

19 December 2014

A Collaborative response to the Commission on Housing and Wellbeing on behalf of the Beyond4 Walls Project

Dear Commissioner

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Commission on Housing and Wellbeing, which we welcome at this critical juncture in the Scottish political journey.

Children in Scotland is the national network for the children's sector in Scotland. Its membership consists of more than 430 children's organisations and individuals from across the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

The Poverty Alliance is the national anti-poverty network in Scotland. We have accumulated over 20 years of developing and delivering innovative approaches to participatory work with communities experiencing poverty and disadvantage. A key concern for the Alliance is to ensure that people with direct experience of poverty have their views and experiences heard by policymakers and others.

Together we are committed to seeking, articulating and advocating the perspectives of people within our communities whose views are often marginalised; namely, those affected by poverty, and children and young people. Our combined membership and consultation with children, young people and service users inform our perspective and we have also drawn on the knowledge and expertise of Enquire, the Scottish Advice Service for Additional Support for Learning.

Together, we call for a human rights, and specifically children's rights, UNCRC-based approach to housing and wellbeing in Scotland which we believe will strengthen the findings of the Commission. Furthermore, we call for a Child Rights Impact Assessment to form part of this process.

We strongly support your assessment on the importance of housing to health and education as family circumstances is one of the factors recognised in the additional support for learning legislation and framework

as potentially causing additional support needs. If barriers to learning are not adequately addressed or responded to this may cause poor outcomes educationally, in terms of attainment and achievement, and in health and equality outcomes.

About Beyond Four Walls

This response was drawn up in partnership with young people from the Beyond4Walls project. The Wheatley Group (Glasgow Housing Association) have commissioned Poverty Alliance and Children in Scotland to enable a peer research project led by young people in Glasgow. The participatory research project is working with a group of young people aged between 18 and 21. The project is undertaking a process that moves away from traditional research approaches to one that focuses on co-design and co-production. This will represent a shift from the passivity of traditional research projects where those involved in the research, particularly those in marginalised populations such as those affected by poverty and children and young people, are subjects who are often 'researched on'.¹

The young people welcome the opportunity to respond to the Housing and Wellbeing Commission. They have undertaken this as part of their training programme within the project as they felt it was an opportunity to highlight the key social issues experienced by young people.

In the facilitation of the session, the young people were asked to reflect on the 'key facts' document of the consultation:

¹ Bennett F , Roberts M.,(2004) 'From input to influence' Participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty' Joseph Rowntree Foundation , York.



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- Housing shortages were a surprise to the young people as they had anticipated that numbers on housing waiting lists were around 70,000, not 170,000. This highlighted confusion and lack of awareness on the issues in obtaining social housing within Scotland. The young people discussed this in terms of widening inequality in Scotland and the significance of this for other aspects of people's lives.
- Environmental issues: The statistics highlighting fuel poverty and energy efficiency were discussed and the need for concerted action to address both these issues in tandem was identified. Making homes more energy efficient was perceived as going some way towards providing a solution to this issue.
- The issue of rising housing prices in relation to inflation was also discussed. The young people highlighted the imbalance between the profit of housing providers in relation to the consumer. They also highlighted the lack of focus of housing providers on customer care and customer service which are important aspects of life and not always valued as profit margins.

Young people then conducted a reflexive exercise where young people interviewed their peers within the group on housing and wellbeing based on issues they felt were important within their local communities. This allowed

for a non-prescriptive approach to the work and for reflections grounded in their own views and experiences. The points fed back have been thematically presented below:

Housing Options and Wellbeing

The group recognised the importance of good housing. Housing that was not fit for purpose, in particular damp housing was emphasised as placing people at increased risk of health issues such as asthma.

Housing allocation policy and the availability of housing were interconnected issues. Young people discussed that being on waiting lists caused issues and may have further repercussions. For those becoming increasingly desperate they may take steps trying to alleviate their housing situation.

“More housing is needed – some people could intentionally become homeless to get a higher priority when applying for social housing... [they might feel they need to] amplify their condition to meet their needs.”
(Voice of a young person)

A core need was identified for people who are in temporary accommodation (or several places) for months: this is not good for the wellbeing of the parent and the child because of having to move schools or possibly not being registered with GPs.

Safety and Wellbeing

Safe communities were defined as important. Specific issues impacting on young people were highlighted. The issue of territorialism, especially in Glasgow, came up repeatedly. One young man had experience of walking to school with a baseball bat as he had to cross through three rival areas and felt threatened and unsafe on a daily basis.

Factors that contributed to feeling safe within communities were discussed. Most of the young people did not feel safe at nighttime in their communities because of smashed glass, drug and alcohol abuse and intimidatingly large groups of people.

There were gendered dimensions to this. Many young people felt that there was a perception that men are better at protecting themselves and that safety was a bigger concern for women, girls and children in their communities. In addition, the recognition of the intersectionality² of age was also perceived as critical to feelings of safety. The team agreed that often it is the older people in their communities who don't feel safe: "at community meetings they say they feel scared".

Communities, Identities and Wellbeing

Communities were seen as central to people's lives. The young people placed a lot of importance on communities being able to access resources including shops, community centres, health facilities, pharmacies, wellbeing and leisure centres. Specific issues were identified in terms of core needs for children and young people and families.

A focus was placed on employment and access to jobs; the young people agreed that there should be an increased focus on creating job opportunities near housing or adequate transport. This focus on infrastructure was critical to enable people to meet their needs.

In terms of parks and leisure spaces within communities the young people reflected on the need for spaces to play within their communities to provide a diversion from negative behavior by children and young people as well as a place of enjoyment. Some observed that playparks had been stripped away and brand new equipment put in, which looks attractive but hasn't always been planned properly. An example was given of a playpark bordering rival areas in Glasgow, which was never used because the children playing there did not feel safe. Lighting in parks was also highlighted as an important issue; children and young people use parks, whether they are lit or not, so the team did not understand the logic behind choosing not to light parks at night. They felt that the darkness made them even more ominous and meant that the spaces were less used by the communities they seek to serve.

² Intersectionality is the idea that all forms of discrimination should be thought about together.

“More youth clubs should be in place to keep young people entertained and through this, crime rates can go down”.

(Voice of a young person)

Sense of community and perceptions of local areas were topics of concern. On a positive note, it was felt that

“Community spirit is more common in the poorer areas of Glasgow”.

(Voice of a young person)

“even in the face of all the problems that it face”.

(Voice of a young person)

The young people were clear that they wouldn't let their area define them and often there was a strong sense of pride about where people live despite communities being labeled in a negative way.

The sense of cohesion and familiarity of being within a community is central and keeps people living within their communities. It was argued that this led to positive outcomes such as people taking on roles within their community and addressing the problems it faces. They do this by striving to take,

“an active leadership role and involve themselves in bettering conditions [which] contrasts with the normal view that most people are individualistic and not as community-minded as they once were”.

(Voice of a young person)

The young people felt that it was very important that there was dignity in housing and that communities should be meaningfully consulted if there were to be changes to their accommodation.

An example of this was the asylum seekers who used to live in the Red Road flats and were being forcibly dispersed to other areas in poor and inadequate housing without consultation. More broadly, consultation periods in community planning were perceived by the young people as being tokenistic and short in their experience; they were very critical of this practice.

Changes in Communities and Wellbeing: Community Planning and Regeneration

There is significant regeneration in many areas around Glasgow. This is challenging the perception of the city more widely and, for some of the young people, was resulting in decreased feelings of embarrassment about their area. There are often new community centres being built and new direction and leadership within the communities.

“People have better ideas where the money could be spent...people have cheaper alternatives in mind, but they feel ignored”.
(Voice of a young person)

The young people agreed strongly about the importance of devolving budgets for community planning to the communities themselves and empowering decision-making at a local level, although they recognised that this would only work in areas that have a strong sense of community. By doing so, this would help to avoid the disconnect between those within the local authorities and their engagement with people on the ground and where strategic ambitions were not always well received at a grassroots level.

“We feel like the council have grand ideas but the people don’t want these, they want the simple solutions...there’s a lack of common sense”.
(Voice of a young person)

Relationships with communities were seen as evolving based on interactions and involvement within community activities and spaces. The feelings of community connection changed as the young people grew up. Some felt less connected now than they did when they were younger and used to go along to community events.

“My area used to be plagued by crime and violence but since the regeneration, it’s died down”.
(Voice of a young person)

Education, Wellbeing and Poverty

Education was critical to positive choices and destinations for young people. Emphasis was placed on the need for preventative education to assist young people in their life choices. This was critical around sex education and drug misuse.

One young person reflected on the current situation for many peers:

“It’s a vicious circle; from getting a bad education, no job from this, go on benefits, get depressed from being bored, take drugs to deal with, turn to crime to fund drug habit. Could end up homeless after jail time.”

(Voice of a young person)

In terms of other key life transition points, with regards to managing tenancies, a gap was identified on housing support and the life skills required.

“There is no support on things such as budgeting, benefits and how to pay bills etc”

(Voice of a young person)

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