

Voices of Young People

The Children's Rights Referendum

Voices of Youth

Introduction

Voices of Young People is an occasional section in *Youth Studies Ireland* which features the direct contributions of young people themselves without the formal editorial or 'peer review' process that applies to other sections of the journal (although these too, of course, are open to younger readers).

In this edition we look at an event on the proposed children's rights amendment referendum co-hosted and organised by Voices of Youth, a youth-led group promoting the unmediated voice of young people in public life.

Background

The event titled *Your Right to Know Your Rights* was co-hosted by Voices of Youth, a youth-led rights campaign group and by Youth Work Ireland, who support Voices of Youth. It took place on Thursday, June 23rd 2011 in Youth Work Ireland National Office, Dublin. The event concerned the issue of the children's rights amendment scheduled to take place in 2012. It was an event attended by over 70 young people aged between 14–22 to give their opinion around the issue and the difference it will make. This was the first such major event actually involving young people themselves who would be affected by the referendum whether it is passed or not. According to Tanya Wrightson (19), one of the facilitators of the day:

Voices of Youth decided to hold this event as they believe young people have a right to know their rights and have a say on things that will affect them. It was organised by Voices of Youth, a group of young people between 14–21 year olds from all across the country. Young people organized, facilitated and were directly involved in the event which is all about young people.

The day came on foot of requests from young people to be provided with information on the constitutional amendment and a commitment from Youth Work Ireland in its Strategic Plan (2009–2013) to support young people to realise their rights. Youth Work Ireland focused on this obligation in 2011 and worked to ensure that young people were made aware of the implications of a possible referendum and that their views were heard in relation to it. Alice Kinsella (18) of Voices of Youth said that:

... about a year ago the children's referendum came up in conversation but we didn't know anything about it. It is young people who will be affected by this so we wanted to help them to know what is happening. Hopefully this event will help us to get answers for them.

Methods

During the event young people were given scenarios and outcomes based on the current constitution. There was a graffiti artist recording the findings of the event as well as there being two camera crews filming throughout the day.

Outcomes

Importantly, the day also provided a chance for organisations campaigning for a constitutional referendum to hear young people's views and concerns in relation to a possible constitutional change. Stand Up For Children and the Children's Rights Alliance were involved in the day with the purpose of hearing from young people on this issue. In addition, video footage, photos and illustrations from the day provided a youth-centred dynamic and engaging video production to inform young people across Ireland about a possible constitutional amendment.

Feedback from young people

When Young People were asked '*What do you really want to tell the Irish Government about the children's rights amendment to the Constitution?*' responses provided indicated clearly identifiable themes as follows:

35% of the feedback from young people was formulated in statements that were fully supportive of a children's rights amendment; this was the largest observable pattern in the written and verbal feedback on the day. For example young people said such things as: '*We want a change in the Constitution.*'

16% of the feedback came in the form of statements calling for greater voice and involvement in decision making by young people. For example, '*We would like a say in matters that concern us.*'

11% of statements directly related to calls for the provision of youth friendly, accurate and appropriate information on rights and the possible constitutional amendment. For example: '*We don't have enough information about anything to do with children's rights, please fix this.*'

11% of statements related to a minor but identifiable theme of why young people couldn't be part of the decision making process in relation to the constitutional amendment. For example: '*Young people over the age of 16 should be allowed to vote on matters affecting them.*'

Young people's questions about the proposed constitutional amendment

When young people were asked if they had any questions that they would like answered, a number of themes once again were evident:

53% of young people's questions directly related to the process and outcomes. For example '*Will information for young people be released?*'

23% of questions touched on the involvement of young people in a possible constitutional amendment. For example, '*Can young people actually make a change? If no why not?*'

17% of questions were about rights of young people and children. For example:
'What rights do individual children have, separated from their families?'

About Voices of Youth

Voices of Youth is an organisation of young people that are interested in getting young people's views across. And now we're online!

We want to promote the achievements of young people in our country, as well as drawing attention to important issues surrounding young people.

Voices of Youth is a group by the young people, about the young people, for the young people. We care about what young people have to say!!!

Contact

Voices of Youth, 20 Lower Dominick Street. Dublin 1.

Email: voicesyouth@gmail.com

Web: www.voicesofyouth.wordpress.com