

## Are Children's Rights Being Forgotten

CE investigates whether the proposed bill of rights for Northern Ireland will really make a difference for young people.

The phrase "children are the future" has been repeated time and again by countless adults, but how is the future being protected by today's present?

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is in the process of compiling a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland with an entire section dedicated to children. However between the draft version in 2001 and the latest draft version in 2004 this section received a major overhaul, much to the disgust and fear of many children's rights groups.

Maria Herron is the Information and Policy worker with Derry Children's Commission. She says her organisation were completely taken back by the diluted 2004 draft of the children's section.



"In the original 2001 bills of rights there were 29 clauses in the Children's section. In the 2004 version of the bill of rights the number of clause's specified in the children's section has been reduced to 11. Many key provisions such as a child's right to protection have been watered down to such an extent that they now fall short of international standards. Fundamental rights such as a child's right to play and children's right to express themselves has been completely removed."

Maria also stated that the current draft has fallen well below international human rights standards and many significant details have been left out.

"The 2004 version has removed the general principle found in article 12 in the UNCRC that every child has the right to express his or her views freely in all matters concerning him or her. By not making a clear statement of a child's right to an opinion the rights and wishes of adults will continue to take centre stage."

Brice Dixon, the Chief commissioner for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, has defended the draft and believes there is nothing wrong with the current children's section.

"I can understand their concerns but I think that the children's sector are misinterpreting what was said in the second draft but that's because what is said in the second draft actually goes further than the first draft.

"We're proposing that the UN convention on the rights of the child should be incorporated lock stock and barrel into the law of Northern Ireland, where as in the first draft we were just saying that some bits of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should be incorporated.

"It's probably our fault for not explaining it right but they are under the impression that the second draft is less protective of children's rights from the first draft, where as in fact it is our understanding that it that it is more protective."

Mr Dixon also claims that the bill of rights will prove a useful tool for young people.

"Policies will be devised to ensure that those young people get what they are entitled to, where as at the moment there is no mechanism for ensuring that happens. Under the Bill of Rights children will have a remedy, they will even be able to go to court if they feel that rights that there given by the bill of rights have not in fact been conferred upon them."

So what do the young people themselves think? Nicole Lynch and Terri McLaughlin are both 14 and live in Derry. They have looked both at the 2001 and 2004 versions of the children's section.

Terri says, "They are using all these big words and these rights are supposed to be for children, so if children want to know their rights it needs to be in a language that they understand, so it would be hard to teach children their rights if they can't understand what they are reading".

When the suggestion is made whether they would like the opportunity to rewrite the rights of adults both are diplomatic in their replies.

Terri believes, "they have reduced our rights but we shouldn't try to reduce theirs, as it should be them trying make it better, not us trying to make it worse."

Nicole does offer some solid advice for the adult population however.

"I wouldn't reduce their rights to an extent because I would try and resist the need to be spiteful. They are leaders in this world so reducing their rights is taking away what our world can be, but I would have make it compulsory for adults to have to listen to us, if that is possible, because if they did then our rights would not have been taken away so much".

### About the team

This story was produced by Rebecca Burns, 17. It was published by [Northwest Telegraph](#).

### 0 comments

- [Add a comment to this page](#)

### Related Links

#### From the rest of the web

[The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission](#)  
[Derry Children's Commission](#)

Built on [Cubik](#)  
©2012 Headliners

Registered Charity Number 1043300. Supported by the [Department for Children, Schools and Families](#)