

Children and young people in their own words

Sir Al Aynsley-Green introduces the contributions to this themed section.



MILLION

I have a statutory duty to promote the views and best interests of children, and so I was delighted that the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies were keen to work in partnership with 11MILLION and I, to do just that and highlight some of the really important issues facing our children today in relation to crime and justice.

In their own words, children and young people will share with you why they are passionate in wanting to be involved in developing local and national policies that could impact on their lives. They are also keen to share with you their insights into their childhood today.

Along with my words and those of children and young people, and in order to bring a cross-section of opinions to **cjm** readers, we have also invited Barry Goldson, Phil Scraton and Deena Haydon to share their views with you too.

In all of the articles, the views and opinions of the authors are entirely theirs and not mine.

The next few pages provide a snapshot of some of the challenges

our children and young people face; and we have also included examples of what can be achieved when children and young people are given the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience with adults to make a positive change.

Thus, you will read **Ethan's** interview with Children's Minister, Beverley Hughes MP, as he asks her what the government is doing to address crime and safety issues.

A group of young people from Corby tell you about their achievements during their BUZZ OFF campaign to halt the use of the Mosquito ultrasonic device, which emits a high pitch noise that is sensitive to younger ears, that aims to tackle anti-social behaviour by moving it on – but does not deal with the root cause of problems, i.e. nowhere to go for so many young people and nothing to do.

Young adults who were in the care system speak out about ways to better support children who are being looked after and how they can be better helped as they move towards adulthood and leaving the care system.

We also hear from some of the amazing children and young people who took the opportunity to work alongside adults and make important decisions as part of 11 MILLION Takeover Day.

As you read on, young people across the country explain what the words justice, fairness and respect really mean to them. These words are often used by adults, but within these pages they share with you their own perspective and definitions. You will also find out what makes them feel safe where they live and their take on children's rights.

In sharing with us what they think, children and young people can support adults in making all our lives better. Time and time again they're showing us all why it is so essential for us to listen to them and to work together.

We also hear from adults in this supplement. They highlight some of the issues faced by children and young people living in Scotland and Wales, and how the Children's Commissioners in these jurisdictions

are working hard to improve their lives.

Often there is no simple or one-size-fits-all solution to the concerns raised by our children and young people, nor to what some of them have to deal with every day. But during

my time as Children's Commissioner for England, I have been truly impressed by the shift in government thinking and the unprecedented changes to policy introduced during the last five years to improve the lives of children and young people.

The government must be commended for the Children's Plan and the Every Child Matters agenda, which provide clarity and focus for all those working in the children's sector. I am also encouraged by the increasing number of adults who are keen to develop more child-focused policies, which have been shaped by listening to what the younger generation has to say.

Children tell me how happy and empowered they feel when their views are sought and when they see the beneficial changes created from

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or triggered by their own ideas.

Initiatives in many locations across the country to involve children and young people in tackling gun and knife crime, in the planning of their school activities and their learning and seeking their opinions for better play and leisure facilities where they live, are just a few examples of where I have seen this happening successfully.

However, we know that there is still more work that needs to be done to achieve lasting improvements in the lives of some of our most vulnerable children and ensuring that all of their rights are freely enjoyed. Too many children, for example, live in poverty, although it is welcome that the government plans to enshrine in law the commitment to end child poverty by 2020.

I have previously reported on my visits to listen to asylum-seeking children and young people being detained before deportation; I found that many of them were deeply traumatised by their experiences. Some of them told me that they felt like prisoners and were not always respected or listened to by the adults with whom they dealt. In this issue, a schoolgirl talks about the time she spent at an immigration detention centre.

I am delighted to report that since my first visit to one of these centres, there have been a number of welcome improvements to create a more child-friendly environment.

In September 2008, the government withdrew its reservation on immigration in the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child, which we welcome. And earlier this year, they introduced a Bill to ensure that there is a statutory duty on the UK Border Agency to safeguard and promote the welfare of

children who are subject to immigration control.

Ultimately, we want any child who comes into contact with the asylum and immigration services to be treated fairly and humanely. 11 MILLION and I will endeavour to achieve positive change for children in their journey through the system by working closely with the UK Border Agency.

Young offenders' needs are also of concern to me. A young person in one of England's Young Offender Institutions speaks frankly in these pages about his life there. It is imperative for us to understand the lives of young people in these circumstances and provide support early when a problem has been identified so we can help them appropriately to change their behaviour and improve their life chances.

We will work closely with government to deliver our shared aim of fewer young people being given custodial sentences and fewer children going back into the juvenile justice system for second, third and fourth offences.

Again, the importance of children and young people being at the centre of discussions around crime prevention is key.

The vast majority of the 11 million children in England are law abiding and do not commit crime or cause problems. Many children, like me, are saddened that some adults fear young people and consider them to be a threat, even though crime is committed by only a small number of children.

During the past year, we listened to children and young people across the country to hear their solutions to reducing gun and knife crime among their peers. The findings of this work will soon be published and it will show the real benefits of a

community-based approach to crime reduction.

I believe we are at a turning point in the way children and young people are viewed and treated in our society. But we have to continue to strive in the coming months and years to make England the best place in which to grow up and to encourage adults to not fear children and to uphold their rights.

We must not rest until this country is a place where all children and young people have every opportunity to achieve their full potential, are safe and loved.

Initiatives like 11 MILLION Takeover Day and National Youth Work Week will continue to show just how amazing children and young people are and the positive contributions they make to our society. More young people contribute to society by volunteering in their communities than cause trouble, but this is rarely celebrated.

Improving their lives requires sustained national, regional and local efforts, across all agencies and services with all service providers and professionals working together and listening to children and young people, wherever they live and whatever their background.

Do visit us at www.11MILLION.org.uk to showcase your work with children or to find out what children are telling us.

I hope you find this supplement enlightening and that it inspires you to continue to use children's views in shaping and delivering your work. ■

Sir Al Aynsley-Green is the Children's Commissioner for England.

11MILLION is led by the Children's Commissioner and supports the 11 million children and young people in England to have their voices heard. For more details visit: www.11million.org.uk

