of safeguards including child protection legislation. Concern has been expressed, however, about the position of non-registered youth groups. Currently the DE has no authority to demand that such groups register, and therefore no control over their child protection compliance. There is some ambiguity as to which statutory body has the authority to identify and inspect such groups. DHSS&PS is introducing a voluntary scheme for unregulated organisations to ensure a level of accreditation for meeting certain basic minimum standards.
- The participation of young people has been a core value of youth service provision for many years and the service has a number of structural mechanisms to facilitate this (such as the NI Youth Forum and local youth councils, as well as the inclusion of young people on decision-making groups such as the Youth Service Liaison Forum). However, at grass-roots level, the quality of participation is variable, and research has found a degree of dissonance between adult youth workers' perception of young people's involvement and the extent to which young people agreed with this (Benefits of the Youth Service).
- Young gay and lesbians can become isolated from youth activity. Concern was expressed that much community based activity for young people was church-based and that "coming out could alienate young people from all types of social life events" (NGO Representative).
- The Youth Service has an agreed curriculum which places emphasis on citizenship. However, the curriculum does not specifically require youth workers to raise awareness among young people of the CRC.
- As a consequence of the segregated nature of housing in NI and the fact that many youth services are organised by local church organisations, much of youth service provision is religiously segregated. One young person commented:

*"And you know many church groups, you know, say that everyone is welcome but they're not really ... I had a past experience where I was best friends with someone and she was like "Oh yeah, we're going to this youth club thing this weekend" and then she stopped and then went "Oh! you can't really go." Even though it was open to everyone and that was coming from someone who was really my friend" (Young female, aged 18 – Youth group).*

There is a number of initiatives in the sector. The JEDI (Joined in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence) is a partnership of key youth service bodies. JEDI addresses the impact of segregation at an institutional level in the sector, as well as piloting new approaches in terms of policy and practice. Youth services also receive funding for cross-community contact projects from the Community Relations Youth Service Support Scheme. However, the value of some of these activities was questioned on the basis that the contact is not always meaningful and/or sustained. The Inspectorate have identified a number of concerns with cross-community provision, including: the need for better planning to ensure breadth and progression of young people; the need to improve the skills and confidence of staff; and a "clearer focus on key objectives such as understanding conflict and cultural understanding" (ETI, 2001).

In general terms, there is widespread concern in the sector about its capacity to deliver a full range of services to all young people as a result of resource difficulties, in particular the perceived inadequacy of core funding (around 1.6 % of DE budget) and the fact that much of the voluntary sector relies on short-term project funding. This is considered to have adverse consequences for planning, the physical condition of buildings, the quality of the service offered and the retention of staff. One interviewee observed that the youth sector has expanded to include all those aged from 4 to 25, without proportionate increases in funding. DE Youth Service is in the process of revising the common funding formula in an attempt to ensure a more equitable distribution of the available core funding.

There is a current consultation document on a proposed Youth Work Strategy (YWS) (Youth Service Liaison Forum, 2004). It is anticipated that this will be in place by April 2005 and it is intended to coincide with the Children's and Young People's Strategy. The CRC is explicitly mentioned in the draft YWS and rights to participation, protection and provision are looked at under separate headings. The YWS identifies many of the

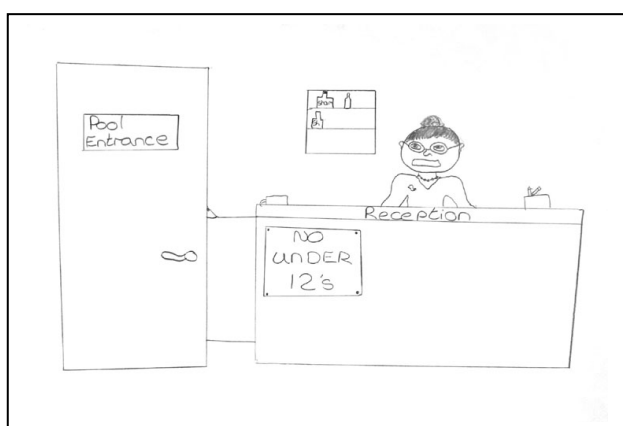
key challenges facing the sector which are described above. However, a number of interviewees expressed concern about who will take key issues in the strategy forward and the time scale for doing so. Discussions are ongoing between Youth Service Liaison Forum members to clarify roles and responsibilities.

## **SPORT**

*Right to engage in recreational activities (Art.31, CRC); to physical development (Art. 28, CRC); to health; safety and well being (Art.23, CRC); non-discrimination (Art.2, CRC); involvement in decision-making (Art.12, CRC).*

The Sports Council NI is the lead statutory agency in this area. The current Strategy for Sport was produced by the Sports Council in 1997 and will end in 2005 (SCNI, 1997). A new strategy is currently being prepared by an inter-departmental group which includes representatives of DCAL, DE and DHSS&PS. Recent statistics suggest that 4 out of 5 children participate in sports activity apart from time-tabled lessons on a regular basis (NISRA, 2004). However, in the NICCY research, the major issue to emerge was the lack of access to appropriate sporting facilities. Typical comments include:

"Our town has been telling us for years that they are going to build us a leisure centre and they still haven't built us one and it is sooo annoying. We are eating too many sweets and there are not enough sports and things to do and we are all putting on lots of weight. Donaghadee has a tennis court and some playing grounds but it needs things where people can just go and play and not have to join a club to actually play" (Girl, aged 12).



"It annoys me when you go to a leisure centre of some kind and you are not allowed to do something because you are not old enough or tall enough or you don't have an adult with you. It's not fair! These things were made for us anyway so why can't we use them" (Girl, aged 11).

The Sports Council is in the process of trying to map the availability of sports facilities throughout NI to identify locations where there are limited facilities. There are particular problems accessing sporting facilities in rural communities. While there are various initiatives to try to encourage local schools to open their doors to the community, schools can be reluctant to do so for practical reasons such as the need for extra insurance.

## **KEY ISSUES**

### **Sport at School**

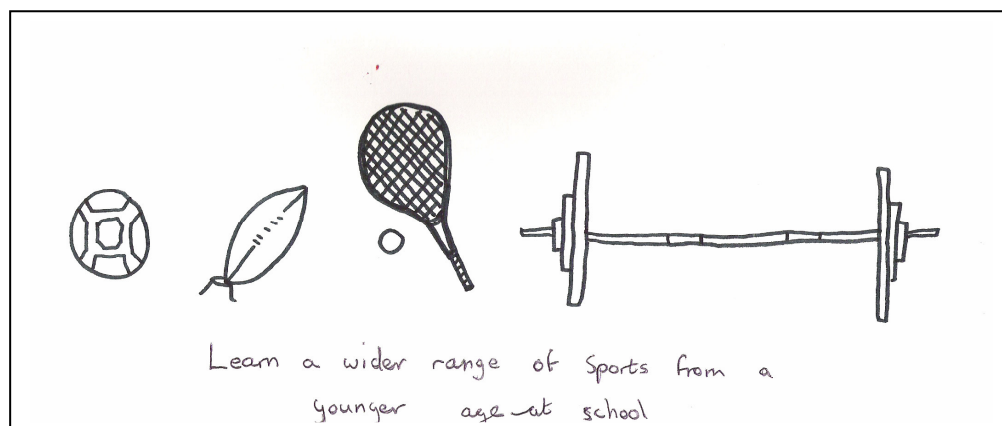
A recent ETI report concluded that 36% of schools inspected had inadequate sports facilities with the result that those schools were not in a position to deliver the full programme of study in the curriculum (ETI, 2001a). In the NICCY research, 112 of the 958 responses relating to unfairness in school were direct criticisms of the lack of sporting facilities available. Two thirds of these pupils were boys, the majority of whom made comments such as:

"In school there aren't enough sports and games. The clubs aren't very good either. We would need a proper football club" (Boy, aged 9).

Children in the NICCY research also indicated that their sports facilities were often of poor quality. Typical comments included:

"The facilities here are very poor. The football pitches are easily flooded. The nets have no netting and there are no cricket fields. The facilities for football, cricket and hockey are very poor. The cricket bats are like old, old things" (Boy, aged 13).

The picture below which recommended that children should "Learn a wider variety of sports from a younger age at school" was typical of the criticism made by children that there was not enough time given to sport.



In England, there is a requirement that pupils will do a minimum of 2 hours physical education per week. However, even this was felt to be inadequate as it does not allow for changing time and/or getting to facilities. Moreover, there is concern that physical activity can get squeezed to facilitate other parts of the curriculum. For example, physical education classes will be often be the first to be cancelled during examination times.

### Safety

Concern was expressed about the fact that many volunteers will not have been vetted or have received child protection training. The Sports Council NI has produced a Code of Ethics on Children's Sport. Moreover, the Child Protection in Sport Unit assists Sports Governing Bodies in the development of policies and procedures and develops training resources. Individual Sports Governing bodies produce guidance on best practice for coaches but the sector relies heavily on volunteers. There are various initiatives in this area (e.g. DCAL and SCNI have funded a Child Protection in Sport Advisory Officer and supported the delivery of child protection awareness workshops to over 8000 volunteers in the last three years). Concern was also expressed about the difficulties in getting children to activities safely. The Sports Council is working on a "Safe Routes to Sport Policy".

### Involvement in Decision Making

Children indicated that rather than doing the sports they wanted to do, they often ended up doing those sports the school or local clubs wanted to promote:

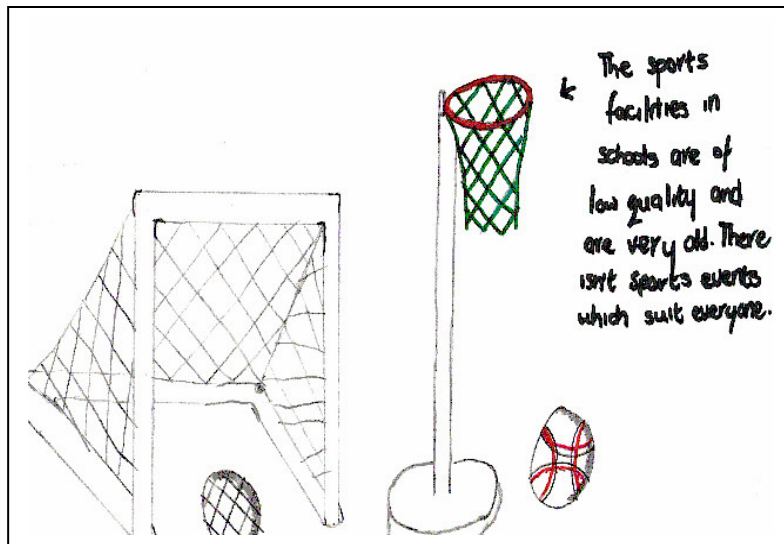
"There is absolutely nothing to do except for Gaelic football which I love. But in Gaelic football it doesn't matter if you are good or not, it's all about who you are and who you are related to. I would love for netball, or basketball or camogie to be started in my local area because when football's off there is nothing for us to do - that's why we get in trouble" (Girl, aged 14).

"There aren't many sports or leisure facilities in my area. There are no faculties for other sports like basketball, ice-hockey and skateboarding. There are leisure centres, but these are hard to get into and they're expensive" (Girl, aged 15).

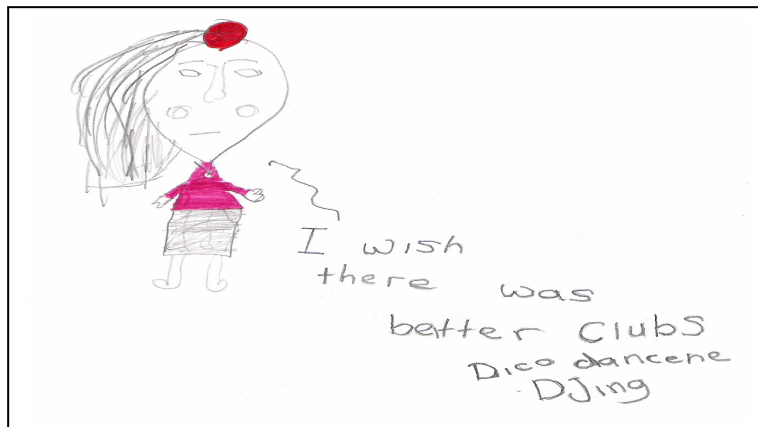
## Gender

*"The same opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education." (CEDAW, Art. 10);*

There are various initiatives aimed at encouraging greater participation in sport by girls. The key to success is seen to lie in engaging girls in sports they want to do. For example, girls often want to do things like hip/hop dance and boxer-cise where they can wear their own clothes. Involving girls in sport may also involve challenging gendered perceptions of sport by providing opportunities for girls to engage in the same activities as boys. Girls who participated in this research said:



"In school I don't think it's fair that there is a boys football team and no girls team. Also, we are not allowed to play rugby on the pitches. It would also be nice to have a girl's school rugby team" (Girl, aged 11).



"The girls should be in more tournaments for sports. We only get one tournament in hockey and cricket but the boys get loads... The boys also get to go to a golf club and play golf. The girls should get more opportunities like this"

## Promoting Tolerance

Participation in sport in NI reflects the community divisions in a number of significant respects. This is also the case in schools since Catholic schools are more likely to offer Gaelic games while schools attended by mainly Protestant pupils are more likely to offer Rugby and Hockey. There is a lot of school-based EMU activity in this area but there can be difficulties maintaining links beyond the organised events. Moreover, some parents object to their children engaging in sports connected with the other community. This is a particular issue in cross-community summer schemes. Staff try to get round the issue by focusing on "kicking skills" rather than Rugby and Gaelic. Individual Sports Bodies are working on issues related to sectarianism (e.g. the Irish Football Association's involvement in the "Stamp It Out" campaign). The lack of attention to the significance of play in the school curriculum. SCNI places a requirement on all funded organizations to make a commitment to equity training and to developing an equity policy. However, there does not appear to be a sector wide strategy aimed at addressing communal divisions and promoting tolerance through shared activity. While the Sports Strategy for

1997- 2005 mentioned concerns about “enduring prejudice, tolerance and sectarianism”, it did not set specific objectives or targets for addressing it.

## CULTURE AND THE ARTS

*States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity (Art. 31, CRC).*

Research indicates that the majority of children’s art-based activity takes place in school. In a recent survey, children aged 11-16 were asked about extra-curricular activity in creative and artistic pursuits in the last twelve months (Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitude Survey, 2003). Their responses were as follows:

**Table 5.1: Extra-Curricular activity**

Activity	% IN SCHOOL	% OUTSIDE SCHOOL
Drama/dance	22	13
Creative writing	34	3
Photography/film-making	4	8
Painting/drawing	49	7
Craft	22	9
Other art activity	16	11

*Source: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitude Survey, 2003*

### School-based arts activity

Most children’s experience with the arts takes place in school. Children and young people who participated in the NICCY research raised concerns about the lack of time and/or equipment for arts in school. Related to this point was the negative effect strike action could have on the availability of after school arts based clubs and societies. Many children and young people specifically used the opportunity provided by the research to request a greater variety of arts-based subjects to be made available at school. They raised issues such as:

“I think our school should get a drama club as I think a lot of children would be interested in that” (Girl, aged 13).

“We need more facilities for school and more instruments for music and more equipment for other classes” (Girl, aged 15).

“There are no clubs in school which is a shame because I would like to go to acting classes” (Boy, aged 11).

The following picture aptly captures the dissatisfaction pupils generally expressed about the low value placed on art at school.



The reviews of the primary and post-primary curricula have identified a need for increased attention to be given to children's creative development in school (see Chapter Four). The emphasis on diversity and social inclusion within the area of Local and Global Citizenship also offers potential for increased attention to culture.

### **Key issues**

- The broader educational value of arts-based activity is not always recognized and the arts can be squeezed as a result.
- Schools do not always have the resources to pursue a broad range of arts activity. The majority of schools will have a music suite but not all will have a decent stage, dance hall, photography or art equipment. A recent ETI report on post-primary schools concluded that while 75% of work was of good quality, there were serious deficiencies in accommodation and equipment (ETI, 2003a).
- Schools tend to restrict themselves to certain arts such as music or drama as young people can do examinations in those.
- ELBs provide curricular support for music but not for other arts.

### **Community-based arts activity**

A 2001 Survey of Creative Arts in the Youth Service indicated that there is need for further training of youth leaders and greater availability of specialist tutors in the Youth Service so as to ensure greater accessibility of the arts (ETI, 2002). A recent evaluation of Creative Youth Partnerships (Annabel Jackson Associates, 2003), which included a base-line survey of arts activity in NI, identified the following issues in relation to community-based arts activity:

- Community arts activity is not sufficiently linked to the NI School Curriculum.
- The need to develop partnerships with youth clubs and non-traditional venues.
- The need to ensure that youth arts activity is provided across district council areas in NI. While every district council area has some youth arts activity, more than two thirds of respondents to the survey worked in Belfast.
- The need to broaden participation across the various age groups of children and young people. Most activity is directed at children over the age of 7. The base-line survey found that only 24% of those surveyed worked with pre-school children and only 46% worked with those in Key Stage 1.

The evaluation document highlights some of the difficulties involved in estimating the actual levels of participation by young people in arts activity. However, on the basis of the available information, it concluded that: "there is a reasonable level of youth arts activity in Northern Ireland" (Annabel Jackson Associates, 2003:48). The base-line survey also indicated that a significant amount of work is targeted at marginalized groups of children and young people. Although 80% of those surveyed indicated that they worked with the generality of young people, many respondents also worked with marginalized children and young people, including: socially and economically deprived groups (59%); rural groups (35%); ethnic minorities (22%); young offenders (11%); children and young people with disabilities (33%) (Annabel Jackson Associates, 2003: 46).

The Arts Council (NI) is the lead organisation in this area. Its strategic plan for 2001-2006 locates its key objectives within a human rights framework (Arts Council NI, 2001). However, there is no specific mention in the strategic plan of the CRC or children's rights, in particular children's rights to have their views given due weight and/ or the right to cultural and artistic development. However, increasing access to the arts for children and young people is identified as one of the Council's nine strategic objectives. The strategy indicates that the Arts Council, in conjunction with other partners, will work to: increase the number of primary and secondary school students working with artists on creative projects in school; develop the range and quality of early years arts provision; increase the number of youth workers using the arts; increase employment for artists in the education and youth sectors; increase the number of artists with appropriate training to work in education; and increase the creative participation in and attendance at the arts by 16-24 year olds.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is a wide range of initiatives within NI which are aimed at giving children enjoyable play, leisure, recreational, cultural and artistic experiences. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the issue of play and leisure is the one which most children feel strongly about. The most pressing issues are as follows:

- The right to play must be given a higher profile through the implementation of a Northern Ireland Strategy on Play.
- The various types of provision across NI should be mapped in order to identify particular locations where children's access to various forms of play, leisure, recreation and the arts is limited.
- There must be a greater emphasis on providing inclusive social opportunities for marginalised children and young people, particularly those who have disabilities and those living in rural communities.
- There is a need to create safe space for children and young people in the areas where they live and in play, youth and leisure facilities.
- Children and young people should be involved in planning decisions about play, leisure, recreation and the arts.
- There is a need for a more concerted effort to tackle the problems of community segregation in play, youth, sport, recreational and arts activity and to harness the potential of each of the various sectors in promoting tolerance.

One general theme which emerged in discussions with key professionals working across the services mentioned above was that much of the provision which is made for children is financed through short term project funds with adverse implications for the scope and quality of provision and the sector's capacity to retain staff. A second cross-cutting theme concerned the need to give children more freedom in their so-called 'free-time'. There were two dimensions to this. The first was ensuring that they are safe in the areas where they live and where they play. Various initiatives (such as the introduction of Play Wardens in Parks or the NSPCC's Leisure Watch programme) were mentioned as examples of community-based initiatives which could be extended to ensure that children are safe in play and leisure space. The second was that children should be both allowed and encouraged to take risks. Several interviewees expressed concern about the negative impact of a "litigation culture". It was felt that adults who work with children are forced to be over cautious about the children's safety with the result that children can be denied valuable opportunities for development.