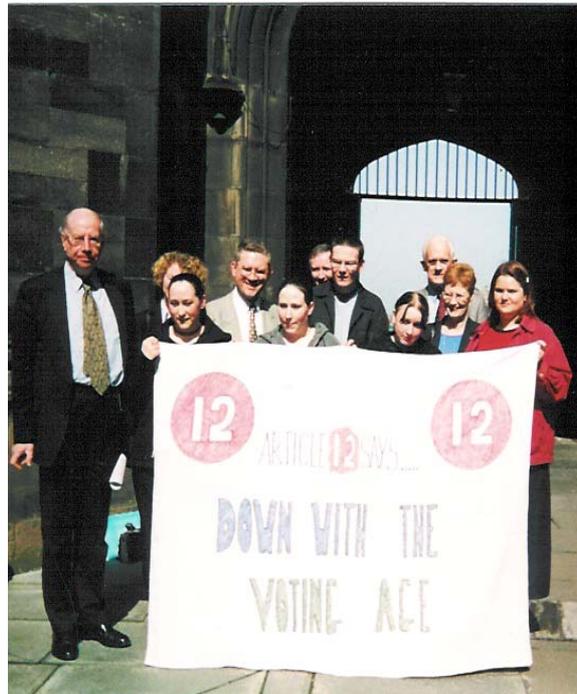


"CHILDREN ARE EUROPEAN CITIZENS TOO"



YOUNG SCOTTISH VOICES

A REPORT BY ARTICLE 12 IN SCOTLAND

"CHILDREN ARE EUROPEAN CITIZENS TOO"

SUMMARY

Our research focuses on **participation** and is set out in three sections. Section one outlines our "focused" research, undertaken in February 2003, on the **participation** needs of groups of young people who are often the most marginalized in our society; those who are the least likely to be given the opportunity to "have their say": *Young Gypsy Travellers, Young People with Disabilities and Young People Living in Remote Rural Areas.*

Section two outlines the outcomes of our **National Conference on Participation Citizenship** in February 2003, attended by members of Article 12 in Scotland and representatives of other organisations who share our aims.

Section three outlines additional recent research about **participation** undertaken by Article 12 in Scotland, focusing on: *The European White Paper on Youth, The UK Governments Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and The Voting Age in Scotland.*

INTRODUCTION

Article 12 in Scotland is an independent youth led network that works across Scotland to promote youth rights as laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (**THE CONVENTION**). We take our name from Article 12, the key participation right, of the CONVENTION: *a child's right to express an opinion on matters that affect them, and to have that opinion taken into account at all levels of society*. We believe that young people care about their rights, and the rights of others, and that given the knowledge and the opportunity they will take positive action to make Scotland, the UK, Europe and the World a better place for young people!!

Article 12 in Scotland works to make RIGHTS a reality for Scotland's young people by:

- Developing our existing network to fully reflect the diversity of Scottish young people
- Undertaking research to identify the needs and concerns of young people, aged 12 - 18 years, relating to their RIGHTS
- Producing jargon free RIGHTS information, on our Website and in leaflet form for distribution throughout the country
- Organising events/conferences/training for young people throughout Scotland, which highlight the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

WHY WE ARE WORKING WITH THE EURONET PROJECT

Article 12 in Scotland wants to extend its work to embrace new ideas and developments emerging in Europe and to ensure that young Scottish voices are heard in the process.

We are seeking to establish new partnerships with a wide network of individuals and organisations that share our aim of empowering young people to have a greater say in the way things are run at local and European level.

The success of our own website, www.article12.org, in reaching out to, and gaining the views of, those young people who cannot, or choose not to, participate in the more traditional forms of youth support, highlights the need for a similar mechanism to be established Europe wide.

SECTION ONE

THE TRAVELLERS INFORMATION AND EDUCATION PROJECT - ABERDEEN - THE NORTH EAST OF SCOTLAND

Wendy Lee Lindsay, Secretary of **Article 12 in Scotland** and a member of the **Travellers Information and Education Project Girls Group** outlines the thoughts and concerns of her peers (11 females aged 12 - 18 years):

"Things happen! How? When? Where? As members of the Young Travellers Group no one has ever consulted us about anything. It would be great if young people like us from minority groups could have a say in things that matter to us and which affect our lives.

Even meeting together has its difficulties. There are always obstacles to be overcome. Funding, location and access are the main ones. The Local Authority Gypsy Travellers site is 12 miles out of town with a two-mile walk to the nearest bus stop. Funding from local or central government could help young people from minority groups to meet more often.

It is difficult for Travellers to make a commitment to attend meetings as they could be travelling all the time. If meetings were spread over Scotland then we could meet up nationally without any one group having to fork out for expenses all the time.

Access to the Internet would help groups stay in touch and the use of web cams would allow people from outlying districts to take part.

Our group feels we could participate in future by listening or watching broadcasts, debating issues ourselves, watching information videos, filling out questionnaires and voting on the Internet - if it was available to us.

Young Travellers want to influence decision making - just ask us - you've got the technology!!" **Wendy Lee Lindsay**

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES - KILMARNOCK - THE WEST OF SCOTLAND

Louise Hunter, Vice Chairperson of Article 12 in Scotland, and founder member of a social activities group for young people with disabilities outlines the thoughts and concerns of her peers (a mixed gender group of 10 young people aged 14 - 20 years).

" We need to be given the chance to talk to heads of education at local level and to the Minister for Education at the Scottish Parliament.

We need to be able to talk to our local councillors and to be able to have input to community councils.

Adults don't seem to want to listen to us, or take us seriously. Young disabled people need to be represented on local access panels so that we are given the chance to have our say. Our needs are different from the needs of adults and access panels don't always take this into account when they are making decisions.

There should be local, national and international panels for disabled young people so that we can meet together to put forward our ideas and views.

One of the biggest things we need is funding to pay for meeting places, travel and to be able to advertise our groups so that other young folk can join with us to give us a **LOUDER** voice"! **Louise Hunter**

YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN REMOTE RURAL AREAS - DRUMNADROCHIT COMMUNITY SCHOOL - THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

Jelica Holmes, Group Development Worker for Article 12 in Scotland outlines the views of a mixed gender group of 7 young people (aged 13 - 15 years) from the Drumnadrochit Youth Club.

"We have a pupil council with representatives for each class. We're supposed to be able to go to them, about things we're not happy about. Our headmaster sometimes listens to us, but things don't really get changed".

"Our youth club allows us to discuss things and do things we want. We have been able to get approval to build a skateboard park in Drum - despite some complaints about it and we are going to have new youth club built. These things have been able to happen because our youth leaders have helped us. Most other adults don't really take much notice".

"The biggest obstacles for young people are that it feels like no one really listens to us, we never get invited to become members of the local groups that make the decisions; like the community association. It always seems to be the same young people that get chosen to do everything at school; it doesn't feel like a fair system".

"Although we have been involved in some good projects, like the Youth Club, The Arts Project and the Skateboard Park, we are still generally excluded from the formal decision making processes. We need to be given information on how to get involved in the formal processes and adults need to learn to treat us like equals, respect what we have to say and show us that they will involve us in their actions, and not just go away and do things for us".

Living in a rural area like Glenurquhart means that it can be difficult keeping communication going. Often, though we are left out of what adults discuss and decide. Sometimes this is because of the way they do things, like having meetings that are really boring so we don't want to do it.

But they could let us have our own group - like at the youth club - and listen to the things we have to say. They could come to us". *Jelica Holmes and the Young People of Drumnadrochit Youth Club*

SECTION TWO

PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP CONFERENCE

In February 2003 seven (7) members (aged 15 - 20 years) of the Article 12 in Scotland Management Group, with the support of Project Staff, hosted a national conference to identify and address the key barriers to participation and citizenship at local, national and European levels.

Thirty-seven (37) young people and young people's advocates from organisations such as: Participation Projects, Social Inclusion Projects, University Research Departments and the Scottish Executive contributed to the event.

The following outlines the key issues raised by participants:

LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL

BARRIERS:

- The biggest barrier identified by our group was societal attitudes
- Elitist/narrow attitudes of those in positions of authority, work colleagues and society in general towards children and young people's participation
- 'Tokenism' - not really listening or interested in children and young people's views
- Language used - too much jargon can alienate you and prevent you from taking part

SOLUTIONS:

- Challenge power systems - make a point of promoting young people's participation and demonstrating it's effectiveness at any opportunity
- Activists work *with* decision makers
- Changing government structures of decision-making (more of a long-term plan!) to encourage all levels of society to participate in decisions that effect them
- Working with other children and young people's groups to encourage/empower other children and young people so that they see change is possible and that their participation can make a difference
- Sparking enthusiasm in children and young people can have a positive effect on their communities
- Educate young people about their rights
- Go to children's and young people's own environment to talk to them
- Begin participation at a young age
- Use language that children and young people can understand and relate to
- Cross-dimensional training

EUROPEAN LEVEL

BARRIERS

- Information is not widely distributed. It is not filtered down to young people
- There is a lack of awareness of the opportunities available to young people both amongst young people and youth workers
- Need to be aware that not all young people have access to web based information
- Too much use of traditional networks - what about the young people who do not participate at those levels

SOLUTIONS

- Evaluate current mechanisms
- Consult with young people to establish their preferred methods of accessing information
- Training for young people and youth workers about the European Union and the Youth Programme

SECTION THREE

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR TO EXAMINE THE "EUROPEAN WHITE PAPER ON YOUTH" AND THE IMPACT IT WILL HAVE ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

In November 2002, in partnership with Save the Children Scotland, we invited 20 young people (aged 16 - 24 years) and workers from seven EU member and applicant states, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Italy, Sweden, Holland and Austria, to examine the "White Paper" and to identify ways young people could monitor its impact at country and European level.

The following outlines the proposal arising from discussions:

WHITE PAPER SEMINAR OUTCOME PROPOSAL

AIM

To create a Young People's Commission that will work to monitor and promote the recommendations of the European White Paper on Youth at local, national and international level.

METHOD

A one-year pilot project involving eight member and applicant states: Poland, Sweden, Lithuania, Italy, Holland, Austria, Scotland (UK) and Portugal.

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

- (i) To raise awareness of the European White Paper on Youth
- (ii) A need to establish mechanisms to make Governments accountable
- (iii) An opportunity to promote European citizenship
- (iv) An opportunity to strengthen relationships between young people from member and applicant states
- (v) An opportunity to share examples of good practice and to promote these examples of good practice Europe wide, as recommended in the European White Paper on Youth.

ARTICLE 12 IN SCOTLAND'S "ALTERNATIVE REPORT". A RESPONSE TO THE UK GOVERNMENT'S 2ND REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTAION OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD.

This report aimed to present a "snap-shot" view of the impact that the implementation of the convention has had on the lives of young people in Scotland. In spring 2002 six members (aged 15 - 19 years) of the Article 12 in Scotland Management Committee undertook action research with their immediate peer groups to identify levels of awareness and understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Two of the authors of the report presented their findings to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva at the UK Governments pre-sessional hearing in June 2002 and were invited, as representatives of the Scottish Executive, to attend the UK Governments sessional hearing in September 2002.

The following extract outlines their findings and recommendations on the issue of participation as outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC: A Child's right to express an opinion on matters that affect them.

FINDINGS

The Scottish Executive and Local Authorities have introduced a number of opportunities (The Youth Parliament, Youth Fora, Pupil Councils) for young people to "have their say". Whilst we welcome these developments we are not convinced that "committee" type structures are the best way of reaching those young people most excluded from Scottish society. We believe that much more work is required to ensure that all young people are afforded the opportunity to actively participate in democratic processes at all levels of society.

Our research failed to identify any meaningful evaluation of these initiatives. Anecdotal evidence indicates that while welcomed in terms of "anything is better than nothing", these "committee" type of structures are perceived (by those on the peripheries) as elitist and tokenistic.

Further more, young people frequently question the value of their input:

"We are consulted to death yet there is little evidence that action is taken in response to the issues and concerns we raise".

RECOMMENDATIONS

We ask the Scottish Executive to ensure that systems are established to effectively monitor and evaluate the outcomes of current participatory structures and to make these findings available to young people throughout Scotland.

We suggest that the Scottish Executive look at alternative and innovative ways of encouraging young people to participate in democratic processes for example: face to face interviews in town centres, inter-active T.V. surveys via popular music channels. (A full copy of the report can be found at our website: www.article12.org)

THE VOTING AGE IN SCOTLAND - YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE THEIR SAY

In 2001 the VOTING AGE IN SCOTLAND research examined the views and interests of a sample selection, diverse in terms of age, gender and geographical area, of Scottish young people aged 12 - 18 years, regarding the current voting age in Scotland.

In total 898 responses were received. Of these responses 421 (47%) were male and 477 (53%) were female.

A good balance of urban/rural participants was realised, with the four Scottish Local Authority City Councils (Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh), and sixteen rural/urban Local Authorities ranging from Moray Council in the North East to Dumfries and Galloway Council in the South West responding to our request. Young people from throughout the target age range of 12 - 18 years were fairly represented, achieved by pre-selecting school year classes and targeting youth groups.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of the survey research successfully challenged the myth that young people have low levels of interest in politics and political issues.

Almost two thirds (62.8%) of young people surveyed thought that the current voting age was unjust and inconsistent, in terms of the law for young people, "At 16 you are expected to be old enough to make the decision to work or to marry, so why not vote?" (Male, age 14, Stirling). 71.6% of respondents in this category thought the voting age should be lowered to 16.

Of the 37.2% who thought the voting age should remain at 18 almost three quarters (72.7%) cited a lack of confidence and maturity and understanding of politics and political processes as their main reasons for wishing to retain the current voting age; "..... Young people should be more aware and involved in politics in preparation for the real world" (Female, age 16, South Lanarkshire).

Less than six percent of total respondents said that they were not interested in politics or voting.

The following recommendations were suggested for consideration by those responsible for ensuring that young people have the right to express an opinion on matters that affect them:

- Realistic and meaningful opportunities for further research and debate around the current voting age should be created
- Politics should be introduced to the school curriculum, as early as secondary year one, as an integral part of an education for citizenship programme
- New initiatives which aim to encourage young people to participate in decision making processes should explore ways of ensuring representation from all backgrounds, in terms of age, race, gender and ability, and aim to be reflective of issues that are important to young people.

Five members of Article 12 in Scotland presented these findings to members of the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh.

(A full copy of the report can be found at our website: www.article12.org)

CONCLUSION

The young people surveyed consistently questioned the value and relevance of current participatory methods and mechanisms:

" The biggest obstacles are that it feels like no one really listens to us, we never get invited to become members of the groups that make the decisions; like the community association... Adults need to respect us and show us that they will involve us in their actions, and not just go away and do things for us".

And they often view their involvement in consultation processes as tokenistic:

" We are consulted to death yet there is little evidence that action is taken in response to the issues and concerns we raise".

Young people want, and deserve, the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes at local, national and international level. Governments and other key decision makers have a duty to make this happen by:

- Providing access to information and opportunities
- Providing adequate funding to ensure that the most marginalized young people can express their views
- Developing mechanisms that empower young people to participate, with their peers and adult decision makers, at local, national and international level

PARTICIPATION matters to young people. Given the opportunities they can and will **HAVE THEIR SAY!**