

Children and Young People

What are your issues/needs in relation to children and young people?

- **Issue:** Young children cannot go out to play in certain areas without being exposed to drugs and drug dealers. **Need:** For the police to adopt a zero tolerance to drugs and drug-dealing to enable young children to play in a drug free environment.
- **Issue:** Children and youth in the area have easy access to drugs in terms of location and their low cost. **Need:** Adequate measures need to be put in place to make access to drugs more difficult, for example more rigorous policing and higher sentences to discourage children and youth from getting involved in the first place and to keep more dealers off the streets.
- **Issue:** Some of the children and young people are being forced into drug running; they are enticed with free drugs, become addicted and then are made to pay off their debts by becoming runners for the dealers. When they try to escape from this cycle they are harassed by the dealers to the extent that a number of the children and youths in the area have taken their own lives because of it. **Need:** For support services to be available for children and youth in this situation to enable them to break free this and for stronger action to be taken against the perpetrators.
- **Issue:** School is no longer a safe haven for children and young people, with drug-dealing taking place both inside and outside of the schools (i.e. at the school gates). **Need:** Parents, teachers and the education authorities need to be proactive in taking a zero tolerance approach to drugs in school; implementing and enforcing strong anti-drug measures.
- **Issue:** Drugs are being openly taken and dealt in public buildings, for example the local swimming pool. **Need:** For public authorities to also adopt a zero tolerance approach and monitor this kind of behaviour within its premises.
- **Issue:** Drugs education within school lacks the necessary depth and impact. Quite often it is provided at too late a stage, i.e. after the children have already been exposed to drugs. **Need:** To have effective drugs education provided to children and youth at an age where it will have maximum impact.
- **Issue:** Parents do not know enough about drugs and their effects for them to educate their children. Similarly, they don't know tell tale signs of drug-taking in their children. **Need:** For more education on drugs to be widely available to parents to enable them to warn their children, or help their children if they are already involved in drugs.
- **Issue:** The children of addicts are not getting the level support they need to help them deal with their situation or to enable them to create a life free from drugs, they are left to follow in their parent's footsteps. **Need:** For strong and effective support services to be made available to the children of addicts.

• **Issue:** Not enough measures are being taken to protect young people from having their drinks spiked when they are out. Drug testing straws are available at a price but they are not widely enough publicised and should be free. **Need:** For the importance of protecting young people when they are out to be recognised and acted upon. One way of doing this would be to provide the drug testing straws to be available at all bars for free, or at least government subsidised.

• **Issue:** Involvement in drugs can, and often does, lead children and young people into other crime, for example, stealing to support their habits. **Need:** For the importance of keeping children and young people away from drugs to be recognised in its wider sense and for anti-drug actions to address the criminality drug-using provokes.

• **Issue:** Informants used by the police are let off for other crimes in exchange for the information they provide. This means active criminals, sex offenders and paedophiles have been allowed to live near families and children, with no protection provided for them. **Need:** For families and children to live in a safe environment and for their safety and protection to be placed above the value of any information an informant can provide.

• **Issue:** Children and young people are being harassed by the police in area who try to extract knowledge from them on drug dealing and other criminal activity in the area. **Need:** For these children and young people to be able to play or carry out their lives without being subjected to unwarranted and unofficial police inquiries.

What is particular about the Northern Ireland context in relation to children and young people?

- During the conflict the police were so tied up in combating terrorism that anti-drugs action was given a low priority. This gave drugs got a chance to get a grip within certain communities. While police may now have changed their focus, the hold the drugs culture has is proving very difficult to lift.
- As a result, the children and young people of Lisburn, and indeed Northern Ireland, have been left in a position whereby they are exposed to a rampant culture of drugs, with a police service who are only just learning how to address “normal” policing issues.

What are the barriers to protecting the rights of children and young people?

- Schools don't want to run drug programmes because they are hesitant to admit that drugs is a problem, they don't want to be labelled as a school with a drugs problem.
- Lack of health care and support services for children and young people who are addicts themselves, and those whose parents are addicts.
- These issues are not being addressed, not because of a lack of resources but because it is being given such a low priority.

- Too many people look the other way; the education system, health system, the parents and wider community will not acknowledge the extent of the problem

What rights do you think are needed in this area?

- Right to be a child
- Right for children and young people to live, play and be educated in a safe and drug free environment.
- Right to effective education on drugs for children, young people teachers and parents.
- Right for children and young people to be protected from the illicit use of drugs.
- Right to have laws that protect our children and young people from drugs and to have those laws effectively enforced.
- Right not to be subjected to police inquiries without due cause.
- Right for children and young people to have a police service which will protect them and their rights.

Criminal Justice

What are your issues/needs in relation to criminal justice?

- **Issue:** Failure of police in the area to adequately police the drug situation: Members of Lisburn Drugswatch have repeatedly brought their concerns to Lisburn PSNI, have provided them with evidence on drug-dealers and have contacted them when drug-dealing is openly taking place. The response of the police has been unacceptable; LDW is still awaiting a response to concerns articulated to the police over two years ago; the police have not acted on the evidence provided by LDW on repeated occasions nor offered reasoning why; and the police either do not respond, or respond a couple of hours too late to calls about drug dealing taking place in the area. **Need:** For Lisburn PSNI to place drugs as a high priority, to take the concerns and tip-offs from LDW seriously, and provide an adequate response to them.
- **Issue:** As a result of the police's inaction on the drugs problem in the area and reluctance to engage with LDW in tackling the problem, members of LDW and the people of Lisburn have lost faith and trust in the police. They are in effect being denied their right to an effective police service. **Need:** For the police to meaningfully engage and work with the community, not just in tackling the drugs problem in the area, but in all aspects of policing.
- **Issue:** The police are not being held to account for their failure to adequately tackle the drugs problem. **Need:** Mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure there is accountability and transparency in all police actions; mechanisms that are accessible to the communities in which the police work.
- **Issue:** Special treatment of informers: Police use informants to gain information on crime in the area, but in return the informers are given what seems to be a blank cheque in terms of their own criminal activity. The police service actively protect these informers if they (the informers) are challenged by the community, and appear to be putting the protection and safety of the informers above that of the community. **Need:** For the use of informers to be more stringently regulated; this includes using ONLY informers who are not involved in criminal activity themselves, and only using informers in situations where it will not endanger or put at risk the community in which they operate.
- **Issue:** Some police officers, and other members of the criminal justice system, are allegedly actually involved in the drugs culture they are supposed to be working to eradicate. **Need:** Drug testing should be compulsory within PSNI, and the whole criminal justice system; they should be setting an example for children, young people and the community they are working to protect.
- **Issue:** There is no support for those members of the community who speak out against crime or drugs in the area. The homes of some members of Lisburn Drugswatch have been repeatedly targeted by drug-dealers because of the public role they have taken in standing up against drug-dealers. The police, however, have consistently failed to respond to reports of these attacks within an appropriate time frame (sometimes taking a number of days), and offer no support for their campaigns. **Need:** For members of LDW, and the wider community, to feel that the police will support them and protect them if they stand up against crime and drugs.

- **Issue:** While there are arrests on drug dealers in the area these appear to merely be token gestures to LDW and the local community; with very few of those arrested facing charges or being prosecuted. **Need:** For police to follow through with arrests on drug-dealers and proceed with a higher level of prosecutions both as an adequate form of punishment and as a deterrent.
- **Issue:** When drug-dealers *are* prosecuted the judicial system quite often fails to impose maximum sentences. This has two consequences: (a) it means that drug dealers are not kept off the streets or given an adequate punishment for their crimes, and (b) the threat of custody or a prison sentence is not serious enough to deter drug dealers from operating. **Need:** For custodial sentences for drug offences to reflect the seriousness of the crime.
- **Issue:** A lot of accidental deaths due to drugs are not recorded as drug-related deaths at autopsy. It is the effect of the drugs, e.g. liver failure, rather than the cause that is recorded. This means that it extremely difficult to get statistics on drugs related deaths, which in turn makes it difficult to convey to the general public and relevant authorities the extent of the problem. **Need:** While it may not be possible to change the way these deaths are recorded, it would be useful to record, albeit obiter, if drugs have been the cause of them. This would enable statistics to be gathered on drug-related deaths more easily.

What is particular about the Northern Ireland context in relation to criminal justice?

- The military style policing that characterised the conflict has left Northern Ireland with a police service who are not as used to dealing with “normal” policing issues, such as drugs, as police in other jurisdictions. Furthermore, not all policemen in the new PSNI have left behind the military tactics that they practiced in the RUC, such as harassment or abuse of their powers of stop and search. They have found it difficult to make the transition from policing in times of “emergency” to times of peace.
- During the conflict the police were so tied up in combating terrorism that anti-drugs action was given a low priority. This gave drugs got a chance to get a grip within certain communities. While police may now have changed their focus, the hold the drugs culture has is proving very difficult to lift.
- The use, or misuse, of informants during the conflict has affected the role informers play in Northern Ireland today; Looking the other way when informers commit crimes in exchange for the information they provide has become an integral part of police operations, it could be argued that the conflict conditioned the police to believe that this type of behaviour is ok. At the same time, innocent people are afraid to inform, or report criminal activity, to the police simply because of that history; they don’t trust them.

What are the barriers to protecting the rights in the area of criminal justice?

- Lack of accountability to communities and transparency in police actions.
- Reluctance by some members of the police and criminal justice system to let go of the past in terms of approach, attitude and practices.

What rights do you think are needed in this area?

- The right to have an accountable and transparent police service and criminal justice system.
- The right to have a police service and criminal justice system that the people of Northern Ireland can put their trust in.
- The right to have the needs and safety of the community held above the potential information an informant can provide.
- The right to free expression; to be able to speak out about crime, drugs or any other issue without fear of reprisal or attack.

Economic and social rights, including relevant equality issues

What are your issues/needs in the social and economic spheres?

Health;

- **Issue:** Doctors and medical practitioners prescribing drugs without monitoring where they are going, or ensuring that they are being taken, especially in cases where the patient is a drug addict, has a history of drug abuse, or drug convictions. The reality is that a number of such patients are selling their prescription drugs, and inadvertently feeding the drug problem in the area. **Need:** For the practice of more responsible health care; providing prescriptions based not only on symptoms but on the patients drug history and other relevant factors.
- **Issue:** When drug addicts seek help from the medical services they are treated like lepers, left to wait at the back of the queue and given a low priority. This type of treatment effectively strips these patients of their dignity because of the nature of their illness. **Need:** For more compassionate health care combined with greater awareness within medical services about how to deal with drugs addicts.
- **Issue:** Lack of access to emergency drug or rehabilitation services. While they are provided in Belfast and other areas, there is a lack of access to such services for those living in Lisburn. Furthermore, the experience has been that those services are not provided outside of normal working hours. This is in effect a denial of the right to adequate healthcare. **Need:** For adequate access to be provided to these services for everyone who needs it.

Housing;

- **Issue:** Unfair allocation of housing; the Housing Executive are giving priority to criminals, drug-dealers, and informants who have been ousted from one area and need to be re-housed, over families with children who are in great need. **Need:** For transparency and accountability in all Housing Executive decisions.
- **Issue:** Residents who live in the areas where these criminals, drug-dealers and informants are being re-housed are not warned that they are coming, or given a say in whether or not these people should be allowed to live next door to them. The effect is that residents in these areas feel unsafe in their own homes and neighbourhoods. **Need:** For local residents to be consulted about re-housing schemes in their area and have a greater say in the running of their community.

What is particular about the Northern Ireland context in relation to social and economic issues?

What are the barriers to protecting rights in the economic and social spheres?

- Lack of transparency in decision making process for allocation of housing and other economic and social issues.
- Lack of resources and funding

What rights do you think are needed in this area?

- Right to access to adequate health care, including drug rehabilitation and prevention services.
- Right to access to this health care
- Right to responsible and compassionate health care which respects the dignity of everyone.
- Right for drug addicts to have an equal voice.
- Right to adequate housing
- Right to live in a safe and drug free environment
- Right to social security, including the right to access to those benefits (in terms of knowing what you are entitled to)..

