

HEADLINERS

CE celebrates 10th birthday

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In 1995 Children's Express was born and made its first mark upon ...when I got the opportunity to write for The Observer I felt like doing back flips in my room. the world in The Guardian with a double page spread. 10 years later dozens of young people from around the UK came together to celebrate back where it all began - at The Guardian newsroom.

Members and staff flew from Northern Ireland and Newcastle to join the London bureau folk and the charity's trustees to celebrate at The Guardian newsroom exhibition space in Farringdon.

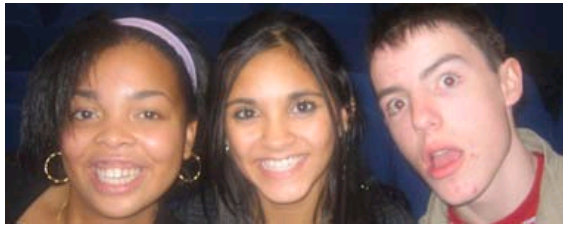
Young journalists from all the bureaux did a presentation about what they've been up to, including two young deaf people who've been working at the Newcastle bureau. We all sang happy birthday as a giant cake was rolled on. And then it was time to eat and make friends.



So what has made Children's Express so successful? Lathaniel Dyer, 15, looks at why we're still around and what this means to him...

"Why is it that we have stayed open for 10 years and published hundreds of stories? If you think about it, we're a charity and so it's really impressive that Children's Express has done so much. Not many children's charities I have been involved in have succeeded because the staff have not stayed around or the children have not been interested in coming. But the children here really enjoy what they do.

When I stepped through the door I thought that Children's Express would have been more like a Guardian-style newsroom. But when I got the opportunity to write for The Observer I felt like doing back flips in my room. I've learnt more here than I assume I would in any other journalism programme for young people. Since I joined I've learnt the basics of journalism.



Now I aspire to be a professional journalist and apply what I have learnt to help me get into other media organisations. I would first like to work at Sky and then GMTV and then ITV and then the BBC. And then that's it. Done. Life over. No more journalism for me."

Lathaniel joined CE a year ago, he's one of the many hundreds of children that have written stories and had their voices heard. It all began with 30 of them after the idea for a children's news agency was brought over from America to London. The man who set it up over there came and did a talk about it here in England and two women, Stephanie Williams and Clare Richards, decided we had to have one here too.

Clare Richards is still one of our trustees and says she saw it as a way to give young people a voice. "It was clear that given the opportunity young people could write stories on subjects that concern them from a very different perspective to that of adults. That's what I saw them doing in the states. I thought if they can do it there, they could do it here."

And she says they'll be doing it for many more years to come: "Being 10-years-old is just a beginning. We'll go on for years and years."

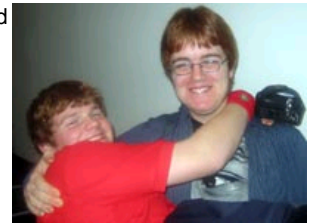
One of the first 30 members that started with Clare was Erica Rutherford, she's now 24 and remembers her first visit: "I went to the open day and really enjoyed it as there were lots of young people. It was new and exciting and a brilliant opportunity for me. I thought why not go for it."

Erica wrote an article about teenage pregnancy for The Guardian. It was one of the first of over 700 articles published to date.

Two years after the birth of the London bureau the charity raised enough money to open one in Newcastle. A few months after it opened its doors Gavin Mather, 16, joined and he's still with us.

"I've learnt loads of stuff, including sign language. That's because the bureau got involved in the Tyneside Deaf Youth Project and started teaching young people there about journalism."

"If it wasn't for Children's Express I think I would be in the house, watching telly like The Simpsons, doing absolutely nothing. I wouldn't have had all these experiences, and I wouldn't have been as intelligent."





Children's Express celebrated the turn of the new millennium with the opening of a second bureau in Belfast. Tricia McGee is the project coordinator there:

"What I like most is definitely the members and how they work together, their creativity, their imagination and their respect for each other and the organisation. They are great people to hang out with and make my days much better."

Clare says being 10 is a great achievement. "It's exciting that we are still around and going. It's fantastic. Let's hope we have many more years to celebrate."

The newest member of Children's Express is the Foyle bureau in Londonderry, Northern Ireland. Even though it's only been open for two years they've had dozens of radio packages broadcast on their local BBC station and this summer some of their members went to a community radio station in South Africa.

One of them is 17-year-old Rebecca Burns: "I can't believe CE has been going for 10 years. It's so amazing and it's great that it's lasted so long. I hope it goes on for another 20, 30, 40 and 50 years."

And this is where our story ends, but only for now. Children's Express has made it through 10 years and survived some ups and downs. Many stories have been written and thousands of children and young people all over the UK have had their voices heard in the media. Roll on the next 10 years and the next big party.

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