



Give us a
Chance



Barnardo's

GIVING CHILDREN BACK THEIR FUTURE

Barnardo's would like to thank all the children and young people from Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, the Midlands, Yorkshire, the North East, the North West and London and the South who were so willing to share their views and also all the staff in the regions, nations and projects who enabled this to happen.



Barnardo's is marking the centenary of the death of Dr Thomas Barnardo by celebrating the difference the charity continues to make to the lives of hundreds of thousands of children in the UK.

Whilst we no longer run orphanages of Victorian times – we do continue to protect, nurture and provide opportunities for children through 361 specialised projects in local communities across the UK.

Children and young people under 18 make up around a quarter of the UK's population. However, many still have no say in the policies and legislation that affect their everyday lives and the world they live in.

Every year Barnardo's works with over 100,000 children and young people, as well as their families, carers and communities. Our aim is to challenge the disadvantages and injustices they face, prevent social exclusion and maximise their opportunities. We believe that all children have a right to:

- good physical, mental and emotional health and well-being
- protection from harm and neglect
- opportunities for play, leisure, education and the development of life skills
- involvement in the communities they live in
- freedom from the disadvantages caused by poverty.

We are committed to ensuring that children and young people's involvement and perspectives inform all areas of our work and work with them to promote their voices with government, policy makers, professionals and other service providers.

There has been an increasing recognition that encouraging the participation of children and young people can:

- help to provide safe and effective services
- assist children in the development of their own citizenship skills
- provide valuable insight for policy makers at local, national and UK-wide levels.

The UK government has taken several steps designed to improve their communication with children and young people and provide better opportunities for participation. These include appointing a Minister for Children and establishing a Children and Youth Board, and Children's Commissioners in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, with plans for an English Commissioner to be appointed in 2005. But much more can be achieved by listening to children and young people, involving them at all levels, across all sectors and government departments and giving equal weight to their views and opinions.

In 2001, Barnardo's produced the report: *Whose government is it anyway?* which gave the opinions of more than 80 children and young people about their lives and the policies and legislation that affect them. In 2004 we consulted with a much wider range of children and young people. This report contains the real voices of over 130 children and young people aged between 6 and 22, from a variety of backgrounds and who use a range of our services throughout the UK. These voices prove that children and young people are indeed interested in 'politics'. As adults, we need to listen and take account of the messages they are sending.



Politics, politicians and governments

The children and young people who gave their views have clear ideas about what they feel makes a 'good' politician: fairness and the ability to trust were seen as important. They have some interesting thoughts about how governments could better engage with children and young people.



'He (a politician) would want people to be treated fairly'
11-year-old, Hull

'They would speak proudly and strong'
12-year-old, Hull

'Trust – you have to trust your friends so you should be able to trust a politician'
13-year-old, Scotland

'Have different views, as sisters have different views on things but are friends and trust each other, but are different people'
13-year-old, Scotland

'It shouldn't matter if they (politicians) have a disability'
8-year-old, Blackpool

'Someone who doesn't think they're better than everyone else'
16-year-old, Liverpool

'Listen to everyone – including young people'
12-year-old, Wales

'They shouldn't judge people'
10-year-old, Wales

'They (the government) say what young people should do with their lives; they should talk to the young people about what they want to do with their own lives'

14-year-old, Northern Ireland

'It shouldn't be about what they think is right, it should be about what everyone thinks is right'

15-year-old, Wales

'They are chatterboxes – always talking on the telly'

7-year-old, Tamworth

The young people's suggestions for how politicians might better engage with them reflect the world we live in – the use of technology and media for communication is well established. These ideas show how they can be used specifically to listen to children.

'There should be a number of ways to get in touch with them, like over the phone or internet for people that can't get to them'

14-year-old, Wales

'Like we have to do for homework – we have to research, go on the internet and everything – why can't they do that (to find out about things that matter to young people)?'

14-year-old, Wales

'Use texts to ask us about things'

9-year-old, North West

'They should try and make political things more interesting – put them on Bo Selecta – try and get pictures in our head what it's about'

15-year-old, North East

But the young people are also keen that politicians should make more effort to understand the realities of their lives.

'They should walk around towns and get to know how other people live'

16-year-old, North East

'Why don't they 'swap lives' for a day with a young person?'

17-year-old, North East

'Experience things that affect young people, use a wheelchair or live off benefits for a week'

17-year-old, Liverpool

They can also see the importance of having someone to speak up for children and young people.

'It takes too much time, (talking to young people); they haven't got time to do it properly. Could they get someone who could do that or them and then tell the politicians what we said?'

14-year-old, Liverpool

The children and young people who gave us their views come from a variety of family backgrounds and circumstances. Some are caring for a sick or disabled parent, some come from families with very low incomes and some are parents themselves. They have strong views on a range of well-being issues. They are very aware about drugs but are also concerned about alcohol and smoking; they talk about the availability of substances and why young people use them. They demonstrate a clear understanding of the pressures families face and not only have some questions to ask but also ideas about what can be done to support families more effectively. Several of the children and young people are disabled themselves and others have family members who are disabled or have health problems, both physical and mental.

The everyday availability of drugs was demonstrated clearly.

'I kept going to school and I couldn't walk from one lesson to another without getting asked if I'd got drugs or if I've got a cig or anything'

14-year-old, Hull

'I think that these people that smoke joints and drink cans I think it sometimes comes to do with their upbringing and sometimes people do it because they are depressed, and some kids think it looks hard if you sit there and smoke'

12-year-old, Hull

The children and young people are clear about why drug and alcohol misuse happens – as an escape from an unhappy life, because others do it or because of boredom and lack of other things to do.

'To a certain extent young people drink to look older, because that's what adults do'

18-year-old, London

'Young people might drink and use drugs less if there were more facilities and things to do'

12-year-old, Cannock

Current governmental responses to the drug problem range from compulsory treatment through to heavier sentences and better information sources such as the 'Talk to Frank' information website and helpline. The children we spoke to are clear about what they think the priorities should be.

'We want more good quality information – not just told to say "no"'

17-year-old, London

'Better support for young people affected by drugs and alcohol'

10-year-old, London

'More money spent on catching the big dealers – them who bring it in – and less on putting addicts and users in prison, they still get the stuff in there'

16-year-old, North East

'Better places for homeless young people, not hostels, it's hard to keep off drugs and out of trouble when you live in a really crap place, I have to be out between 9am and 5pm and there's nowhere to go and nothing to do'

16-year-old, North East

'No smoking on buses at all'

8-year-old, Blackpool

The debate on child care and better support for parents is reflected. Children feel strongly that parents should have choices about working or staying at home and that there should be better support for parents at those times when they are struggling

'Parents should be supported if they want to stay at home (and look after their children)'

13-year-old, North East

'They should have more people around that are qualified and can look after children, say if the parents need a break and they don't know where to go – they could just ring up and get some help'

12-year-old, Tamworth

Over the last decade there has been a greater emphasis on consulting and involving children who are in care. Several initiatives have been designed to address

this, including the requirement for children to participate in their reviews, funding from the Quality Protects Programme for participatory work, and legislation giving the right to advocacy when making a complaint. But it is clear that children still feel they do not get heard.

'If you are not living with your parents you should be able to see them. The government shouldn't say that you can't see your parents; it should be up to you 'cos they're your family. And it really hurts when you can't see them on a special occasion, it was my brother's birthday last Saturday and I couldn't see him.'

14-year-old, Belfast

'Social services need to listen more – actually take in what the child says and not twist it – and talk things through with us'

14-year-old, North East

Disabled children and young people still feel that they are faced with inflexible attitudes and approaches.

'Accessible schools – it's not just about ramps and things it's about the attitude of staff and children'

18-year-old, North West

'It's very much me having to fit in with my carers (domiciliary help in the young person's own home) and on their timescale rather than the other way round. If they can't be flexible and meet my needs it misses the point – I feel more isolated'

17-year-old, Belfast

'Better shops – there's a new law but disabled people still can't get into some of them'

12-year-old, Wales

Facts and figures

Alcohol

- the average amount drunk by 11 to 15-year-olds who do drink is 10.5 units per week
- binge drinking is becoming common among young people in the UK
- 18 per cent of 11 to 15-year-olds who drink do so at least once a week
- by the age of 16, 94 per cent of all young people will have tried alcohol
- research suggests that the design, packaging and marketing of drinks appeals to young people and that 'alcopops' are often the route into regular drinking
- surveys show that 29 per cent of 11-year-olds, 37 per cent of 12-year-olds, 41 per cent of 13-year-olds, 55 per cent of 14-year-olds and 67 per cent of 15-year-olds have bought alcohol illegally
- a survey into adolescent mental health found that regular heavy drinking and binge drinking behaviours are associated with a

range of problems including accidents, violence, anti-social behaviour, poor school performance and physical and mental health problems

- at age 15, children who have a parent with an alcohol problem have a higher risk of psychiatric disorder
- children whose parents are heavy drinkers are more likely themselves to become heavy drinkers¹

Drugs

- cannabis is the most widely used illicit substance, 44 per cent of 16 to 19-year-olds have used it
- 8 per cent of 11-year-olds have taken an illicit substance in the last year (2003)
- 38 per cent of 15-year-olds have taken an illicit substance in the last year (2003)²

Smoking

- in a recent survey, 40 per cent of 13-17-year-olds admitted to smoking over the last year (2003)³

Living away from home

- in 2003, 74,646 children were in care throughout the UK

Disability and access

- part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act now requires service providers to take steps, where reasonable, to tackle physical barriers to access for disabled people, including access to transport and housing
- the average percentage of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools is 2.7 per cent⁴
- the Disability Discrimination Act, as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, places a duty on all schools and local education authorities to plan to increase over time the accessibility for disabled children to the school curriculum and physical environment⁵
- Ofsted inspections in 2003 found that over half of schools had no disability access plans and of those plans that did exist, most focused only on accommodation⁶

While most of the children don't talk in terms of 'child protection' or 'abuse', they have opinions about why abuse and neglect happen. They are also concerned about wider issues of safety, such as their relationships with the police and accessible transport.

The children do not take the line that parents who abuse are 'bad' parents. They recognise that most parents will want to look after their children properly, but that their own circumstances can prevent this.

'It's not always that they're bad parents, sometimes they do these things (abuse and neglect) 'cos they're at the end of their tether and need somebody to help them'
13-year-old, Cannock

Safety on the streets was an important issue. The young people talked not only about physicalities but also about what made them feel safe. We should note that being in a group when out and about is

rated by children and young people as the thing that makes them feel most safe. In the current climate, groups of young people are seen as a threat or potential troublemakers and anti-social behaviour legislation allows groups of two or more young people to be dispersed. While these children and young people know that some do cause trouble, they also feel unfairly scapegoated on occasions.

'There's no lights at the bus stop and it's scary in the winter'
13-year-old, Tamworth

'I'm not scared of walking home (from the youth club) 'cos I'm always with my mates – there's about seven of us'
12-year-old, Tamworth

'It's a big group of kids and I suppose it looks frightening, but we just want to hang about – we're not doing anything bad – and the shop keeper just shouts at us to clear off – he doesn't talk to us'
15-year-old, North East

'I'd like there to be more justice for young people, we're all portrayed as criminals but the reality is we're not'
17-year-old, London

Bullying in schools has increased despite a range of anti bullying strategies and initiatives such as 'Anti-Bullying Week'. Children and young people still feel that not enough is done, or that the issues are not addressed in the right way.

'Sometimes people don't do enough about bullying (in schools). Kids get told off but there should be more 'bully watch' and buddying schemes'

12-year-old, Hull

They talk about approaches that have worked and what doesn't work

'Just expelling them ain't going to work – when they go to another school they'll just start again. They should try more to find out why they do it'

15-year-old, Northern Ireland

'The people that bullied people, they had a hat on and it said 'Buddy' and they gave the Buddies a responsibility to look after the kids that are being hurt and that made it easier for the school to cope with bullying because there wasn't as many around because of the Buddies'

13-year-old, Hull

Young people had a real concern to see 'proper' policing and a recognition of the importance of good relationships and that law and order is necessary for everyone's safety.

'They (the police) should know about where people live. The police are good here, they know about where we live and what the problems are'

13-year-old, Scotland

'Can we have more police on the streets – real ones not wardens'

17-year-old, London

'More black and Asian police'

15-year-old, London

'There has to be rules, if there were no rules then the whole place would go nuts. If there were no rules there would be people getting murdered and everything. I know it's crap but you have to have the law'

14-year-old, Northern Ireland

Facts and figures

Bullying

- in a survey by Childline, half of primary schoolchildren and more than one in four secondary schoolchildren said they had been bullied within the last year⁷
- just over a third (35 per cent) of pupils in mainstream schools are afraid of being bullied. 43 per cent of girls and 42 per cent of Asian young people expressed concern⁸
- one in three secondary schoolchildren will face bullying at some point in their school life⁹

Families

- in the last year (2003-04) Parentline Plus received 297,000 visits to its website

All the children and young people have something to say about their opportunities for play, leisure and education. They have opinions on the current debates about special versus mainstream education for disabled children, lack of spaces for play and what happens in schools. The links between boredom and trouble-making were recognised by the children and young people.

'There should be more youth groups for young people so it stops them getting into trouble'

12-year-old, Wales

'The bigger lads on our estate just hang around and make trouble, but there's nothing for them to do – the youth club's closed and you have to pay for everything else.'

13-year-old, Cannock

'Can you build a skateboard park in Grange Park because it will keep kids out of trouble?'

9-year-old, Blackpool

'I think the government should spend more money on things for teenagers today because you get complaints about vandalism and stuff like that and it's because people haven't got anything better to do than be in the street, they do it because they're bored'

12-year-old, Hull

'Give young people something to do, especially in rural towns, like skate park, young people's discos. Make them inexpensive; young people are forced to wander the streets to meet up together'

a group of young people aged 12-15 years, Dundee

The role of schools in providing wider education and support, not just academic input, is valued by children. They are concerned that important decisions affecting education are made without opportunities for proper consultation and the increasing autonomy of schools is likely to decrease these opportunities.

'I think that the issues that are important for young people are education, someone for them to talk to during the holidays and health and sex education'

14-year-old, London

'I would eventually like to work with young people and would like to see things change - informing young people about their rights; improving sexual health services and making sure all young people get a good education'

20-year-old, Hertfordshire,
(taken from *Young People's Voice*, Barnardo's 2004)

'They are closing one of our schools and there was a meeting but it wasn't arranged properly and people didn't know, it means everyone will have to go to the same school and some don't want to – it's a long way and difficult to get to for some kids'

12-year-old, Tamworth

'We should stay in school until 4.30pm instead of having homework'

13-year-old, Cannock

Disabled children and young people feel they get a different response and service from others and that this is a barrier to their progress in education and training.

'Some young people when they leave special schools to go to the training agency, they will find placements for the able-bodied ones but leave it to the disabled young person to find their own. So they have to deal with all the barriers and access and if you don't deal with it, you don't get a place'

17-year-old, Belfast

If schools were mixed then more kids would know about disability, it would challenge and change people's attitudes'

20-year-old, North West

'It's quality rather than quantity, some students take longer but they should be given the opportunity to learn'

17-year-old, Liverpool

Facts and figures

Leisure and youth services

- a 'good practice' youth service having contact with 125 young people a week would cost £75,000 a year to run¹⁰
- a Save the Children survey of play schemes on one estate in Cardiff found only 60 places for more than 3,000 children and young people¹¹

The views in this section show that both younger children and older young people are concerned about life in their communities. Crime and anti-social behaviour are common topics, children and young people are concerned about the impact of crime and anti-social behaviour on them, their families and communities. In some cases, they feel more could be done to understand the experiences which lead to some children being vulnerable and getting involved in such behaviour. They are also interested in the physical environments they live in and told us how, in some areas, they are trying to improve things.

Children and young people are concerned about their local environment; litter, recycling and taking responsibility for improving localities are discussed. They have examples of what they are already doing and some ideas about what others should be doing

'There was lots of graffiti, but some of it was really good, they should have a wall or somewhere for them to do it where it won't spoil anything'
13-year-old, Hull

'If you don't look after the environment, who will? And you'll be the one complaining when it's all in your way'
14-year-old, Liverpool

'Yes we're trying to get this youth organisation set up and we'll be there to do clean ups and all that, and hopefully we'll show them that the youth aren't all bad if they'd give us a chance'
14-year-old, Belfast'

'There should be more recycling bins'
11-year-old, Caerphilly

'They should have people walking round the streets picking litter up'
10-year-old, Caerphilly

Children and young people have clear ideas on what money should be spent on. Contrary to popular opinion, the ideas are not grandiose and they do not expect state of the art facilities, but instead asked for modest leisure areas and gave ideas about how to use money effectively.

'All the skaters go down town and skate around Woolworth's and places like that and they're starting to kick them off it. So what are they supposed to do?'
14-year-old, Belfast

'That there new shopping centre, I think it's a total waste of money. Me and my daddy were saying it's just going to be posh shops, what's the point of having posh shops when there aren't any posh people here?'
14-year-old, Belfast

'I'd want to spend it (the money) on the windows and things that have been smashed, building it up again (the community centre)'
7-year-old, Tamworth

'There should be a room or somewhere they can go to smash glass and stuff – and talk about why. Somewhere safe so they don't keep trashing the (community) centre'
12-year-old, Tamworth

Crime and justice are high on the agenda for the children and young people we spoke to; they do not see imprisonment as the answer.

'Money should be spent on rehabilitation, prisoners should also give something back to the community – cleaning the streets or something'
11-year-old, North East

'Spend less on jail and more on stopping crime and getting people off drugs'
16-year-old, North West

Relationships with the police in relation to crime and justice are seen as important. The children and young people strongly feel that they do not get treated respectfully by the police.

'The police shouldn't shout at people when they arrest them, they have to be stopped but they (the police) should be reasonable'
11-year-old, Hull



'Someone has to give orders out. But the police aren't always nice people in the first place are they? And then you give them a uniform and they can tell people what to do. I think sometimes it's the government saying 'it's OK for you to bully people'

13-year-old, Liverpool

Facts and figures

Crime and justice

- youth crime has fallen over the last decade¹²
- the UK locks up more children, at a younger age, for lesser offences and for longer periods than almost any other European country. In 1992 just over 4 per cent of custodial sentences were made on children under the age of 12, but by 2000 this had risen to almost 9 per cent¹³
- 80 per cent of children who are locked up are kept in prison department custody¹⁴
- in 2003 in England and Wales just under 3 per cent of police officers were from ethnic minorities. At Chief Superintendent level, the figure is just over 1 per cent.¹⁵ In Scotland under 0.5 per cent of police officers were non white.¹⁶ The ethnic minority population in the UK in 2001-02 was 7.6 per cent¹⁷
- black people are six times more likely to be searched by police officers than white people and there are almost twice as many searches of Asian people as white people¹⁸

The disadvantage of poverty

All the children are aware of the relationship between their family's income and their own experiences and opportunities. Some are concerned for their families and others talk of their own experiences of struggling to get by on a training allowance or at college.

A Barnardo's report *Still Missing Out* published in 2003 showed that when parents are struggling to provide even the basic necessities such as books and meals, extras like out-of-school and holiday activities are virtually impossible to fund. Children will then miss out on the opportunities for learning and development available to their better-off peers.

'I think the school is asking too much money off parents to buy school uniforms'

14-year-old, Hull

'School prices shouldn't be so high. My mummy pays £25 a week on stuff like dinner and books for me and my brother'

9-year-old, Derby

'It would be good for my mum if the school meals were free'

6-year-old, Derby

The UK regards itself as an affluent society with well-developed welfare systems, yet many families still live in poverty and parents are denied the opportunity to give children a good start in life. The children and young people recognised the importance of investment for young families in order to break the cycle of poverty.

'There should be more child benefit and money for parents on their own'

14-year-old, Caerphilly

'Like if you have a family that earns £1,000 a week and some who can't earn anything and they all get the same child benefit – that's not fair'

12-year-old, Caerphilly

'That's something the government also doesn't understand, that young mothers need more money to help their child when it's born'

14-year-old, Belfast

'Somebody was saying that we are going to get an incentive to go to college, so that you're better off in college or training than you are not working – that would be good'

17-year-old, North East

In 1999 the Social Exclusion Unit in England and the Strategy Action Team in Scotland both produced reports outlining the concerns over the numbers of over 16-year-olds not in education, training or employment. Since then initiatives such as New Deal and Entry to Employment have aimed to increase these numbers, particularly among those young people who have difficulties in accessing training or employment. The young people who contributed to this discussion feel that more could still be done to support them.

'We really need support from the government especially in relation to jobs'

18-year-old, Northern Ireland

'The money for training should be higher than on the dole and there should be more places like this (a Barnardo's training scheme)'

16-year-old, North East

'£40 a week training allowance is just not enough to live on. I know I get housing benefit 'cos I can't live at home but by the time I've paid my light and stuff and bus fares there's hardly enough for food. I'm not getting at pensioners but didn't somebody say they can't live on less than £100 a week, well how can I do it?'

17-year-old, North East

Facts and figures

Poverty

- One in four children in the UK live in relative poverty and 17 per cent in absolute poverty (lacking the basic necessities)¹⁹
- Over 100,000 children in the UK do not have a permanent home²⁰
- Children who are from poorer families don't get the same chances as their more affluent friends. They are more likely to grow up to be socially excluded, homeless, to have problems with drugs or alcohol and to commit crimes or to be victims of crime²¹
- 17.3 per cent of children in primary schools are eligible for free school meals but only 14.2 per cent claim them. In secondary schools, 14.3 per cent are eligible and only 10.6 per cent claim²²
- The total income for a lone parent with one child is £114.16 a week (made up of a personal allowance, child tax credit family premium, child allowance and child benefit). The minimum income guarantee for a single pensioner is £104²³
- The average house price in the UK in 2002 was £128,300

Children and young people were not only passionate about the things that directly affect their lives; they had views on a wide range of issues, world events and other cultures.

'They should talk to the MPs in Northern Ireland, try to bring them together. Put them all in a room and tell them to put the past behind them'

17-year-old, Northern Ireland

'It's not fair people with darker skin get harassed, it's not their fault. Just because they are different colours and speak different languages – they shouldn't be treated differently'

12-year-old, Hull.

'Why can't they just talk? (Instead of going to war.) It might not have worked but at least they could try. Like I have a friend who I had argued with, but just for a lesson we had to work together and I had to get on with it'

14-year-old, Wales

'Keep on trying to get rid of poverty please'

14-year-old, Yorkshire

'Other people in other countries can be helped by us talking to politicians all over'

a group of disabled children, aged 14-22 years, Belfast

'He (the Prime Minister) said good things about equal opportunities, 'if you work hard you can get anywhere' is a good theory but will it really work?'

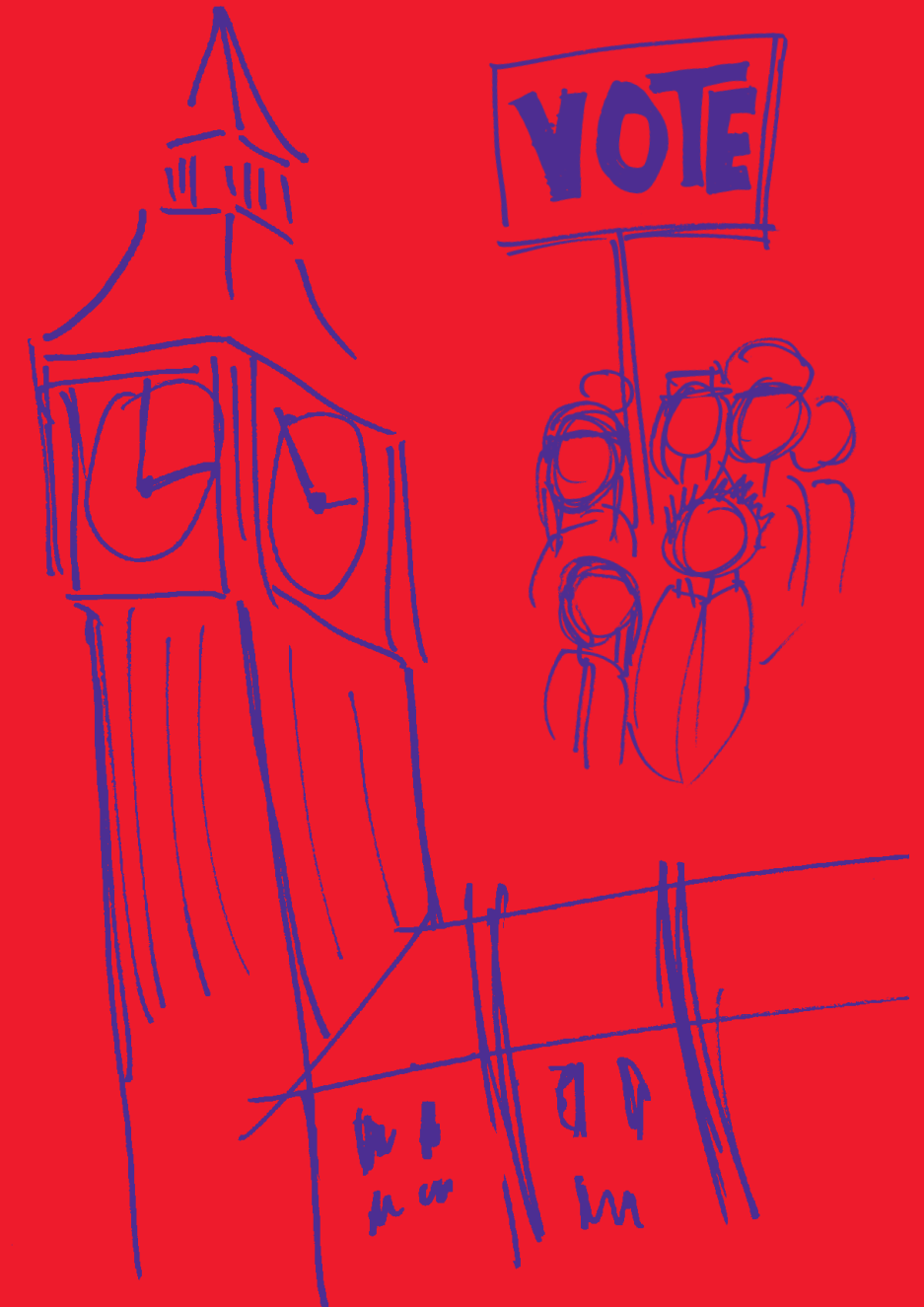
19-year-old, London

(taken from *Young People's Voice*, Barnardo's 2004)

'We don't see the point of war, why can't they talk to each other?'

young people, aged 12-15 years, Dundee

This report shows that children and young people have mature, thoughtful and reasonable views on social issues, many of which adults will share and identify with. Feeling safe, dealing with bullying, crime and what happens in communities are concerns that are also high on government agendas. Children and young people not only have opinions about these things, but also have ideas, based on their own experiences, on what works in addressing the things that concern us all. The government must do more to build on the steps it has already taken to better engage with and listen to children and young people. In 2005 all four UK nations will have Children's Commissioners. We would call on all administrations to take this opportunity to fully enshrine Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in policy, legislation and practice throughout the UK.



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Article 12 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

*'If no one believes that you
can do anything then why
should we believe that we
can? Give us a chance'*

14-year-old, Wales



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