

## YOUTH JUSTICE

- ⊕ Although many children and young people involved in the youth justice system are extremely vulnerable, their rights and needs are often overlooked because they are labelled as an offender.
- ⊕ Young people who have had troubled family backgrounds, or mental health problems, or who are being harmed or abused were more likely to not comply with COVID-19 regulations to 'stay at home'. This led to fines and/or arrests in some cases.
- ⊕ Children and young people who had been arrested for criminal behaviour were not able to attend court when their case was being heard.
- ⊕ There were concerns raised with policing including issuing of Community Resolution Notices; the PSNI's use of Stop and Search powers and the temporary introduction of Spit and Bite Guards.
- ⊕ There should be a number of solutions to help children feel more involved and supported by their communities, and prison should only be the last choice. We need to build back fairer, focusing on children's and young people's best interests.

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*"There's one thing I'd like to say, the staff attend our court on behalf of us, I think we should be able to attend our own court, so we know what's happening and we hear it.  
(Young person with experience of the Juvenile Justice Centre)*

## WHAT GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- ⊕ When dealing with young people, particularly in relation to breaching COVID-19 restrictions, the PSNI must ensure that arrest and detention are a measure of last resort, and focus on the best interests of the young people.
- ⊕ The use of Stop and Search powers must be reviewed and revised to make sure they work to keep young people and communities safe.
- ⊕ Spit and bite guards should not be used on young people under 18 - or where there is a reasonable chance the young person is under 18.
- ⊕ Effective early intervention and prevention initiatives must be used to ensure children and young people are helped to stay out of the youth justice system. Such measures must be developed in consultation with young people.
- ⊕ Young people must have reasonable adjustments made to meet their additional support needs during court proceedings (virtual or in real time) including access to an independent advocate.

