curfews and crime
- what young people think.
Curfews are a big issue that Article 12 has been interested in for a long time. Every group in our network has different experiences in their local area of where people hang out and how the police respond to young people. We know that in lots of areas there is some kind of curfew, even though it is not officially called that. Young people are moved on by one means or another wherever they are.

Article 12 feels that curfews deny us our rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 15 says we have the right to Freedom of Association (to have friends and meet other people) and Article 31 says we have the right to Leisure and Recreation. Our survey reveals that these rights are not being met and young people want more youth facilities.

We also have Article 12, which is young people’s right to express their views. Young people must be asked their opinions about matters that affect them. Yet we have never been asked about curfews, even though politicians think they are a good idea. Before curfews spread to more areas, we demand politicians ask young people first. We decided to make a start in putting young people’s views forward by carrying out this survey.

We want people to take notice of this survey, but these results are only a start. The government has to do more consultation on this issue, as it will seriously affect young people’s lives and we believe it will be for the worse.

( Erica Wallace, 17, Dundee, A12 )

Who Took Part?

Article 12 in Scotland designed a survey questionnaire to find out from young people information which could help us consider curfews.

We wanted to know whether young people feel curfews would be effective, but we also wanted to find out how young people are currently spending their time at nights, or if they are experiencing any problems in their neighbourhoods because of this.

All the different groups in Article 12 have different experiences of the police in our own communities in Niddrie, Edinburgh; Mastrick,Aberdeen; and Ardler, Dundee. We know that there can be strict approaches to policing young people on the streets whether there are curfews or not.

We wanted to carry out the survey to get an idea of whether other young people’s experiences were similar to ours.

We also felt it would be too easy to just say that young people don’t want curfews, so in our questionnaire we also asked what measures young people felt would be most successful in tackling crime. We sent the questionnaire to some of the youth workers and youth projects we knew of around the country. Ninety eight young people responded who were between the ages of twelve and twenty. The young people were from various locations around the regions of Ayrshire and East Lothian, and from communities within the cities of Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee.

Of the 98 young people who responded:

- 6 x 12 year olds
- 17 x 13 year olds
- 12 x 14 year olds
- 19 x 15 year olds
- 20 x 16 year olds
- 8 x 17 year olds
- 5 x 18 year olds
- 8 x 19 year olds
- 2 x 20 year olds

and one young person who preferred not to give an age.
Good Relations

We asked young people how they felt about their relationships with the police in their communities.

Most young people felt they had positive relations with the police in their area. 34% felt their relations were 'ok most of the time', 12% 'good' and 10% 'very good'. Obviously some young people did not have positive relationships with the police. 10% said their relations went through 'bad patches', 17% felt relations were 'bad most of the time' and 14% said relations with the police were 'very bad'.

Some young people made additional comments on their questionnaire about the police, as they felt they were often picked on; 'the main problems are that the police are always annoying you and telling you to get away for nothing'; 'the police walking around like Robocops harassing people they perceive as un-educated or 'vulnerable''.

Other comments about police relations were linked to the reasons young people gave for being moved on by the police. Some young people felt the primary reason they were moved on when they were on the streets was 'the police just trying to annoy us'; and 'there is never a reason'.

In total, 69% of the young people said they had been moved on by the police at some time. Of these young people, 51% felt the main reason was that they were being picked on by police. 60% of the young people who had been moved on felt it was because they were hanging around with other young people, and 64% felt they were moved on for no reason.

Young people admitted they were sometimes moved on because of bad behaviour: 63% because they were making a noise, 30% for fighting, 23% for vandalism, 47% for drinking 30% for being cheeky to the police. But 37% also said they had been moved on just for playing football.

82% of young people said they were moved on because of adults' complaints. One young person commented that she had been moved on for 'sitting in a graveyard' and some people said they were moved on for smoking.

Contact with the police had involved getting into more serious trouble for 59% of the young people in our survey. These young people had 37 arrests (without action), 77 cautions between them, and 51 had been charged with various offences.

The most common offence resulting in arrests and cautions was Breach of the Peace, with Loitering the second most common. Drunk and disorderly and Damage to Property were the third and fourth most common offences resulting in arrests and cautions. Some comments were made such as 'most people are charged for loitering as there is nowhere to go' and 'they have nowhere to go and get moved on from where they settle. Teenagers are criticised for underage drinking when there is really nothing better to do'.

The most common offence resulting in charges was Assault (involving thirteen young people).
It seems that many young people are getting into trouble with the police over trivial matters.

While young people's crimes are always being hyped in the press, being a victim of crime is less likely to grab the headlines. 39% of the young people had been a victim of crime, the most common being assault. A small number of young people reported being the victim of very serious crimes such as kidnapping, attempted murder and racial attack.

The crimes against young people were committed by adults unknown to them in a third of the cases and by other young people unknown to them in 43% of the cases. 25% of the young people had been victims of crimes by adults they knew, and 30% by young people they knew.

These crimes against young people often go unreported. The incidences may have led to comments such as 'there is not enough police' and 'we aren't taken seriously by the police' (made by one young person who reported being a victim of a racial attack).

Some of the comments made about the police were connected to young people's comments about adults in their area, giving the impression that the police listened more readily to adults making complaints than to young people.

In some areas the community police put a lot of effort into young people, like playschemes and holidays. They get to know young people so they know we're not going to cause trouble and they stop moving us on. Young people and the police have to get together and youth workers have helped that where we live by organising activities like climbing and things where we get to know each other.
Out Til All Hours?

Some policing schemes recommend a certain time when children and young people should be off the streets. After this time they would be taken home, or taken to a place where their parents must collect them.

As far as we know, no-one has asked young people what they think are reasonable times for young people to be going home at night. We asked two kinds of questions. The first asked about what young people think is reasonable for themselves, both during the week and at weekends. The second asked what they felt were reasonable times for people of other ages to be in at night.

From the 98 young people who responded, these are the most common times for young people to be home at nights (for some age groups there were two equally common times):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Evening Times</th>
<th>Bed Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 yrs</td>
<td>9pm and 10pm</td>
<td>10.30pm and 11pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 yrs</td>
<td>10pm</td>
<td>11pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 yrs</td>
<td>10pm</td>
<td>11pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 yrs</td>
<td>10pm</td>
<td>11pm and later than midnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 yrs</td>
<td>11pm</td>
<td>later than midnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-20 yrs</td>
<td>later than midnight during the week and at weekends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

73% of the young people expected to stay out later at the weekends than during the week, usually by half an hour or an hour.

The young people decided the times that people from different age groups should go home at night. There were a wide range of times given, often people allowed half an hour or one hour later for each age group as they got older. These were the most common times given for each age group:

- **Children under three**: many young people thought they should never be out alone or without an adult.
  - 3-5 year olds: 6 o'clock
  - 5-7 year olds: 7 o'clock
  - 8-11 year olds: 9 o'clock
  - 11-14 year olds: 10 o'clock
  - 14-16 year olds: 11 o'clock
  - 16 - 18 year olds: whenever

61% of the young people thought that 16-18 year olds should be allowed to go home at any time. Perhaps this is because at this age young people can work as adults, have their own home, or get married and have children of their own if they want to.

Tough on the Causes of Crime!

The young people who took part in our survey had a high level of contact with the police, for some resulting in arrests, cautions and charges. The majority of young people also said they were bored and had little to do with their time when they met their friends other than to hang around on the streets. We don't think it takes a genius to make a connection between the two!

We asked young people what measures or approaches they thought would be effective in tackling crime. We asked them what they thought 'would definitely reduce crime', what 'might help reduce crime', and what measures or approaches 'would definitely not reduce crime'.

There were a wide range of responses in all these answers. Here are the four most popular in each category:

**Would definitely reduce crime:**
1. Youth workers on the streets
2. Curfews
3. Police in schools
4. Police in clubs

Young people are sending a clear message that they want places to go. Youth clubs and youth groups are not set up to tackle crime, they are places where young people can spend time relaxing with friends, and also get involved in interesting activities, developing themselves and benefiting their local area.

But if they have an extra benefit of helping young people stay out of trouble, then youth groups and clubs should be getting the same amount of attention and money as other measures being used to tackle crime.

These other measures, such as curfews and police schemes do achieve things that youth clubs don't achieve, such as giving young people a bad image in the press and making relations between adults, the police and young people even worse. Do these measures help young people develop and communities improve?

While people have been spending money on expensive measures to tackle crime, youth facilities and community centres have been facing cuts and underfunding.

Young people themselves don't have much money to take up sports or hobbies, or go to the cinema or bowling. Youth facilities that we can afford and that we can have access to when we are out at night and at weekends are important.

Our survey shows that young people aged between 13 and 16 years expect to go home between 10pm and 11pm at night, yet most of those who said they went to a youth club once or twice a week, were there between 7 and 9pm.

No-one said they went to a youth club at weekends and we believe there is a big gap in youth services over weekends. Youth clubs need to be funded to open at more realistic times to meet young people's needs. This would help young people avoid lots of the petty offences they are charged with when they are on the streets. It may also help prevent young people from becoming the victims of crime, as our survey shows this is another aspect of young people's problems in their communities.
It is not surprising that over half the young people (58%) said they were involved in a youth group, since this was how we distributed our survey. But for most young people who did go to a group or club, this was only once or twice a week for a couple of hours.

The most vivid picture that comes from the whole survey is that young people are bored.

`Boredom, boredom, boredom` was one young person’s comment, and, out of the 82 people who wrote additional comments on their questionnaires, 58% expressed boredom or said that there was nowhere to go - ‘there isn’t anything for young people and young children to do’. 57% of the young people who took part in our survey said they did have some kind of hobby which they sometimes did in the evenings, but that leaves quite a number of people who have no hobbies. Only 20% of the young people said they went to any kind of sports club.

One person commented:  ‘there isn’t anything to do and some people don’t have a lot of money’.

This leaves young people spending most of their time hanging around with their mates. 47% of the young people hang around with their friends on the streets for at least five nights every week.

For a small number of people (7%), this is the only way they spend their time in the evenings.

It is obviously important for young people to spend time with their friends, but they don’t seem to have much choice about where. Young people’s comments showed they wanted more places they could go: ‘there’s nowhere to go, there should be drop-in cafes in every area of the city, in all areas’.

> In our area young people have been working hard to try and get somewhere to go at nights, to avoid hassle by the police. We confronted the police with our problems and they did agree we needed somewhere to go. They said they would donate money to help us get a youth café.

But we have spent years now trying to get together money from all sorts of places.

By the time we get somewhere we will be too old! We need facilities for young people now and we think the government should make sure there is enough money for better community facilities for young people in all areas.  

(Cherie Dow and Melissa Thomson, 16, Aberdeen, A12)

Another reason the police get on with us better where we live is maybe because there are more big families in our area. All the adults know us, our brothers and sisters and cousins, so adults have no need to be frightened or complain, they understand us more. Neighbours tend to sort problems out between each other rather than calling the police.

The situation described in the survey is quite sad because there is obviously no tolerance between adults, the young people and the police in some areas. Something needs to happen in those places to create more tolerance.

(Cheryl Cameron, 19, Edinburgh, A12)

Generally, the young people who responded to our survey were positive about their relations with adults in their communities. 27% thought their relations with adults were ‘ok most of the time’, 31% felt their relations with adults were ‘good’, and 16% described them as ‘very good’. 17% of the young people said they felt their relationships with adults went through ‘occasional bad patches’. 2% felt relations were ‘bad most of the time’ and 4% felt things were ‘very bad’.

Some of the comments made on questionnaires about what people felt were problems for them in their communities described difficult situations between adults and young people, especially with older adults: ‘sad old people that have nothing better to do than to spy on young children and call the police, just to feel good about themselves’; ‘lots of old people who think young people should be mated’.

One of the issues which caused young people to be moved on by the police were the complaints of adults (given as a reason for being moved on by 62%) - ‘there’s nowhere to go and when we do find somewhere people complain’. Some comments indicated that adults approached young people themselves to complain directly: ‘picked on by snotty faced adults who think they know everything’, ‘We don’t get enough freedom, too many adults are too strict’.

Half the young people who took part in our survey said they had been asked their views on what their needs were in their communities. This means that the other 50% have never been asked what their needs were - our survey clearly shows that young people need more youth groups and clubs, more youth cafes, and more places to go in their communities where they can meet their friends without hanging around the streets.

Would this help solve some of the problems of youth crime?

Only 30% of the young people said they had been asked for their views on how to tackle crime in their area. Our survey asked young people for their views on tackling crime, since all the police schemes and curfews have this as one of their aims. Young people are easily seen as criminals or nuisances on the streets but their understanding of what it is like to be young and how you can become a criminal just by hanging around with your friends is ignored.
Curfews won’t work. It’s just asking for bad relationships between young people and the police. If you can spend more money on having more police on the streets, why not spend that money on youth workers? All the police are there for is to give you into trouble, whereas youth workers would be there to give you support and help you sort things out. Curfews would make everyone into a criminal, not just people who are doing wrong.

(Symon Mathieson, 18, Dundee, A12)

This survey from so many young people in different areas backs up our view that curfews would be a bad thing for young people. We think it is healthy for young people to be out in their communities while they are growing up, learning about life for themselves instead of watching it on the telly. If people are made to stay at home we think there is a danger people’s relationships with their parents will be worse and could lead to an increase in domestic violence.

We recommend that government ministers and local authorities think about investing in youth work, not curfews. Invest in making our lives better, don’t throw away money on shutting young people’s lives behind closed doors.

(Emma Kyles, 18, Edinburgh, A12)