

**UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
PALAIS WILSON BUILDING GENEVA 10 JUNE 2002**



Following the submission of our report to the committee we were invited to participate in the pre-sessional hearing on the morning of the 10th of June. We were also invited to an additional meeting in the afternoon, which had been organised by the committee specifically for them to hear the views of young people from the U K.

We (Stu, Regan and Lynne) thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to "tell it like it is for young people in Scotland" and their commitment to using our contributions and those of others present, to inform discussions at the Sessional Hearing with the UK Government in September. Laura, secretary to the committee, for giving up her Sunday evening prior to the meetings to help us prepare for this important event. Alison Davies, Director, of Save the Children Scotland and Jennifer Turpie, Co-ordinator, of the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights (SACR) for their support to our organisation and the content of their reports which clearly reflected the views and concerns of Scottish young people.

What follows is a brief overview of the day and information regarding Article 12 in Scotland's' input to the events.

THE PRE-SESSIONAL HEARING

The session began with formal presentations from NGO's from the four UK jurisdictions: Scotland, Wales, the North of Ireland and England. These presentations were reflective of the earlier written submissions presented to the committee in February. This gave the committee and other NGO's the opportunity to identify common and differing themes and concerns and to highlight those issues that required further discussion.

Following the presentations each member of the committee presented questions for further discussion and comment from all those present. The NGO's were then given a short period of time to discuss the questions and prepare answers for feeding back to the committee.

During the feedback session our main contribution was reference to the repeal of section 2a of the Local Government Act 1986 in Scotland (Section 28). We highlighted that this was just one example of the differences between the four jurisdictions, and a very important one for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender young people. We pointed out that despite these changes in the law; services and support for LGBT young people are still abysmally thin on the ground. We finally noted that apart from the excellent services of a small number of NGO's, such as *Stonewall*, what is around, particularly in schools, does not meet the needs of this group of young people.

Our one regret, and that of all those present including the committee members, was that there was just not enough time to discuss all the issues raised, this despite the session being three hours long!! Still it was really good to break for lunch our heads were buzzing, all that information, all that thinking, all that problem solving!!

Following a great lunch, taken in the restaurant overlooking Lake Geneva, which even impressed Regan (our resident food critic), so it must have been good! And a wander around the Palais Wilson Building to soak up a bit of the "culture" we returned, minus all the adults (Lynne, our Co-ordinator, finally got some time to herself), to meet again with the committee.

PRE-SESSIONAL HEARING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people attended this session from the four jurisdictions. We think this was important for although there are many common issues and concerns there are just as many differences and it is important that governments, parliaments, assemblies and the committee recognise this.

We were the first group to speak at the session (No change there then!) We briefly highlighted our points as laid out in the summary of our report and then moved on to speak about sex education in schools.

We explained that people find sex education dull and uninteresting as well as, in this day and age, irrelevant to their situations. It excludes many young people, particularly with reference to section 2a (28). This opened up a discussion on support for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender young people and the lack of support in schools for young people in regards to their sexual health.

The discussion then moved on to discipline in the education system, another of our key points. We discussed the over use of punishments such as detentions and "sin-bins" and the unfairness or lack of the appeals system. This quickly led to the wider subject of exclusions (which carry a parental right to appeal), which allowed us to raise our point about teacher's misuse of their "discretion" and the lack of any stable or enforceable written guidelines. Discussion then moved to how easy it could be for a teacher to victimise a pupil either through these punishments or by other means and the young person's apparent lack of any support or appeal structures. We pointed out that although there is a parental right of appeal for long term or final exclusion from school many exclusions from school come as a result of previous detentions or "sin-bin" sendings which are served at individual teachers "discretion" and carry no right of appeal.

Prompted by the other young people present the subject of mental wellbeing was raised, especially its diagnosis and treatment in the education system. We expressed our belief that it is a fundamental lack of awareness that damages a young person's ability to access services and support regarding their mental health. We also pointed out that if more was done to raise awareness and remove the "stigma" of mental health issues then problems could be treated at an early stage or even be stopped before they develop.

As with the morning session, although we had one and half-hours with the committee, we ran out of time. That said we felt that we were given a good opportunity to voice our concerns that they were listened to and are confident that those concerns really will be taken into account when the committee meets with government representatives in September.

SO WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

As a result of our input the committee has suggested that we take the opportunity to attend the UK Government Sessional Hearing in Geneva in September. Funds permitting we'll be there!!!!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Article 12 in Scotland would like to thank our major sponsors for making it possible to attend this event:

Save the Children Scotland
Levi Strauss
The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust
The Community Fund

We would also like to thank Sainsbury's (Dundee) for Making Stu a "local hero" and their donation of £200 towards this event.