

whose  
government  
is it  
anyway?

Young people's views...



**Barnardo's**

GIVING CHILDREN BACK THEIR FUTURE

*'My sister, she's in a children's home herself and she's only eight. I would like the government to do something. I wouldn't want her going through what we went through...'*

Young person, Belfast

Our special thanks to the many young people and staff from the projects who have given their time and effort to enable the publication of this book.

Compiled by Kristin Liabo, Simone Sadiq, Jo Stephens and Claire Turner.  
Edited by Annabel Warburg.

## ■ Introduction

Children and young people under the age of 18 make up a quarter of the UK population, yet they are also the most powerless section of the community. They are not yet old enough to vote and have few opportunities to make their voices heard. Nevertheless, they have the right to have their views taken seriously, particularly in discussions of issues that directly affect them.

Barnardo's is committed to ensuring that children and young people's perspectives and participation are at the core of our work. We seek to provide services which tackle the problems facing children, young people and their families, and we have a commitment to working with them to challenge the injustices which they experience and transform the fractured lives some lead.

The 85 young people who have contributed to this publication express their views on the areas of their lives that are of most concern to them: education, housing, the benefits system, life as a young carer, disability, living in care, leaving care, surviving as a young parent, and services and resources available to young people. They are all aged between 12 and 18

and are Barnardo's service users in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Over the last two decades there has been a growing recognition that children and young people should have a say in the services and opportunities provided for them at both a national and local level. A number of steps have been taken by governments to demonstrate the importance of participation by children and young people, including the implementation of the Children Act, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Quality Protects, the appointment of a Children's Commissioner for Wales, and the introduction of a citizenship curriculum in schools. These are all welcomed.

For government, policy makers and service providers, encouraging the participation of children and young people can help us provide safe and effective services. For the young people themselves, participation is an essential component in the development of citizenship skills. We need to encourage children and young people to engage and become full participants in society avoiding the social exclusion which is so common today.

In publishing this report Barnardo's is seeking to:

- Focus government attention on the issues that are important to young people
- Promote greater recognition of the important contribution young people can make to the decision making process

There is a remarkable degree of consensus not only in the concerns expressed by the young people, but also in their clear and practical proposals for ways in which these concerns could be addressed. The young people contributed to this publication in the hope that their voices would be heard and their requests answered. We hope that a broad audience will engage in this report and recognise that the participation of children and young people is of crucial relevance not only to those concerned with the welfare of children, but society as a whole.

## ■ Provide after-school tutors for young people who need more support with school work...

School tutors and special support for young people in care were mentioned by many of the young people interviewed. Those living in residential care or in difficult family circumstances at home will often not be able to receive help with homework and school matters outside school. The young people's experience of school was:

### ...teachers do not have enough time to devote attention to individual pupils...

'You know if you ask a teacher to help they think you're being sarcastic, they think you're just being idle because you asked them a question. Our mate asked questions and the teacher goes 'I've explained already' but she needed a bit more help and they just don't give it to her.'

Young carer; Liverpool

'I think there should be more teachers in the room. One teach one group and one teach another group and explain it to two groups instead of one teacher going around the classroom.'

Young carer; Liverpool

### ...class sizes are too big...

'You get 30-40 in a class and not everyone is being seen to.'

Young carer; Liverpool

'When you're in a children's home you have like 4-5 staff on and they have to deal with like 13,14, 15 children. And you're sort of like left out. The only way you can get attention [at school] was like if you [fussed about] you only do that to get attention.'

Young care leaver; Belfast

'Teachers [should be] more involved with young people – give them more time.'

Young care leaver; Swansea

### ...pupils' problems frequently get overlooked...

'I left school last year. First year you say 'look, I don't like this, I don't like that, I want something done about it'. Second year, nothing's done about it, third year, fourth year and I'm leaving school by fifth year and they've done nothing and they wonder why we don't like school?'

Young carer; Liverpool

'Some teachers don't understand if you've had a really bad day and they start shouting over the little, I remember I got kicked out by my mum and I just wasn't in the mood for a teacher and all of a sudden it was like 'you've got lip gloss on'. And I was like – I'd been through the worst time and all he could pick on was me lip-gloss.'

Young carer; Liverpool

'See what annoys me is if kids who aren't even that bad get kicked out of school. What are they gonna do?'

Young carer; Liverpool

*'At the end of the school you should go back and then teachers can help you with your own way... Just help you through it until you get used to doing whatever they're doing.'*

Young care leaver, Swansea

**Statistics from a survey of 4344 secondary school-aged children revealed:**

- Of 1344 boys surveyed, 13% had been severely bullied at school
- Of 3000 girls surveyed, 12% had been severely bullied
- 87% of boys and girls had experienced some level of bullying, verbal or physical

Source: Young Voices: Bullying in Britain, 2001.

- The average class size (taught by one teacher) in secondary schools is 25.5
- 353,888 pupils are taught by one teacher in classes of 31 or more

Source: DFES: Class sizes in maintained secondary schools in England, January 2001.

'With bullies, they'll expel them from the school for being bullies, but they should look and see why they're bullying. There's gonna be a reason why they're being bullies themselves. I think they just don't understand. They should be sat down and talked to.'

Young carer, Liverpool

# 'What is more important, coming to school or what you wear?'

Young carer, Liverpool

**... some school rules, particularly concerning uniform, are seen as unnecessary...**

'I wore a bit of make-up, it wasn't even mascara, it was Vaseline on my eyes, but they thought it was mascara and I was sent home. That's just stopping me from learning and I weren't even that bothered because I hate school... I'm sure the inspectors aren't gonna go 'Vaseline!!!!'

Young carer, Liverpool

'I think that's one of the reasons why they have more rules about the uniform and that in case inspectors come, but they're not gonna look at your uniform... You're not allowed to wear make-up, which makes people feel self-conscious which makes them not come in.'

Young carer, Liverpool

**...bullying should be dealt with more effectively...**

'Bullying should... have like support ways if you go through bullying or anything like that... you should have cameras to see what's going on... on the playgrounds so you can see bullying when that happens.'

Young person, Liverpool

'Try and get someone [who has been bullied themselves]... If they haven't been bullied they don't know how you feel, they can just turn round and say 'yeah I've been through it'. You know that they've actually felt the way you're feeling, which is better.'

Young person, Liverpool

**When teachers do have time to talk to pupils, this is valued:**

'I used to like one teacher. We used to sit and talk and that.'

Young person, Liverpool

'I think [school mentors] that's quite good because like if you're having like family problems what we have or if you're having a bad time you can explain to your mentor and your mentor will have a word with the teacher.'

Young carer, Liverpool

- Give young people in care more individual support and information from social workers and better preparation for leaving care

*'My sister, she's in a children's home herself and she's only eight. I would like the government to do something. I wouldn't want her going through what we went through...'*

Young person, Belfast

The young people who had experience of the care system felt that it did not treat them with the respect they deserved or provide them with the support they needed. In general, they did not have a good experience with social workers. Some of the young people had the

experience of not being asked about moving and all felt that social workers should listen more to what young people in care want rather than making plans for them over their heads.

'You don't want them [children in care at the moment] to have a time like we have. You want to sort them out before they have to get the stage we have.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'The care system, they should listen to the young people more, what they're saying to them. If they're unhappy in a home or something, they should move them.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'I don't think they offer much support in care.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'They should give less people to one person so they could have more time for them people they deal with.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

*'When I was 14 – 15 my social worker was like, 'I'll see you next week'. He rang up 3 months later... Fair enough you may have more people to see, but you may depend on them doing something.'*

Young care leaver, Belfast

**A major concern was that children in care at the moment should be aware of issues that will affect them when they leave care. The young people saw being fully informed of care procedures, benefit entitlements and the like as a right. In many cases it was felt that this right was not met, and if it had been it was through the Barnardo's Project or other service they had 'happened upon'...**

*'All that I was told was there was an After Care Team, but that was it. I wasn't told where it was, nothing like that.'*

Young care leaver, Swansea

*'[Things should be] explained to you... what they can do for you and what you're entitled to.'*

Young care leaver, Swansea

*'I think that foster children should know what they're entitled to while they're in care as well as when they've left... Because we were never told.'*

Young care leaver, Swansea

*'There is access to some projects, but there's not enough access and there's not enough information given out to young people, like.'*

Young care leaver, Swansea

On 1 March 2000, there were a total of 58,100 Looked After children. The total number of children looked after at any time during the year 1999-2000 was 90,000.

Source: DoH: Children Looked After by Local Authorities: year ending March 2000. (England and Wales)

In 1999-2000, 18.1% of Looked After children had experienced three or more moves during the year. Every time a Looked After child moves they experience changes in the people who care for them, the people they live with, their school, social networks and contacts, and the community in which they live. Only half of all Local Authorities achieved the Department of Health target of 16% or fewer children experiencing more than three moves during the year.

Source: DoH: Children Looked After by Local Authorities: year ending March 2000. (England and Wales)

The average Looked After child received 4.3 hours per week of service from Social Work staff. How much time does an average parent spend with their children?

Source: DoH: Children Looked After by Local Authorities: year ending March 31st 2001.

The average turnover of Social Work staff is 9% per annum.

Source: NISW: The Social Services Workforce in Transition

- Give training to teachers to help change attitudes to young people living in care

*'They [teachers] automatically say 'oh you're in a children's home that's why you do that.'*

Young care leaver, Belfast

**Many young people living in care reported the negative views their teachers held...**

*'Run some sort of course to let teachers know about what it's like to be in care for young people.'*

Young care leaver, Belfast

*'Schools think because you're in children's homes you're a problem tag not because of your proper family background.'*

Young care leaver, Belfast

*'We're not educated enough.'*

Young care leaver, Swansea

- On 31 March 2000 there were 33,100 school-aged children in the Looked After population. Of these, 1.5% were permanently excluded from school, compared with 0.14% of all children.
- On average 45% of those Looked After children in the appropriate age group achieved English level 2 at Key Stage 1, 32% achieved level 4 at Key Stage 2 and 19% achieved level 5 at Key Stage 3. The comparable percentages for all children were 80%, 74% and 63% respectively.

Source: DOH: Outcome Indicators for Looked After children: Year ending 31st March 2000 (England and Wales)

## ■ Put more into the curriculum that is relevant to ‘real’ life

More education and better education about issues affecting young people was an agreed area where simple, though effective, improvements could be made. This education could have a preventative role to play if presented in an accessible way to young people...

*‘They should have celebrities saying ‘look, you could be like me – get out of that bed and get to school’. People like that they should be like, ‘cause young people look at them, look up to them, they’re not gonna look up to Tony Blair are they?’*

Young carer, Liverpool

‘We should be taught more about health and that, we don’t get taught nothing about health in school and why you shouldn’t go on a diet our age. We get told we’re too young to diet because that can do something to your body but we don’t know why.’

Young carer, Liverpool

‘Has a teacher sat down with you and said ‘look this is what tax is, this is what you’ve gotta pay, this is what you mean with a mortgage?’

Young carer, Liverpool

‘I think there should be more crime prevention things in schools and maybe foster carers to be taught, like parents, sex education, easier access... to family planning, drug and alcohol misuse [prevention], you know.’

Young carer, Swansea

‘...[need] more awareness of [mental health] and that it’s not something to be ashamed of.’

Young carer, Liverpool

‘Make education fun. It’s all serious isn’t it?’

Young carer, Liverpool

The National Curriculum on Education for Citizenship includes:

- At Key Stage 2: ‘to look after money and realise that their future needs and wants should be met through savings’;
- At Key Stage 3: ‘spending and saving including the use of pocket money’;
- At Key Stage 4: ‘to use a range of financial tools and services including budgeting, saving and managing personal money.’

It is difficult for marginalised young people to relate to these concepts. Many of them live in households where two generations have not been in work and where poverty levels do not allow for sensible budgeting and money management.

'Once they're 16 they're expected to live on their own even though you're not classed as an adult until you're 18. Once they're 16 they're expected to be able to live on their own, get a job, pay a mortgage.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

## ■ Provide training for foster parents

The young people had a great deal of insight into where parents and foster parents were failing to meet the needs of young people. They did not blame individuals, rather they felt that there should be training available for all parents. Children need support from their parents, and in turn, parents often need support from elsewhere.

Some agreed that if they had the opportunity they would go and sit on a panel to interview future foster carers and thought that would be a good way of improving the situation for young people going into care.

**'I reckon when foster carers go for this training they should have kids that are actually in care at that training session and saying 'look this is what you really need to do.'**

Young care leaver, Swansea

**'I think that we should train parents as well to break the cycle, because that's what the parents blame it on. They say like 'my mother done it to me...'. The parents should be educated before you educate the child...because parents are the people who you look up to, innit?'**

Young care leaver, Swansea

## ■ Offer continuing support after the age of 16 to young people who have been living in care

While some young people leave care happily and are able to settle down on their own, the people interviewed felt that they had not been ready to move out when they had to. They pointed out that most 16-year-olds would continue to live at home until the age of 18 or 19, but that they were required to move out at the age of 16 because the local authority was their 'parent'.

**'Once they're 16 they're expected to live on their own even though you're not classed as an adult until you're 18. Once they're 16 they're expected to be able to live on their own, get a job, pay a mortgage.'**

Young care leaver, Swansea

**'I think you should stay at a placement until you're ready to move out, because they will... you should be able to like come up and say like, I'm ready to move out and not when you're 16. When I was 16 I wasn't ready for the move...'**

Young care leaver, Belfast

## ■ 65% of looked after children are placed in foster care

Source: DoH: Children Looked After by Local Authorities, year ending March 31st 2001.

## ■ The average age of leaving home among the general population is 22

Source: CHAR, 1998.

## ■ The average age young people leave care is 16-18

Source: National Children's Bureau, 1998.

## ■ Approximately 8,000 young people leave care every year

Source: National Children's Bureau, 1998.

## ■ Improve levels of support for young people who have left care

A common theme among all the young people interviewed who had been in care was that getting a job after leaving care is easier said than done. Having a social worker, however good, will not replace the support and help a parent will give before leaving home and this means that young care leavers enter the employment market with disadvantages compared with other young people.

'When I left care, they forgot about me, like.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'We don't get any training schemes, like, we don't get to hear about it because we haven't got, you know, parents...If it wasn't for here [Barnardo's project] we wouldn't have a clue... we wouldn't know where

to get all our grants from, we wouldn't know nothing.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'You're just a little project and once it's done with that's it.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'I've been told when I was in the children's home... it cost £60 thousand pounds for one child for a year...'

When you're in a children's home compared to like what we are, we're in now, it's like royalty really... But things all change when you hit the age of 17, 18.'

Young care leaver, Belfast

'I applied for a job... and because of the care system and 'cause of the social worker rung up on behalf of me, it was sort of "Sorry, we can't give you the opportunity because you don't meet the criteria".'

Young care leaver, Belfast

'If you go for a job and they turn you down that's going to make you feel "oh I'm not going for another one".'

Young care leaver, Belfast

'The more you're refused, you lose your self-esteem and confidence.'

Young care leaver, Belfast

- More than 70% of young people leave care with no academic qualifications
- 50% of care leavers are unemployed
- 17% of young women leaving care are pregnant or already mothers
- 23% of adult prisoners and 33% of young prisoners have been in care
- 30% of the young, single homeless population have been in care

Source: SSI: When Leaving Home is Leaving Care 1999.

The Children (Leaving Care) ACT will be implemented from October 2001 and is aimed at:

- Improving the life chances of young people living in and leaving care
- Delaying young people's discharge from care until they are ready and prepared to leave
- Improving the assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care
- Providing better personal support for young people after leaving care
- Improving the financial arrangements for care leavers

## ■ Give young people aged 16 – 18 the same level of benefit and minimum wage as those who are older

The benefits system is seen as contradictory and discriminatory. Young people felt that determining the level of benefits by age was unfair, as daily living was of an equal expense. The minimum wage also came under fire from the young people. They felt that it should be the same regardless of age, as you are effectively doing the same job.

‘If you’re 16, you’re not going to get as much benefits as somebody else. And at the end of the day you’re all in the same situation.’

Young care leaver; Swansea

‘That’s discrimination. [The use of age to determine benefits] It’s ageism innit?’

Young care leaver; Swansea

‘I’m just saying from my point of view, like benefits for eighteens it’s £82.70, for somebody over 25 they get more... There’s no difference between somebody who’s 18 and somebody who’s 25, they’re both homeless, they’re both on the dole... but yet someone who is 25 gets more.’

Young care leaver; Swansea

‘The minimum wage, that’s wrong as well, because if you’re 16 and 17 you get £3.60, and if you 18 and 19 you get £4.20, or something like that. So it goes by age, and it’s the same with housing benefit. I don’t quite understand that...’

Young care leaver; Swansea

**Young people also felt there should be more financial incentive to do training...**

‘And it’s the same with the New Deal... they send you on these courses, they pay you £40 a week. What’s the point of going on these courses when you can sit on your ass in the house and still get £40 a week? They should pay you more if you’re working, shouldn’t they?’

Young care leaver; Swansea

**Young care leavers emphasised the fact that while there is a social stigma attached to a background in care, trying to survive on benefits enhances this label...**

‘£41 a week that’s what one have to live on and you have to pay your rent... and after you have to buy your food and stuff. You have no money left for socialising and anything really...’

Young care leaver; Belfast

‘And all that money that went on the millennium dome.’

Young carer; Liverpool

- Job Seeker/Severe Hardship Allowances for 16- to 17-year-olds are £31.95 per week. For 18 to 24-year-olds they are £42.00. Those aged over 25 receive £53.05

Source: Department for Work and Pensions

- The average weekly household bills (expenditure on accommodation, utilities and food) for a single person, non-retired household are £243.60

Source: D. Brown: Family Spending, HMSO

- **Make it possible for all young people on benefits to continue in further education**

*'I wanted to go to college 'cause I wanted to take a catering course but I couldn't because I wouldn't get no money.'*

Young care leaver, Belfast

Young people in care, who are often unable to rely on support from their parents for continuing in education, felt frustrated by the benefits system. Some of them fall under a regulation that would deprive them of benefits if they attended a full-time course because it would be classed as a full-time job.

*'You can't do a course and get no benefits whatsoever. Nothing to live on.'*

Young care leaver, Belfast

*'If you're living on your own in a flat you don't get grants from college.'*

Young care leaver, Swansea

The benefit regulations with regard to non-higher further education and part-time courses are complex. While not all courses entail loss of benefits, the guidance is complex for both Benefits Agency staff and young people alike:

*'If in any week a person is a part time student and he has restricted the hours for which he is available (for work) and whose course hours fall within the pattern of his availability for work, his studies will be considered irrelevant in determining whether he is available for employment, providing he is able and willing to rearrange the hours of his course to take up employment'.*

These regulations do not apply to courses under 16 hours per week.

Many vocational training courses, although they are part-time, have fixed daytime hours, which students cannot alter in order to be 'available for work'.

Source: CANS Digest of Social Legislation.

## ■ Housing

**Another important issue for young people is their housing situation, either when living at home with their parents in council accommodation, in a foster or children's home, or when coping on their own with independent living arrangements.**

'Houses, I mean we can only speak about ourselves, but we've been in our house for about 13 years. We've got the crappiest little windows ever and people who are just moving in get a placement automatically. We've been waiting for double glazing for 13 years, our houses bricks are falling down.'

Young care leaver, Belfast

'Cause there's loads of homeless people on the streets they should get priority of houses. And if they haven't got an address they can't claim benefits if they're homeless. Helping them to get money, if the social worker won't give them 'cause they haven't got an address. They should get them a house and give them money and get them off the streets.'

Young care leaver, Belfast

Significant numbers of young people who have experienced family breakdown have no choice but to live independently from as young as 16.

High youth unemployment (one in five young people aged 16 to 17 is unemployed) and low welfare benefit rates have had a particularly harsh impact on young people with no family support to fall back on.

It is estimated that between 200,000 and 300,000 young people under 25 experience homelessness each year.  
Source: CHAR 1998

The Single Room Reference Rent for people under 25, introduced in 1996, has had a significant impact on young people who have to live independently. A number of research findings have been consistent in providing the following evidence:

Young single people are the group most reliant on the private rented sector, as families are given priority for social housing.

The majority of young people leave home because of family conflict or breakdown and, in many cases, actual assault or abuse.

The shortfall between the Single Room Housing Benefit and actual rents varied between £9 and £30 per week. In no areas did the Housing Benefit allowed under the Single Room Reference Rent rules match the rent demanded.

A significant number of private landlords no longer rent property of any kind, including shared occupancy, to people aged under 25 because of the Housing Benefit shortfall.

## ■ Give young people more places to go, more things to do

Many of the young people felt that the lack of services for under-18s is one major reason why young people are out on the streets. However, any service provided would have to be closely monitored and be able to offer something to do and not just a place to be. Although some young people had a club in their area, this was often dominated by a few people who were there to wreck the place rather than do something constructive.

*'Every person under 18 has got a title and their title is 'trouble'. And it's not right at all.'*

Young carer, Liverpool

*'It's nowhere for kids to go so they go in gangs on the streets and that.'*

Young carer, Liverpool

*'We're worried about personal safety. There's too much violence if you go out and nobody will help you because they don't really care.'*

Young parent, Londonderry

*'I think we need more community services for young people.'*

Young care leaver, Swansea

*'We need more parks... Somewhere where people can just go.'*

Young care leaver, Swansea

*'It should be on a Friday or a Saturday because everyone is on the street corners getting bullied and there's nowhere to go.'*

Young carer, Liverpool

*'Something concrete like building, like some sort of sport centre where it was cheaper to get in or you know. Send them out ice skating, something for young people to do without standing on street corners and getting drunk.'*

Young person, Belfast

*'What about a gym? I would enjoy going to a gym.'*

Young parent, Londonderry

*'When I used to go to youth clubs I used to get bullied but I went to one and I didn't make any friends so I didn't bother going after that.'*

Young carer, Liverpool

*'I work for a youth club... and at first you've got people going in there enjoying themselves getting away from the problems, they can be themselves. And then you get other people coming in saying 'look I'm older than you' and then saying this and saying that and you just say 'I'm not coming back here' and then you go off.'*

Young carer, Liverpool

**The young people interviewed currently had few places to go other than the streets. They spoke about how they cope in a rough environment. Their experience shows:**

**...the intimidation of gangs on streets...**

*'You've got gangs on the street corners drinking and everything – if you walk past as innocent as anything they just jump on you thinking that you're an easy target.'*

Young carer, Liverpool

*'And you can't even go to the pictures or walk about an area or even to McDonald's or something without getting the crowd on the corner, you know, giving you snotty looks and the rest of it.'*

Young carer, Liverpool

*'Some girl down in our area, she gets battered and they all know that she does it so they get in on her and she just gets beaten up.'*

Young carer, Liverpool

**...their dealings with the police...**

*'You've got to go out in a big gang yourself, but then if you go out in a big gang you're gonna be stopped, you know what I mean? But you can only do it 'cause if you're in a big gang they won't pick on you, you know what I mean?'*

Young carer, Liverpool

*'The police came and took pictures of myself and we were just walking down the road, we weren't doing anything. And then the gangs*

*on the corners they were too scared to go over to the gangs.'*

Young carer, Liverpool

**...the other dangers on the streets...**

*'Yesterday I was out with someone and this car comes shooting in to me and we could have died and she nearly died herself... so that's what can happen, it didn't hit, but it was that close...'*

Young care leaver, Swansea

# 'I can't wait to be an adult 'cause you're getting rid of that pressure then.'

Young carer, Liverpool

## For young people in Northern Ireland, violence is frequent:

'Summer time, most of the summer time's mostly bad, they're all out. The marches, causing the trouble... I don't mind in the rest of the year but when it comes to one month.'

Young care leaver, Belfast

'There's things going on in town but you can't take these wee kids because of the fights and stuff.'

Young parent, Londonderry

## ...the effects of peer pressure...

'I think mainly as a teenager it's getting accepted and stuff. There's groups of people and boys and you know what I mean.'

Trying to find yourself.'

Young carer, Liverpool

'People do say that 'just say no and walk away and it's easy and all that' but then when you're with your mates ... it's not as much the peer pressure it's just to do it. Do you know what I mean? Just to be.'

Young carer, Liverpool

'Got kicked out of school for smoking and I know it was wrong but you're hardly gonna stay out of smoking when everybody else was doing it.'

Young care leaver, Belfast

'When I used to go out with my mates, they'd say 'come out' and then there'd be a big gang of us and then we'd start shouting at someone in the street and that. I'd be like – I wouldn't know what to do but I still liked the people, do you know what I mean?'

Young carer, Liverpool

## ...drugs...

Although a taboo area for many young people to discuss with adults, some of the young people did admit that substance misuse is prevalent in their environment. Some even said that classmates would take drugs whilst in school. Although most of the interviewees did not admit

to having taken drugs themselves, one young person connected his drug use to feeling lost and unhappy about life...

'... the worst thing in the world ever... a big sword hanging down on life basically. When I moved in here, I took drugs and drink, the tablets and anything else I could get ... I couldn't go out and enjoy myself like everyone else...'

Young care leaver, Belfast

'My mates had drugs in her pocket at school. She had her 'e's' in her pocket.'

Young carer, Liverpool

'Loads of lads in our school go off and do it [drugs] in lunch breaks and that.'

Young carer, Liverpool

## ■ Set up drop-in centres for young people, offering information and support

The young people felt that it is difficult to find out about support that is available. In addition, they pointed out that the majority of support is currently crisis-based. The young people were also aware of the

inequity in support currently available. For example, homeless care leavers may have more readily accessible support than other homeless young people. They wanted to see more information being

made available that was not full of jargon, but written in a format accessible to all. They also felt that services should be more inviting, taking an informal approach.

*'He's never been in care but half the support he's tried to get, he's never been able to get it and he really does need it. Just as much as me and him do, and no-one's there to help him.'*

Young care leaver, Swansea

'Drop-in service with young people, sort of, running it. Say like, you've got a problem, and you want to speak to someone, it's not always easy to speak to adults, is it? You'd rather speak to someone your own age who's in the same position as you, so I reckon there should be more drop-ins, easier access... Because it all seems to be formal, the way you've got to do it like. I think it should be more informal.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'There is support through projects like this, but there's not support for everyone. Like this project is for care leavers, there should be something out there for other people, because at the end of the day we're all the same...Shouldn't be like we've got care leavers here, and we've got somebody else whose been on their own for years, he should have the same support as we get.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

The Connexions Service, which is to be set up during 2001, aims to provide a universal and comprehensive youth support service to all young people aged between 13 and 19. The goal of the Service is:

'To ensure that all young people have the opportunity to learn the skills they need to make a success of their adult lives. Young people should be stretched so that they can achieve higher standards, and so that half of them are later able to go on to university. Equally, young people should be supported so that those from disadvantaged backgrounds or at risk of disaffection become motivated to participate in society through learning'.

The Connexions strategy will bring together four key themes:

- a flexible curriculum that engages different young people and leads to the relevant sought-after qualifications
- ensuring high quality provision in school sixth forms, Further Education colleges and work-based learning
- targeting financial support for those in learning
- providing outreach, information, advice, support and guidance

- Create special young people's rates for transport, sports and other leisure activities

# 'Free sports activities for under-16s.'

Young parent, Londonderry

'You can't get out. If you are going to college you get a bus pass and concessions but if you're not you can't get out of the place.'

Young parent, Londonderry

'If we could get a concessions card, like a young person's card.'

Young parent, Londonderry

'Well I think they should bring out for your own benefit this wee card... you should get free travel, to help you like... or you just ask for a normal low rate fare or something.'

Young care leaver, Belfast

**Sporting activities and many other forms of leisure activities were seen as relatively exclusive because of their expense and the relatively high cost of public transport...**

'They should make it free 'cause it's £20 in college to go to the gym.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'Swimming is something like £2.10 and babies have to pay adult prices.'

Young parent, Londonderry

'Too expensive, we need a cheap alternative to these bowling alleys...'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'What about the price of joining weight watchers? It's £4 a time.'

Young parent, Londonderry

■ Improve access and opportunities for young people with disabilities

'They pick on people with disabilities, I always find.'

Young carer, Liverpool

'More facilities for disabled people, people with disabilities. Because the likes of me, if I went to an office and I was put behind a desk on a computer, I couldn't use it like that. I would need the likes of software that enlarges things on the screen and that. That cost money. And my employer's gonna say "well look, you cost too much". And they gonna boot me out the door.'

Young carer, Liverpool

**Young people with disabilities meet prejudices on a daily basis...**

'And then people stare if people are in a wheelchair or something they stare.'

Young carer, Liverpool

'You find people who do stick up for you. But you get other people saying "you should be dead".'

Young carer, Liverpool

'You've gotta feel sorry for these people 'cause they're just uneducated and they just got the way they've been brought up. They must have been just taught like that.'

Young carer, Liverpool

'It's grown ups, you'd find it's grown ups more than what it is like people our age.'

Young carer, Liverpool

- Half of all disabled children and their families live in unsuitable accommodation
- 20% of children and adolescents suffer some form of mental health problem
- Households with a disabled child have only 70% of the resources of an average family

Source: Barnardo's, NSPCC and CPAG: Our Children their Future. 2000

## ■ More support for young carers

Like young people with disabilities, those caring for relatives with disabilities live with prejudice and a sense of social stigma on a daily basis...

'You've got all these nosy neighbours sitting around the wall watching while the police had to take my mum away 'cause she was really bad then, depressed and all that... the neighbours were talking and I'm melting with shame. People would deliberately stand nearby watching while she was [taken away], shouting you're mum's a psycho and all that.'

Young carer, Liverpool

'And it affects the way we are, especially emotionally, 'cause that's gonna be there all our lives. From the day we were born to the day we die. It's always gonna be there and it's never gonna go away. We all are hurting

inside and no one realises it. We're just classed as little carers and no one realises it and it's hard.'

Young carer, Liverpool

'Me parents carry the cane and my dad's got a hearing aid to show he's deaf and you know you get people walking past saying 'oh, disgusting'... really slagging them off and that. I look after my nan who's got emphysema and she can't walk, she's in a wheelchair, so if you go out with the wheelchair you're getting more abuse throwing back in your face.'

Young carer, Liverpool

**In addition, many young carers face financial hardship...**

'And especially when...your parents are disabled or they've got an illness or something, you're not working off an income or proper wage. You're living off benefits and benefits are crap now.'

Young carer, Liverpool

- There are no definitive figures, but a reasonable estimate of the number of young people caring for a disabled/ill family member is 32,000
- In 1999 a survey identified 28% of 5 to 15-year-olds and 33% of 11 to 15-year-olds had missed some school or experienced educational difficulties as a result of caring

Source: Young carers and their families – Office for National Statistics, 1997.

## ■ Help young parents stay on at school

**The young parents interviewed were concerned about the lack of support from the Government for them to carry on with their education. They suggested crèches at school where they could leave their children while in class and free child care for young parents whilst still in education. They also felt that the benefit system's treatment of young parents was unfair and they felt excluded and stigmatised by both media and statutory regulations...**

'I would think about a crèche in school so that young mothers can get more education.'

Young person, London

'Help these young people with living expenses and support networks. Let them receive their much needed benefits and education and do not discriminate against us because we are young mothers.'

Young person, London

'Why do single mothers not get enough benefits? For example, people under the age of 16 receive nothing, there is no housing benefits available and no free child care for young women to go back to full time education.'

Young person, London

'Why aren't people allowed to claim for their own child if you are under 16?'

Young person, London

'Help young people and support them [pregnant girls]. Treat us the same as others should be treated.'

Young person, London

'Young families they need help. They shouldn't have got themselves in that situation but they need help.'

Young person, London

'There's a girl I know who had a baby and she said to me she only had the baby because she wants to be loved.'

Young person, London

**Facilities and services for parents can be intimidating for young people...**

'Mothers and toddlers groups for our age group, as the others are all older.'

Young parent, Londonderry

'It's really difficult using family planning because of age. What if there was a health centre for teenagers?'

Young parent, Londonderry

- The UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe – six times higher than that of the Netherlands. There are 7,700 conceptions per year to girls under 16 and 2,200 to girls under 14
- Teenage parents are more likely than their peers to live in poverty and unemployment and be trapped in it through lack of education, childcare and encouragement
- Teenagers usually go to their doctors much later in pregnancy and also miss out on important pre-conception health advice and measures. For many, any kind of conventional antenatal planning is impossible
- Teenage mothers are 25% more likely than average to have a baby weighing less than 2500 grams
- Infant mortality of babies in the first year of their lives is 60% higher for babies of mothers under 20 than for babies of older mothers
- Mortality rates for infants and children aged one to three are higher for mothers under 20

'It would be good [for us]  
if this person who is  
supposed to stand up was  
young themselves.'

Young carer, Liverpool

■ Consult young people about the role and priorities of a Children's Commissioner

'Someone who'll listen  
and who'll take your  
views seriously.'

Young person, Belfast

**The idea of a commissioner for children was endorsed as a particularly good idea...**

'Someone who'd been to university and college and that and is educated and knows how to talk.'

Young carer, Liverpool

'Not someone who just came out of Cambridge and lived in some big mansion and the large life. I think it should be someone who's been through it all.'

Young carer, Liverpool

**One of the young people in Northern Ireland had participated recently in a consultation exercise to create a Children's Commissioner there...**

'It was strange, but it was OK. We had to [do] group work and give points and all on it, what we're think the government should [do] and stuff like that and we're waiting on word back and then we're going back and see them and then if we're not happy about it then they'll say to them... Then if we're not happy then they've looked over our stuff.'

Young care leaver, Belfast

## A message for the Government...

**'Listen to us, take us seriously and stop turning your backs on us...'**

'I think they do listen to you, but they don't do anything about it... It's just a waste of their time and ours. If they want our points of view, they should listen, take it in, take it back and do something about it, not just listen to us, pretending they're doing something.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

**The young people identified a number of key points that they felt should be taken on board by Government representatives wishing to consult with young people...**

**Do not prejudge young people / care leavers / young carers / teenage mothers as the media does...**

'Because we are young and we have no experience they undermine us, they undermine our confidence. [re: the media's negative portrayal of young people]'

Young care leaver, Swansea

**Demonstrate that they are really interested in listening to young people's views by visiting them in their own environment where they can feel comfortable expressing them...**

'Go to their environment. You have to go to their formal environment...they should come to you. If they want to know, they can move their ass...'

Young care leaver, Swansea

**Be honest and don't just pretend to do something...**

'We're ordinary people... we should be listened to. And not to pretend to do it.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

# 'It's all talk. They're all talk and no action.'

Young carer, Liverpool

**The young people recognised the multiple demands that are placed upon Government but felt that there should be more equity in the way that issues are prioritised...**

'But, if you were the Government where would you start? Look at all the problems they've got. I can understand from that point of view, but they should do it equally.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'You get told one thing... and then it all changes... It's like, oops sorry, you know, we forgot about it, again. We won't do it this time, maybe next year. Next year comes along, you've got it all planned for the year after, which never happens...'

Young care leaver, Swansea

**Many of the young people interviewed appeared to lack confidence in the Government doing anything for them...**

'You get the government coming out with equal rights here and there and everywhere. Where is it? We're classed as kids, we are classed as kids, no matter, it's 17, 18, if you're under the age of 18 you're classed as a child.'

Young carer, Liverpool

'And that's for the election it's just, nothing gets done.'

Young carer, Liverpool

**There were several suggestions that politicians might demonstrate more understanding if they could experience what life is really like for young people...**

'Put them in the position we're in, because they're all like on big bucks, if they were in our position on the money we had, they'd know what we felt like then, they'd understand more... to see how they'd cope.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'If you took away his house and money and put him in our position for just one day, then he'd see the change.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'Tony Blair went through what we've been through it would be an eye opener for him, he would say well this is what these young people are experiencing, what can we do for them... Until he sees what we've actually been through he can't do nothing for it.'

Young person, Belfast

**As part of the voting population, and more importantly as part of Britain's population, the Government needs to look to ways of engaging these young people rather than making them feel isolated...**

'To stop turning your backs on us, really.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

**If you could ask the Prime Minister one thing, what would you ask?**

**'Why can't I live with my mum?'**  
Young person, London

**'Why can't you claim for a child if you are under 16?'**  
Young person, London

**'What would you do to help a 16-year-old who's pregnant, what things would you offer?'**  
Young person, London

**'Could he lower the price of buses please?'**  
Young person, Fife

**'I would ask him to give more money and housing to young people.'**  
Young person, London

**'What is he going to do for school?'**  
Young person, Fife

**'How does he stop conflict with different races, religion etc?'**  
Young person, London

**'Why do the police always pick me up? I've got no record.'**  
Young person, London

**'Why do nurses get such bad pay?'**  
Young person, Edinburgh

**'Stop bullies. More cheaper recreation. Bus-fares. Learning to speak out now about bullying.'**  
Young person, London

**'Legalise cannabis, because if you legalise it you wouldn't get offered hard drugs.'**  
Young person, Edinburgh

**'Why he approves of children's homes? Because for most children, [they] become offenders and end up with no family contact and in special schools for young offenders.'**  
Young person, Scotland

**And what exactly should the Prime Minister do for you and other young people in the UK?**

**'Make sure that the voices of young people are being heard and that he takes us seriously.'**  
Young person, London

**'He should look into child care because in my opinion it's all wrong. Kids sometimes don't get treated as they should.'**  
Young person, Scotland

**'They should provide free creche facilities for young people to they can carry on with their education. Put benefits up if you are under 16 even if you still live at home.'**  
Young person, London

**'Make more funding for people in care for things to do.'**  
Young person, Scotland

**'I would give them free child care and a lot more money and housing.'**  
Young person, London

**'Listen to my views and opinions. Offer us young people the same help with support as you would an adult. More benefits!'**  
Young person, London

**'Make more children's areas.'**  
Young person, Scotland

**'Help young people and support them (eg. pregnant girls). Treat us the same as others should be treated.'**  
Young person, London

**'To build more houses for the people who live on the streets.'**  
Young person, Scotland

**'Help these young people with living expenses and support networks. Let them receive their much needed benefits and education and do not discriminate against us because we are young mothers.'**  
Young person, London

**'Give more activities to do to stop young people being bored and getting into crime.'**  
Young person, London

**'Where I live there is no place to go, nothing to do. Can I have a centre nearby that I can afford, and that will be run properly?'**  
Young person, London

**'Four days in school and one day work experience should be introduced.'**  
Young person, Scotland

**'Listen to us!'**  
Young person, Fife

'if they want our points of view, they should listen, take it in, take it back and do something about it, not just listen to us, pretending they're doing something.'

Young care leaver, Swansea

'Why should the  
government listen to  
young people?  
Because we are the  
future.'

Young person, London



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Tanners lane, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex IG6 1QG Tel 020 8550 8822

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