

Draft Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland

Making it R Wrld 2

Findings from the consultation exercise with parent focus groups

**Submitted to the Children and Young Peoples Unit
in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
By the Parenting Forum NI**

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Context and Rationale

The Government is committed to bringing forward a 10 year Strategy for Children and Young people, which will among other things find ways of ensuring that children and young people's rights and need are co-ordinated, monitored and promoted within Government. The Children and Young People's Unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister have been working on their Draft Strategy for Children and young people in Northern Ireland for some time already. The strategy is nearly finished but before it is published the draft strategy entitled 'Making it r wrld 2' is now offered for discussions.

The strategy will outline the key issues for all children and young people who live in Northern Ireland with actions set out for how Government intends to address these issues.

In this context the Parenting Forum NI was approached to carry out a consultation exercise with parents. Consultation with parents is an integral part of the work of the Parenting Forum NI and, as such, the organisation has developed effective methodology to carry out such consultations. To facilitate the consultation process a short programme was designed lasting approximately two hours for use with a number of parent focus groups throughout Northern Ireland.

The programme had three elements, the first two exercises focused on the five identified areas for Action. The final exercise provided parents with the important opportunity to inform policy makers how best their view could be heard during the lifespan of the Children's Strategy to ensure that the strategy will deliver real outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The Consultation Process

In January 2005 the Parenting Forum NI commenced the task of carrying out a consultation exercise with parents on behalf of the Children and Young People's Unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. The Parenting Forum has considerable experience in carrying out such exercises: it has contact with a network of parents and parent support groups throughout Northern Ireland on a daily basis and is well placed to carry out real and meaningful consultations with parents within a tight time frame-work. The consultation method chosen was focus groups.

The Parenting Forum NI used their own internal facilitators for the majority of the focus groups. External facilitators were members of the Parenting Forum NI and all were experienced in facilitating focus groups. Consultation with parents requires highly skilled and experienced facilitators who are capable of working sensitively with diverse groups and facilitators were chosen accordingly. The majority of focus groups were well attended and parents clearly valued the opportunity to be consulted on the proposals offered for discussions on the Children's Strategy. In addition parents as key stakeholders of the strategy indicated how they would like their views and voices to be heard.

Consultation Methodology

A consultation pack was designed to ensure a uniform approach across all the focus groups in collecting and collating the views of parents.

The pack also included information for parents on the purpose of the draft children's strategy consultations and how the information gathered from the focus groups will help to shape the final child-centred published strategy. User-friendly materials were designed in order to present to parents the five identified action areas with additional cross-cutting actions contained in the strategy with their accompanying monitoring methods and the final exercise provided parents with the opportunity to indicate how best their views can be voiced throughout the life-span of the strategy. Focus groups were chosen as the data gathering method because they brought parents together in a way that allowed them to share their views and identify issues both of individual and common concern. They also made effective use of the resources available. Existing support groups/networks were approached with a view to becoming involved. The Parenting Forum NI was aware at the outset of the need to ensure that a diverse group of parents was consulted and therefore parents were consulted from differing socio-economic backgrounds and also from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Twelve focus groups were set up, the consultation with the Chinese community arranged through NICEM was not able to proceed due to the time constraints of the group preparing for and celebrating the Chinese New Year. We were able to consult with the Derry traveller group and parents of different ethnic origin were participants in the general focus groups.

In addition the Killyclogher Parent and Toddler Group, Omagh consultation did commence but due to the impractical aspects of the venue, which only became apparent when conducting the consultation with parents; our facilitator had to make the rare decision not to complete the exercises.

Quantitative information was collected from the participating focus group parents. Eighty-one parents were consulted and these parents cared for a total of two hundred and twelve children. Focus groups were held at times that would most suits the parents and transport and childcare costs were met to ensure accessibility.

The groups, which proceeded, were located as follows:

Men's Action Project, Derry
Derry Traveller's Group
PAPA, Newry Parent Support Group, Warrenpoint
Young Person's Project Parent Support Group, Craigavon
Euston Street Primary School Support Group, Belfast
Antiville Primary School Parent Support Group, Larne
Holy Family Primary School, Belfast
Women's Aid, Cookstown
Combined Parent Support Groups, Derry
Dalriada Rural SureStart, Bushmills

Each facilitator compiled a report based on the 3 exercises carried out. The responses were analysed by the Parenting Forum NI and they are responsible for writing this report, which presents the views of parents both quantitatively and qualitatively. Key issues are identified in the recommendations.

Exercise 1

This exercise covers four areas for Action

(Presented in full in Chapter 6 of Making it r world 2)

In small groups parents completed a worksheet covering the areas entitled 'Poverty, Protection, Participation, Rights and Equality'

Each Area outlined specific Actions with their accompanying monitoring methods.

Key Questions were addressed on each Action Area presented. Collated below is the overall responses provided by parents from all the participating focus groups. The responses are divided into two sub-headings: Direct Action and General Statement

Poverty

Key Questions with identified Action

Question *How can we best understand the difficulties of those experiencing poverty?*

Action *Simplifying and raising awareness of how families with low income can get financial support.*

Direct Action

- The needs and expectations of families are different and therefore they need to be looked at on an individual basis with more consideration for personal circumstances.
- Families need to know what support there is available - a) by addressing misinformation and lack of knowledge around what is provided for all families and b) easy availability.
- Media campaigns on TV, radio and in the press could highlight the problems suffered by those experiencing poverty and could help those experiencing poverty find services, support and advice about help they require or are entitled to.
- Build up relationships with families in the community. Provide home visits by Social Services to help assess needs (even in working families)
- A scheme with financial support to low income families should be higher priority
- Families have difficulty financially in September when providing shoes, uniform, school bags for their children - could financial support be accessed through the child's school?
- CSA needs to be rectified - too difficult for lone parents to receive money from 'absent' parent. Simplify the process and become more efficient to ensure earlier financial commitment
- Understanding that parents circumstances directly affect children ie not qualifying for housing, social welfare benefits, new introduction of water bills - where will this extra money come from when parents are on social welfare?
- Provide better information from DHSSPS, families aren't aware of the benefits they are entitled to.
- Raising awareness and review subsequent uptake of financial support for families provided if and when as promised.
- Politicians should pass legislation to ban adverts, which appear to offer quick, reassuring financial solutions to debt.
- Advertising for finance on TV during daytime appears to target people who are struggling financially. Parents request that these adverts should not be shown at all on children's channels because it can cause a misunderstanding between what children perceive to be available financially and what is the reality for their families

General Statement

- Poverty affects all aspects of life - health, quality of life, etc.
- Poverty today is harder to identify, it is not like poverty in the 60's and 70's.
- It is impossible to reach everyone because people can be self-centred and there is an embarrassment factor in acknowledging financial difficulties
- Benefit fraud - some parents don't use the money for the children's needs
- Government should keep taxpayers money for our deprived children instead of giving to overseas charities.
- The government should not keep taxing us as this vast fortune could be put to better use (i.e. us parents/families).
- Temptation of credit facilities, difficult to define poverty - on whole terms, to what degree, etc - recognising poverty trap.
- It is easier to identify poverty if we have experienced it ourselves, watching programmes on TV, and when it is itemised on soaps raises the profile of poverty
- I live in a community where there appears to be a small level of poverty ie social security, free school dinners and basic housing.
- Be sure not to discriminate against poverty.

Question *Will this Action help people already experiencing poverty?*

Direct Action

- Provide more drop-in centres and clear sign posting to available services i.e. Citizen Advice Centre, Resource Centre
- Set up telephone service for parents
- Need to 'educate and support' people to be less services dependant.
- Provide training on managing your money
- Simplify benefit system and how to access information - one stop homelessness v bureaucracy
- Could the financial help be provided in a more subtle way?

General Statement

- This action will not be enough until the government see sense and address real issues of families on low income.
- Hopefully - if the governing agencies would understand how far-reaching poverty becomes in that it does touch all aspects of parents' lives and therefore their children's.

Question *How can we best understand the difficulties of those experiencing poverty?*

Action *Addressing the barriers to services particularly in relation to health, social services and education e.g. NHS waiting lists, price of school uniforms, price of school trips.*

Direct Action

- More printed information - to libraries, health visitors, schools, doctors, Hospitals, D.S.S. Internet.
- By listening to people and by understanding the needs of people in different situations.
- Poor choice in school for the meals that children want. Provide survey to find out what they want if there is not alternative/reimburse with cash/pass for local take away.

- Swipe cards for canteen - parents should be able to pay in total or top-up a swipe card to enable all children to appear equal with no identification on the card of pupils receiving free school dinners

General Statement

- Poverty causes friction between parents and older children ie "I want" vs. "I can't afford"

Question *Will this Action help people already experiencing poverty?*

Direct Action

- Doctor's worry about their budgets but the health of their patients should be their concern not affordability of drugs.

General Statement

- Everything is a waiting list now even getting to see your GP.
- Parents of a special needs child find it very difficult to find out what they are entitled to and how to access the information and entitlements.

Question *Will this Action help people already experiencing poverty?*

Action *Assessing the quality of accommodation, including owner-occupied, social housing, traveller sites and specifically targeting the needs of homeless young people*

Direct Action

- Once housed and settled people have a better chance of improving their own lives, more transit sites are required
- Not enough accommodation for young people.
- Easier way to get on housing, better allocation by individual case assessment than a points system.
- Ability to apply for housing in more than one area.
- Housing - declared homeless only to get free accommodation.
- Assess the quality and quantity of housing provision and local environment
- Housing Executive remit to be more open and available.

General Statement

- 'I would not like to see more sites for travellers because travellers bring crime into the area'.

Protection

Key Questions with identified Action

Questions *Will these Action plans lead to the protection of all young people? How else might children need to be protected?*

Action *Development of a health and safety strategy/good practice guidelines for work experience and work*

Direct Action

- Yes, if health and safety is monitored by the Health and Safety Executive.
- Health and safety of children, priority for everyone - parents, schools, media, training/work = information.
- Parents should be aware of how children need to be protected properly
- Training in child protection for all people involved with children, child protection issues should be more highlighted by schools, government.

General Statement

- A lot of children don't work and those who do should be responsible for protecting themselves in the workplace?

Action *Identifying what is currently the law and policy on work for school-age children. Developing standards around training and support and levels of pay for young people*

Direct Action

- There should be more jobs after training and the government should make funding available and this would cut down on poverty.

General Statement

- 16 - National Insurance Number to work, but under 16 aren't protected by law e.g. restaurants, kitchen work, paper rounds, etc. Poor pay and conditions - no one monitors in the same way. No insurance if anything happens.
- No, because children and young people do not get wages/expenses for what they do.
- Some employers have young people working casual hours or in part time work and there is no record of their employment or conditions of employment or pay e.g. paper rounds

Action *Evaluation of extent and impact of domestic violence on children and young people*

Direct Action

- Parents need information to support and protect children in abuse cases
- What about children with disabilities?
- There should be more emphasis on the domestic violence on young people - it should not be tolerated!!!
- When children require counselling - what is available and where? Provide more accessible therapy on a one-to-one
- Evaluating domestic violence - domestic violence is not well promoted in the media.
- Children should be removed from the household were domestic violence is being done.
- More support for families in vulnerable situations to reduce the possibility of abuse - e.g. Well advertised parent support groups
- Children need to be protected by media advertising and information provided by the community for parents.
- Better support and training for parents.
- Early intervention - prevention rather than cure.
- Children who cannot speak are not being protected.
- Children with special needs are more vulnerable and therefore need greater protection.
- A child age 16-18 years who is at risk from domestic violence should be allowed to apply for their own accommodation.
- Domestic violence - train social workers to understand what they are dealing with ie alcoholism, physical abuse and how children are affected.

- Inform victims of domestic violence about Women's Aid/helpline.
- Please send a female doctor when medical assistance required.
- Stronger presence of police in the community.
- Provide a safe area for children i.e. child-line on a local basis with a drop in centre
- Increase support for agencies already working in this area
- A holistic approach including voluntary agencies needs to be encouraged.

General Statement

- Why is only domestic violence identified? What about bullying, sexual abuse and emotional abuse?
- What about protection for special needs children in care?
- Paedophiles should get the death penalty not be in the community with kids.
- Domestic violence - some children suffer in silence and you would never know - never going to be an accurate evaluation.
- Support mechanisms in Women's Aid - no strategies in place!
- More people will be needed to implement these actions

Action *Developing guidelines for the media on advertising aimed at children and young people*

Direct Action

- A better guideline on advertising for junk food and Alco pops.
- Monitor ads that are on between children's programmes - trendy clothes, unhealthy drinks and chocolate
- Protect children with standards as to what is shown on TV.
- Look again at the watershed.
- How can parents find out and know what is law/policy about such issues as the media, internet, advertising.

General Statement

- Boundaries are continuing to be blurred

Action *Improving the safety of children and young people living on farms*

Direct Action

- Safety on farms should be dealt with by the farmers or farmers union and paid for by them.
- A substantial risk assessment for children on farms needs to be carried out with regards to what accidents can happen. Put in place restrictions before they happen e.g. gates falling off hinges onto child - no excuse, pure neglect.

Participation

Key Questions with identified Action

Questions *Will these Actions lead to genuine participation for young people? Do you think these Actions will lead to the view of young people being taken seriously at an early stage?*

Action *Involvement of children and young people in making decisions across a range of areas that affect them such as planning, transport, environment, health, social care and education*

Direct Action

- What happens if children are too young - should parents be able to have a say?
- Would lead to a genuine participation, but children with disabilities would need an advocate.
- More training need for professionals in listening to young children and taking their views seriously
- Ensure enough young people are targeted.
- If taken seriously and their views taken on board then they can make a serious contribution.

General Statement

- Yes, because it gets children involved, and will be made more aware of different organisations and what they do.
- This should all be age appropriate - P1, 2, 3 children should be free to play they have enough on their plates and shouldn't have to worry.

Key Questions with identified Action

Questions *Will these Actions lead to genuine participation for young people? Do you think these Actions will lead to the views of young people being taken seriously at an early stage?*

Action *All young people able to easily access information they need using the internet, and mobile phones etc*

Direct Action

- It's not enough to offer them - need support to help them participate.
- The small print information e.g. mobile phones, etc needs to be 'large print'.
- Mobile phones, the use of inter-net is fine within reason - needs to be protected.
- Making use of existing provisions is a priority.
- Help parents to do this, to find ways of encouraging and talking to their children and to ensure their protection.
- Good to have laws for children's issues provided by government and particularly need for inter-net monitoring.
- Ease of accessibility through inter-net, will allow young people to participate.

Key Question with identified Action

Questions *Will these Actions lead to genuine participation for young people? Do you think these Actions will lead to the views of young people being taken seriously at an early stage? Do you think young people will want to be involved in writing young people friendly information leaflets?*

Action *Involving young people in the designing and distribution of understandable, user-friendly information for use by other young people.*

Direct Action

- Definitely as they could relate to the target audience
- Yes - "no problem" and they have plenty to add "in their way".
- They will feel more "involved" in what happens in their own lives and be more "responsible".
- Information for children could be distributed through school
- Children should be involved in writing young people friendly policies, however they may not write leaflets themselves
- Involve teenagers in giving talks to other young people, because they are more likely to listen to peers than adults

General Statement

- Information is part of learning.
- Adults need to treat kids as equals and human beings and not just kids. Each are different
- Are kids going to be allowed to have their own opinion and be able to put on what they want to say?
- Other kids would be more interested in another other child's views.
- Only a small minority will want to put the effort in to get the results - more girls than boys will probably want to do the work needed to get results.

Key Question with identified Action

Questions *Will these Actions lead to genuine participation for young people? Do you think these Actions will lead to the views of young people being taken seriously at an early stage?*

Action *Checking out what types of ways of participating (having a say) already exist, e.g. schools councils, identifying gaps and developing new structures.*

Direct Action

- There would need to be skilled people to run any session with young people so that views could be aired and listened to.

- The problem is that they are not listening to the kids - children's forums at school may make

them feel good to try to educate the parents as well, as a lot of prejudice to make children feel involved and responsible. Ensure participation properly co-ordinated through a recognised body, with the right actions/structures put into place

- Children with Special Educational Needs have choices and views but often passed over, need to have advocate or specially trained people.
- How inclusive is the process for involving all young people - will all schools become involved and special educational establishments, etc?
- Children often given questionnaires at school but no feedback is received as to what is being done with the information gathered.

General Statement

- Do teachers pick chosen few to give their views?
- The value of the young person's opinion depends on who is listening to it.
- Times when children aren't listened to, frustrating for child, unable to give their opinion.
- The value of a child's opinion depends on the maturity of the child.
- Will children take responsibility for their actions?
- Yes, as they will learn more by being involved, but will they be taken seriously?
- Good for them to be aware of different organisations and what they do
- Older people will also look upon them "more seriously"

Rights & Equality

Key Question with identified Action

Questions *Do you think these Actions are enough for us to see changes in prejudices and inequalities? Can you think of anything else that might help?*

Action *Making sure that the rights and needs of children and young people are reflected in the carrying out of a Racial Equality Strategy.*

Direct Action

- "Campaigns to raise awareness" first of all to inform public.
- Slow, but it is happening - education is the key - what is going on in the adult work place - is there enough raising awareness/induction?
- PSNI need to give more support to people who suffer racial abuse.
- Education is a key requirement, starting in pre-school
- Monitoring could be difficult especially if people do not volunteer information, how can government help?
- It would do more good to try to educate the parents as well, as a lot of prejudice comes from the older generations.
- If implemented and funded all members of community will be able to access it.
- We could do with a better form of information system - a couple of leaflets and word of mouth is just not good enough.
- Provide education for children and parents re: tolerance.
- More integrated youth groups (to include people of other denominations, ethnic backgrounds, etc)
- TV is a great opportunity to promote equality, as is sport.
- Introduce more integrated housing estates and schools!
- There needs to be more cross community/cross cultural identity programmes allowing children and young people to break down the barriers of racism, sectarianism etc

General Statement

- More emphasis needs to be placed on religious equality.
- A lack of respect for any reason leads to tolerance of other levels of racism/bigotry.
- Philippine nurses and other ethnic minorities receive racial discrimination in the community, it is important that we address this racial bias.
- Inequality relates to poverty, colour, creed, you will not completely stamp out racialism
- Get the peace process off its laurels. How can people be expected to get along when the government/politicians can't?
- Young people will benefit from changes in attitudes from older people - towards them
- Parents need to take responsibility for introducing and monitoring

Key Question with identified Action

Questions *Do you think these Actions are enough for us to see changes in prejudices and inequalities? Can you think of anything else that might help?*

Action *Formal and informal education will fully reflect and promote rights in relation to equality and diversity*

Direct Action

- Schools need to adhere to anti-bullying policies, implement citizenship studies - agree with a better-informed public.
- Awareness raising among whole school, staff including bus drivers, dinner ladies, caretaker, etc.
- Regular review system to encourage cross fertilisation of ideas.
- Idea of citizenship "might be a good idea" to inform young people around equality issues.
- "Young people's helpline accessible in schools?"

Key Question with identified Action

Questions *Do you think these Actions are enough for us to see changes in prejudices and inequalities? Can you think of anything else that might help?*

Action *Creating an awareness-raising campaign to alert children and young people to their rights and how to deal with any breaches of them: and to make adults aware of: 1. The value of children and young people and their contribution, 2. The diversity of children and young people; and 3. The rights of children and young people.*

Direct Action

- We need to know more about the Commissioner for Children.
- Children and parents need to be aware of the rights they have.
- Young people need more information
- Parents need to be able to know children's rights/parents need rights too.
- Diversity covers a multitude but we feel autism and aspersers syndrome need to be spelt out in terms of them needing understanding of their unique differences (ASD being such a hidden disability).
- Government agencies should listen more to the child/parent/carer/advocate (when the child is too young to voice their own opinion) in regards to visitation with potentially abusive/harmful family members (parents, grandparents).
- More powers for the Commissioner for Children ie being able to take on individual cases re: rights and equality.
- Listen to the advocate of the child especially when child is young and can't voice their needs.
- Re-awareness - Children's Commissioner is addressing this.

General Statement

- Children have too many rights and this is used as a threat to parents tying the parent's hands and therefore handing all the responsibility to the children.
- We are committed to children's rights but this does need to be balanced with responsibility and respect.
- Approachable adults make a young person more comfortable and it makes it easier to talk to someone when you are in trouble
- Politicians need to set an example
- Children don't know who to go to with everyday issues. As an adult you feel you're more likely to go for help even when help comes it's too long in coming.
- Informing parents of their rights and giving them more rights or by 2015 children will rule the parents.

Exercise 2

This exercise continues with the same approach as Exercise 1 and covers the area for Action entitled Provision. Followed by a section called Cross-Cutting, which presents themes which run throughout all five identified Action Areas in the Children's Strategy.

Each Area outlined specific Actions with their accompanying monitoring methods.

Key Questions were addressed on each Action Area presented. Collated below is the overall responses provided by parents from all the participating focus groups. The responses are divided into two sub-headings: Direct Action and General Statement

Provision - Built and Natural Environment

Questions *How important to you is the environment you live in? Will these actions help?*

Action *Putting into action the Northern Ireland Road Safety strategy, further developing road safety education and targeting groups with additional needs.*

Direct Action

- ❖ Police need to monitor traffic/children need to have access to roads.
- ❖ Safety training from early age will need to have local programmes to meet local needs.
- ❖ Streets have to be clean, safe, well lit with speed ramps.
- ❖ Up to community and law enforcement to work in tandem to ensure safe environment for everyone.
- ❖ Road safety - get the message across to teenagers - wear seat belts at all times
- ❖ It is very important to get police involved in local community and general community life not just when problems happen.

General Statement

- ❖ Very important actions if put in place in NI need to guarantee they will happen.
- ❖ Extremely important.

Action *Promoting environmental education within the school system and youth focused programmes.*

Direct Action

- ❖ Agencies and statutory bodies need to work together.
- ❖ Target young people who need support to avoid vandalism, etc.
- ❖ Provision of locally based youth clubs which could be used as a vehicle for education - provision of funding to integrate kids with special needs into mainstream youth activities.
- ❖ When promoting environmental education, educate more about recycling/rubbish disposal to preserve the environment. Make these facilities easier to access.
- ❖ Improve councils lifting of waste/recycling and provision of rural youth groups/clubs.

General Statement

- ❖ Parks and facilities are not safe, play area full of broken glass.
- ❖ Pride in your surroundings helps with pride in yourself.
- ❖ Respect for your surroundings helps with pride in yourself and others.

- ❖ Yes, the environment is important for everyone. These actions will help.

Action *Develop opportunities to improve the lives of children and young people in rural areas.*

Direct Action

- ❖ Need facilities in local areas/stronger community involvement.
- ❖ Not just rural areas - some large urban areas do not have affordable, available youth groups and of the available youth clubs, they do not provide the activities that the kids want.
- ❖ Very important to reflect all social, cultural and health issues. How the actions help has to be monitored if they are genuine individual actions.
- ❖ Environment very important. If carried out these actions will help but better funding is needed for rural areas, as there are very few facilities for children.

General Statement

- ❖ Yes, certainly if monitored and carried out.
- ❖ Monitor anti-social behaviour.

Provision - Family and Community Support

Questions *Do you think young people like to access information using the web? How else do young people like to get information?*

Action *Making families more aware of existing family support provision.*

Direct Action

- ❖ Childline, etc going into all schools.
- ❖ Important to take information to families.
- ❖ Require more clarity in how to access the current.
- ❖ Other ideas for young people to get information -
 1. If a few youths were chosen to have information and those youths (dependant on age) brought the info to their classmates.
 2. TV
 3. Comics
 4. Magazines
 5. Games

General Statement

- ❖ Use of less agencies or better co-ordination between agencies.

Action *Provision of quality, affordable and accessible childcare, afterschool and playcare.*

Direct Action

- ❖ Single parents would benefit from two afternoons respite care per week for their young children.
- ❖ It all comes down to funding, and how much parents will have to pay.
- ❖ Childcare provision and working tax credits only allows for child up to the age of 10/11. What about older child with specific needs who at 11 can't be left unsupervised?
- ❖ With reference to Action "Making families aware of existing family support provision"

1. More study needs to be done into childcare. Why not have a provision whereby the parent/carer can choose a family member they know and trust to mind their children and get funding subsidies for these family members.
2. Employers need to become more 'family-friendly' offering crèche for employees' children.
3. Make it financially worthwhile for parents to return to work i.e. better pay, benefits, pensions, etc rather than making social welfare the better option financially (single parents are better off financially remaining on social welfare than returning to work).
4. Family-friendly policies from employers make it easier to keep pensions, etc. when parents are able to return to work part-time.
5. Sure Starts to cover all areas.

General Statement

- ❖ Why do single parents receiving benefits have to seek part-time work during the period their child is at pre-school?
- ❖ In East Belfast it is possible to live between the boundaries of two Sure Starts. Lost in the middle - funding stops at Ravenhill Avenue and Bellsbridge, Castlereagh. It really can depend what side of the road you're on.
- ❖ What about childcare provision if school is closed or child is suspended and parent is working?

Provision – Research and Information

Questions *Do you think young people like to access information using the web? How else do young people like to get information?*

Action *A website/web portal for making research and information available.*

Direct Action

- ❖ Parents need information, training and support to help children and young people - this needs to come from groups not just website.
- ❖ Not all young people have access to computers need somewhere for parents and young people to ring confidentially for information.
- ❖ Try text alerts for kids to get information.
- ❖ Use of web could be a draw back - children will stop writing, adding up. Be careful not to introduce text talk.
- ❖ From peers, friends and role models in society, also from TV and radio media and music.
- ❖ The net and books are very good to put the point around. Friends, family, TV and music.
- ❖ No, I don't think all information should come from the web - through schools, community halls, and churches.

General Statement

- ❖ Yes, to web talking to friends.
- ❖ Yes, to information using web.
- ❖ No, kids should not get all information from the web but from school community groups.
- ❖ Yes, if the web is available and monitored. Only for a certain age group. Young people like to get information in many ways - face to face, media (music and TV), teachers, mentors and support workers.
- ❖ Yes, but not all have access.
- ❖ No, children should not always get information on the web maybe schools or phone lines.

Provision – Achievement, Learning and Enjoyment

Question *How will actions like these improve the lives of children and young people?*

Action *Improving the quality of school buildings etc., e.g. mobile classroom provision, changing facilities, school toilets.*

Direct Action

- ❖ Money needs to be better targeted through this provision.
- ❖ Classroom assistants are important, as is more funding for school buildings.
- ❖ More money to fund classroom assistants – let's go back to basics rather than providing high-tech and fancy new books.

General Statement

- ❖ Buildings are important but those within must have an understanding of the needs of the individual.
- ❖ Will provide opportunities for children and young people and enrich their school life.
- ❖ More space, more activities, more hygiene, more relaxation, happier children, more easy to learn.
- ❖ Better environment will let children be happier and ready to learn and more comfortable to participate and take care and pride in their environment – children need to play and learn through play.
- ❖ Achievement, learning and enjoyment – answer: good conditions of equipment, improving health, learning environment – multi-agency good idea – but not take over the role of the parent!

Action *Looking into the extent to which schools could be resourced to become multi-agency centres with out-of-hours usage.*

Direct Action

- ❖ More funding needed for schools to improve children's education to help children want to go to school.
- ❖ Afterschool care – a child needs one-to-one adult interaction, not just to be in a group care situation all day.
- ❖ This would affect childminders – why only schools providing this funded additional care?
- ❖ Children need a home-based environment.
- ❖ Help parents to buy into services of childminders.
- ❖ Proper training of all staff to deal with children with special needs
- ❖ Not enough funding/training.
- ❖ Afterschool clubs especially for children with special needs.
- ❖ More supervised afterschool clubs especially for children with special needs – extra help with homeworks, etc – and also pre-school clubs e.g. breakfast clubs for children whose parents are working.
- ❖ Perhaps parent support groups could help to supervise afterschool clubs.
- ❖ Summer schemes – somewhere for teenagers of parents who work. Safe environment, drop-in, computer classes, drama, art workshops, etc. Football, netball and other activities.
- ❖ Give schools more facilities to ensure more activities available for children.

General Statement

- ❖ We know that necessity prevails and more time at school for children is to happen. At the moment it is a choice.
- ❖ We are caught up in the cost of living and the notion that if only we had that wee bit more.
- ❖ We are becoming like America chasing the dollar.
- ❖ Younger children do not have option of which after-school provision they attend - parents would make choice. This choice will be made on affordability, availability and not necessarily quality provision
- ❖ Any of these actions will work given the school has the resources, staff and wide range of afterschool facilities.
- ❖ Make the school more relaxed and fun, with a lot more understanding.

Action *Age appropriate imaginative play/leisure facilities.*

General Statement

- ❖ Lives will improve with children having more to do/better families/free facilities/more funding needed.
- ❖ These actions will improve their lives i.e. taking children off the streets, giving them something to work toward i.e. drama club.
- ❖ These actions should improve resources for young people and children to follow their own interests and give them more satisfaction and happiness in those formative years. Broader education.

Provision - Physical, Mental & Emotional Wellbeing

Questions *Which form of Provision is most relevant to you? Is it covered by these Actions?*

Action *Developing and carrying out a programme of confidence building and assertiveness in relationships - appropriate to the age of young people.*

Direct Action

- ❖ All of these actions are important. Developing and carrying out a programme for confidence building and assertiveness would stand out.
- ❖ More information aimed at each age group or issue.
- ❖ More places to go if children and young people need support.
- ❖ More information covered for children, young people and parents.
- ❖ Centres set up for young people with the right support.
- ❖ Yes, provide a programme to help children know their own mind and equip them to be able to say no to the drug culture.
- ❖ Assertiveness and confidence building essential as part of curriculum.
- ❖ Help build self-esteem - coping mechanisms for bullying. If this were taught there would be less victims of bullying and may be fewer bullies - more respect for each other, able to stand up for themselves, accepts everyone is different.
- ❖ Confidence building programmes such as 'Transformer' are vital to kids who are caught up in domestic violence - they need counselling and support because they find it hard to tell Mum and are concerned that they might upset Mum.

- ❖ Developing and carrying out a programme of confidence building and assertiveness in relationships - appropriate to age.

General Statement

- ❖ All relevant and needed - adequately covered.
- ❖ We would agree with confidence building.
- ❖ Too many rights for kids, and kids do not take responsibility for their own actions.
- ❖ Equip young people with the tools to say "yes" or "no" when appropriate.
- ❖ First action is very important because if a child is confident and assertive in his/herself then peer pressure will not take affect and they will not follow suit.
- ❖ First action is the most important in my view - children need to feel good about themselves.
- ❖ If a child's confidence is boosted it won't get caught up in peer pressure and will stand to say no to drugs, etc.

Action Carrying out a teenage pregnancy strategy, and drugs strategy.

Direct Action

- ❖ Strategy regarding teenage pregnancy needs to be re-thought in the way it's taught.
- ❖ This pregnancy strategy should be carried out in all schools.

General Statement

- ❖ Confidence building and drugs strategy - I feel the confidence programme is very important for the emotional and social well-being of young people. Due to our up and coming drugs culture I am very scared for my son and am worried he may follow others.

Action Taking measures to tackle obesity amongst children and young people.

Direct Action

- ❖ Provide healthy snacks/dinners for children when at school.
- ❖ More variety required for P.E. in school i.e. fitness gym, kickboxing and aerobics not just the existing traditional model which is usual apparatus, gymnastics etc.
- ❖ Put gym into all school and more things like kickboxing and aerobics.
- ❖ PE classes in school should consist of aerobics, gym treadmills, exercise bikes and swimming. Not apparatus and gymnastics, etc.
- ❖ Children should be allowed to join the gym or slimming facilities when obesity is starting, not when they are 16 and possibly too obese to want to exercise.

General Statement

- ❖ Obesity - we agree.
- ❖ Third action - children need a proper diet to be able to function properly.

Cross Cutting

Question Can you think of any disadvantages to mainstreaming schools?

Action A need to decide if separate health services are needed for young people.

Direct Action

- ❖ Could school nurses be more prominent once more for provision of health checks?
- ❖ Informing of what services are available - drop-in, GP clinics for teenagers, family planning, smoking cessation, counselling for relationships, helpline advise for parents who can talk over problems - 24 hour service. Lots of problems and can't get out of hours help and advice.
- ❖ Yes, it is vital we provide separate health services for young people.

Action *Removing the barriers to children and young people with disabilities entering and remaining in mainstream schools and colleges.*

Direct Action

- ❖ Every school should have a special needs class.
- ❖ No disadvantage to mainstream schooling if class sizes are monitored.
- ❖ All people should be treated as individuals, their disabilities understood and better access to services needed.
- ❖ Disadvantages to mainstreaming schools -
 1. Lost in the system
 2. Not enough support
 3. No financial backing
- ❖ Support services - exist but are not financially supported.
- ❖ More parent workshops, autism teams (specific skilled staff).
- ❖ Recognition of value of supports like classroom assistants, extra curricular activities.
- ❖ Problems of ADHD child in mainstream school. Very slow process, can take years to get help.
- ❖ Ensure financial support in place to support children with disabilities in mainstream education.
- ❖ Disadvantages to mainstreaming - more resources and staff for schools and some parents value a particular environment for their children. Some choice necessary.
- ❖ Provide strategies to protect certain groups i.e. children with autism who are unable to read social clues and therefore are vulnerable.
- ❖ Provision of classroom assistants.
- ❖ Disadvantages of mainstreaming? - Not suitable for all - children with disabilities perhaps not catered for, bright children bored. As long as individual needs are met. Each child an individual not a statistic. Needs more discussion.

General Statement

- ❖ Educate children to understand and accept those with a disability.
- ❖ A child with SEN/disability can be disruptive in a mainstream school and this frightens young children in P1. Special Educational schools are better equipped.
- ❖ Mainstream school not able to cope with children with special needs.
- ❖ Individual needs can be "left out" and lose opportunity to meet full potential.
- ❖ Budget - disabled children would need a lot more staff. Providing the funding was there I think it's a great idea.
- ❖ Disadvantages - possibly schools may take money from one budget to cater for children with disability - a need for proper resources is important.

Action *Identifying issues for children and young people from Traveller communities who want to enter and remain in mainstream schools.*

Direct Action

- ❖ Children should be able to enrol in different schools if their lifestyle is transient

General Statement

- ❖ Traveller community should abide by rules set and conform to standards that are set.

Action *Development of an attendance and inclusion strategy for all children and young people.*

General Statement

- ❖ Not informing parents that this behaviour is typical of ADHD.
- ❖ No support from school - suspend child without finding out cause for behaviour.

Action *Developing an adoption strategy.*

- ❖ No comments made from the parents consulted on this action.

Action *Having support services for children and young people who have responsibilities as carers, including respite care, leisure opportunities, counselling (impact of the conflict).*

Direct Action

- ❖ Carers should be recognised no matter what age they happen to be. A range of addresses should be made available through schools for younger carers.
- ❖ Carers should be contacted when they are supposed to be and schools should listen to carers not just parents.

Questions *Have we left anything out? Are there any other actions you feel should be taken?*

Direct Action

- ❖ For all the issues to be implemented funding is vital.
- ❖ There should be more partnerships e.g. Women's Aid, Housing Executive, Parents Advice Centre, Citizens Advice Bureau, Drop-in Clinic, Children's Commissioner, Health Boards/Trusts.
- ❖ This must not be just empty rhetoric - it has to happen.
- ❖ Counselling is vital for children/young people. Ensure more provision so that a child's needs are met when they most require it not when a waiting list entitles them to access professional help.
- ❖ More support for natural children of foster carers.
- ❖ Local hospitals with A&E.

Exercise 3

This exercise is designed to invite parents to choose on an individual basis how they would like to be represented as key stakeholders of the strategy to ensure that their views and voices will be heard.

During the life span of the Children's Strategy it is intended that parent's views will be represented on an on going basis, using appropriate channels and structures. (Please note that due to personal commitments, or non- completion of this hand- out not all parents participated in this exercise). Below in Table 1 are three suggested methods which on an individual basis were completed by participants to select how as a parent, they wish to be represented during the monitoring process

Table 1 provides the overall responses from the participating groups

A) Parents represent themselves?	31
B) Parent's views are represented by organisations on the Children and Young People's Strategy Review Panel?	43
C) All parents are informed of what's going on through a Newsletter on an on going basis (once a year)?	52

Table 1

Feedback from parents on the above methods

A. Parents represent themselves

- Parents requested that the Parenting Forum be the agency to support them and ensure their voice is heard.
- Parents need to be consulted and their opinion heard. Parents are pushed aside in today's society and it is hard to get views across. A parents group with Parenting Forum back up could achieve this.
- Parenting Forum ideally placed to represent and work alongside families to ensure research based local sub-groups for parent's representation.
- Target parent groups - i.e. mother and toddler, after-schools, drug action groups, etc.
- Parents as advocates, everything needs to come together. Mainly with parents and children being heard first then leading to all organisation reaching out for us. Everyone needs to work together for a better life.

B. Strategy Review Panel

- There should be a parents' forum and a few of the parents on the forum be selected to go to the strategy review panel and take the information back to their forum. Parents should be able to give feedback on anything they are unhappy with and how it is dealt with. They need to be able to air their views
- Good to have a representative to continue to consult with parents on an on going bases. This representative would feed on to the panel.

C. Newsletter

- Newsletter and Forum meetings should be accessed by all sections of the community. In a simple and straightforward manner as possible.

- Parents play a vital role in the upbringing of their children and a news letter would be a good way to learn about what is happening/what government education and health services locally, regionally and nationally are planning/developing and to make comment on or respond to.
- Travellers Group can be hesitant about direct involvement or representation by themselves (i.e. parents/mothers). However, their children appear to be informed and have opinions. Mothers specifically requested the Newsletter option.
- The Parenting Forum NI - parents representing themselves - hard to get a voice. Marketing and making more people aware of Newsletter, etc., particularly in the North West.
- Danger that this will be only a talking shop with no action being taken, too big?

The paragraph below is a suggested method of consulting with parents.

Table 2 shows the results parents indicated for ensuring the voice of parents are heard.

The Parenting Forum Northern Ireland is an independent organisation, which would be well equipped to provide the required mechanism to facilitate and co-ordinate parent fora, provide parent committee training, representation and distributing and signposting information to parents.

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Parenting Forum Support	56		10

Table 2

Feedback from parents on The Parenting Forum NI as the chosen agency to represent parents during the life-span of the strategy

- PFNI would be best to organise and work with parents - trust is already there, a higher number of parents will then be able to have their say, represented by experienced personnel not government offices.
- All of the above are necessary to improve the clarity of parents' voices. Parenting Forum NI does this but needs more opportunity/funding to fulfil their potential.
- The Parenting Forum Northern Ireland has come to us for years. They have knowledge of directly working with parents and understanding their needs.
- One parent requested that more awareness and publicity about the Parenting Forum needs to happen because he didn't even know of our existence until today's meeting and he is very keen that other parents have access to our services.
- The Parenting Forum Northern Ireland should liaise with all of the PAPA branches throughout NI for an overall view from parents of children with autistic spectrum. Branch contacts would be available from PAPA central.

Conclusions

The Parenting Forum NI has developed and successfully implemented a methodology for consulting with parents on their views in relation to how best parents can be represented during the life span of the ten -year strategy. Also offered for discussion were the five areas for action, with cross-cutting themes taken from chapter six of the draft strategy entitled 'Make it r wrld to'.

The organisation is in a unique position to carry out such consultations because of its links with a huge network of parents and parent support groups throughout Northern Ireland. From the ten focus groups spread across Northern Ireland who participated eighty-one parents were consulted and these parents cared for a total of two hundred and twelve children. The required mix of parents was met by selecting groups situated in areas of high deprivation e.g. Sure Start groups, ethnic minority groups, groups parenting children with special needs and groups both in rural and urban locations.

The consultation has provided a range of useful information. The view of parents in areas of deprivation did not seem to differ from those in less deprived areas.

Chapter seven paragraph 7.5 is entitled 'The role of young people and parents' the final sentence states '.....We believe that the voices of parents are very important and we welcome views on how best to hear those voices'

In Exercise 3 (see Table 2) of the report, participating parents have chosen as a majority overall decision that the Parenting Forum NI should be the agency to support them and ensure that their voice is heard.

The Larne focus group stated, "The group recognised some of the actions which reflected their views at the first Children's Strategy consultation and hoped that their views would continue to be heard" MAP focus group informs, "representation by a body such as the Parenting Forum was felt to be a very good way to ensure that parents voices are heard and to keep parents informed"

The Parenting Forum NI facilitators have positive inter-personal skills, experience and knowledge, and are able to work in a sensitive manner with focus groups. From this and previous consultations we know that parents appreciate being consulted, and being part of the process which enables them to have the important opportunity to inform policy makers of their views. Parents are aware of time-scales with financial implications in changing systems and would request that regardless what is happening with a strategy or not occurring to please keep them informed.

The Parenting Forum NI has a unique relationship with parents, which enables parents to feel supported when sharing their views due to the non-judgmental partnership we enter into, which ensures that parents don't feel judged or criticised. This provides a platform for sharing and expressing meaningful views and experiences in an open and trusting manner, without the apparent constraints, which can occur when parents talk to health visitors, social workers and government officials.

In conclusion the Parenting Forum Northern Ireland is an independent organisation, which would be well equipped to provide the required mechanism to facilitate and co-ordinate parent fora, provide parent committee training, representation and distributing and signposting information to parents.

