



What we do in Northern Ireland

- We're working to end child poverty
- We're ensuring that children get a good quality and inclusive education
- We're protecting and promoting children's rights
- We're raising awareness and campaigning for children's rights



Northern Ireland has the youngest population of any part of the UK: 25% are aged under 18. It is also one of the poorest regions in the European Union: more than one-third of its children live in poverty. For 30 years until 1998, Northern Ireland was racked by a political conflict that killed more than 3,500 people. More than one-tenth of these were under 18. Many children lost their parents or other family members, or experienced and witnessed traumatic events. Following a long drawn-out peace process, and after many setbacks, elections for a new Northern Ireland Assembly were held in March 2007 and there was a return to devolved government.

Children in Northern Ireland still face many problems – poverty, neglect and abuse, inequality and inadequate services. Those from ethnic minority groups, including Travellers, face discrimination, and a lack of proper access to education and health services.

Save the Children in Northern Ireland

We've been working in Northern Ireland since the 1950s. Initially we provided a range of services to families and children, including playgroups and after-school clubs in the poorest and most marginalised communities. Since the early 1990s, we've been helping local groups to provide these services themselves. We carry out research and lobby on behalf of all children in the region. Our work is particularly focused on supporting children who live with poverty and discrimination, and those who've been affected by the long-running conflict. We

actively involve young people in all our work. We also work in partnership with small community groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), public bodies and government departments.

Key areas of work

We've persuaded the government to act on child poverty

Around 122,000 children in Northern Ireland live in poverty. Of these, 44,000 experience severe poverty. Poor children often have health problems and 12% of them leave school with no qualifications at all. We're the leading NGO lobbying the government to eradicate child poverty in the region. We research how persistent and severe poverty affects children. We ask young people about their experiences of living in poor households. Our lobbying of key political and civic leaders for an end to child poverty has attracted widespread publicity in the media.

We've campaigned for the new Northern Ireland Executive to make ending child poverty a key priority and to set targets for its eradication. More than 6,000 action cards were completed and sent to Members of the Legislative Assembly and Ministers. As a result of our campaigning and lobbying, the Executive has set targets to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020. In addition, they've responded to our call for action on severe child poverty by committing to its eradication by 2012 – the first target on severe child poverty in the UK.

We also lobbied the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to conduct an Inquiry into child poverty. This was launched in October and an interim report was published in January 2008. The final report will be completed later in the year.

We're keeping children's rights high on the agenda

Together with our partner, the Children's Law Centre,(CLC) we campaigned successfully for the appointment of Northern Ireland's first Commissioner for Children and Young People. Following a joint campaign by us and other children's organisations, the government introduced a funding package for children and young people worth over £100 million for 2006–08. The government's Strategy for Children and Young People, launched in 2006, places children's rights at its centre. This was largely due to vigorous lobbying by us and the CLC.

We've also worked to ensure that children's rights are included in the proposed Bill of Rights, and have been supported by 200 other organisations. We successfully campaigned for the establishment of a Bill of Rights Forum and, together with the CLC, we were invited by the government to sit on the Forum.

We're developing a system of indicators to measure the government's record on respecting and promoting children's rights. We'll use these in our contribution to the 2008 independent report on the UK government's progress in meeting its obligations under the UN Convention

on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC). We've organised a workshop on children's rights indicators at international conferences in Belfast and Chicago.

We're campaigning for an end to physical punishment

Legislation still allows parents to use 'reasonable chastisement'. We're leading the campaign to end all physical punishment of children in the home. We want all children in Northern Ireland to have the same legal protection against assault as adults. In partnership with the Parents' Advice Centre we're running training for parents and carers in managing children's behaviour without resort to physical punishment.

We're helping young people to take action locally for children's rights everywhere

Our Global Dimension programme ensures that children and young people can find out more about the lives of children we work with globally. We've taken young people to key international events such as the International AIDS Conference in Toronto in August 2006, and the G8 Summit in Germany in June 2007. On both occasions the young people were fully accredited journalists and were able to file stories back home as they happened.

In August 2008 we'll be supporting an international group of youth delegates to attend the International AIDS Conference in Mexico City.

We're helping to stamp out bullying

Bullying remains a big problem in primary schools. We're working to stop children underachieving in school because of racist, homophobic, disability-based or any other kind of bullying. We're increasingly concerned about the impact of bullying on our poorest children.

The first-ever regional anti-bullying co-ordinator, who started work in 2006, is employed and managed by Save the Children on behalf of the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum, which we chair. The Forum has published and distributed an information pack to 1,300 schools so far. The pack provides guidance and support to teachers, so that they can help to bring an end to bullying. The Forum ran anti-bullying workshops for 641 primary schoolchildren in 2007, and 12 workshops for parents. The Forum is also looking at the problem of 'cyber bullying'. We want to ensure that the views of children and their parents are part of a government strategy on this problem.

Apart from its lead role in the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum, we're carrying out two separate projects on this critical issue for children. The Anti-Bullying Champions (ABC) project develops a whole-school approach to anti-bullying in five Belfast primary schools in disadvantaged communities. Promoting Respect, Inclusion and Diversity in Education (PRIDE) is a pilot project focusing on homophobic bullying in a number of schools. It has provided training for governors, teachers and pupils. The Forum is also looking at the problem of 'cyber-bullying'.

We're helping children to stay in education

We want to help schools identify and resolve problems that lead to children being excluded from school or failing to achieve while they're there. And when children are excluded, we want to make sure they still get a proper education.

Since 2001, we've supported the Bridge Alternative Education Project which works with children in East Belfast who have been excluded from, or left, school. Working with local schools, the project supports 12 young people each year to continue receiving an education. It also supports another 60 young people through outreach work.

Another project will involve supporting primary school children in some of the poorest areas to achieve more at school. Research we carried out in partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2007 shows that many of these poorest children, particularly boys, begin to disengage from learning and school by the age of nine.

We're also developing exciting projects with schools around the 'Index for Inclusion' and extended schools initiatives. These projects will identify and tackle the barriers that prevent some children enjoying and achieving at school, and support their parents to become more involved in their education.

We've giving Traveller children a better start in life

There are about 2,500 Travellers in Northern Ireland, and about half are aged under 16. Many Traveller families live by the roadside, and the few official, or tolerated, sites that exist often have bad sanitation and lack electricity and water. Traveller children get poor healthcare and education. They are far more likely to die in early childhood than settled children. This is because they are more likely to suffer accidents as well as preventable diseases. Back in 2001 they were three times less likely than settled children to attend preschool. We began to plan a response to this inequality.

One of our key aims has been to increase Traveller children's preschool enrolment. In 2003 we began a project called Toybox, in partnership with Early Years – *the organisation for young children*. This hugely successful project started by working with Traveller children under four in six areas across Northern Ireland, organising play activities in their own homes.

The children developed socially, emotionally and physically. Parents became more confident in playing with their children and helping them to learn. Altogether 273 children were involved during the first three years of the project (the target was 150). Significantly more Traveller children are now enrolling in preschool education. Also, local schools are showing greater awareness of Traveller culture and rights.

Toybox is recognised as a model of best practice, at home and abroad. When the pilot stage ended in August 2006, the government agreed to fund it for a further two years. This has

enabled us to extend the project to cover 11 areas of Northern Ireland, and work with children both while they're enrolled in preschool and through their transition into primary school. Toybox has now worked with 470 children. In a 16-month, period the project carried out more than 4,200 play activity sessions with children on a one-to-one basis.



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