



# OUR VOICES

## OUR REALITIES

A Report to the United Nations Committee  
on the Rights of the Child  
by  
Children Living in Ireland  
2006



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on the Rights of the Child  
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Prepared by Karen McAuley on behalf of the  
Children's Rights Alliance, Republic of Ireland





***Our Voices, Our Realities: A Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child*** by *Children Living in Ireland* was prepared by Karen McAuley on behalf of the Children's Rights Alliance.

The Children's Rights Alliance wishes to express its gratitude to the Irish Youth Foundation and to the Atlantic Philanthropies for funding the development and production of this report.

The views expressed in the Introduction to this report are those of the Children's Rights Alliance. The views expressed in section II are those of the Children's Reference Group, which took part in the process of compiling the report. The views and ideas expressed in section III are those of individual children, speaking on the basis of their own experience. None of these views necessarily reflect the views of the Irish Youth Foundation or of the Atlantic Philanthropies.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of eighty non-governmental organisations concerned with the rights and welfare of children in Ireland. The Alliance works to secure the full implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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# FOREWORD

***Our Voices, Our Realities* offers a glimpse into the lives of children and young people in Ireland today. The material presented here reflects the innocence and beauty of children's minds and their optimism and hopes for their futures. It also provides a stark reminder of the struggles some children face in their daily lives.**

The Children's Rights Alliance exists to advance the implementation of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ireland. A key principle of the Convention, which finds expression in Article 12, is that the child should have a right to have a say in all matters which affect him or her. While significant steps have been taken in recent years, much work remains to be done to foster a culture of respect for children's views and experiences.

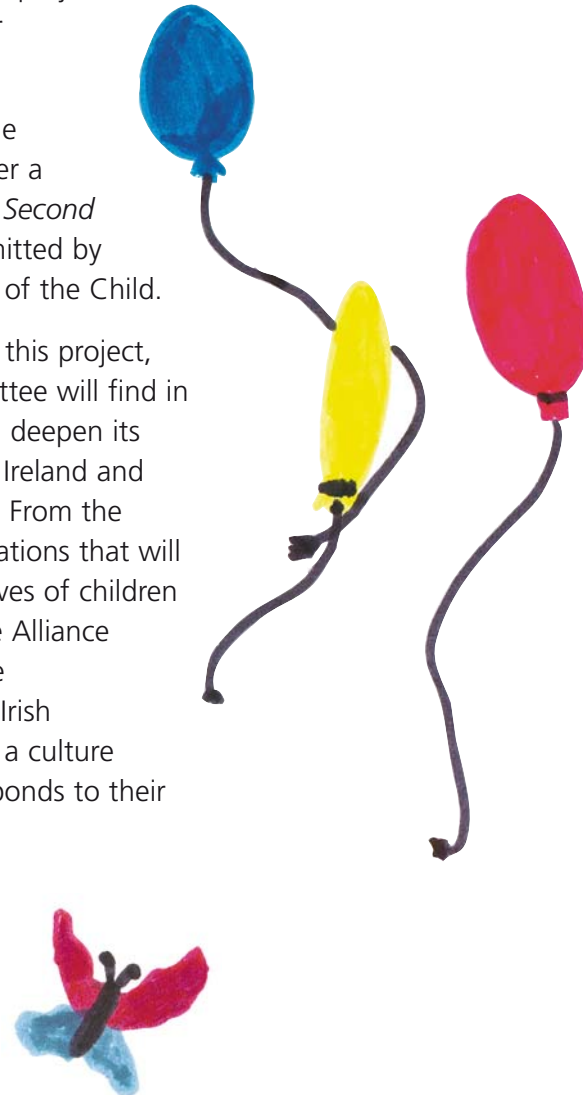
Since its inception, the Alliance has worked to promote awareness and understanding of the implications of Article 12. Through the preparation of *Our Voices, Our Realities*, the Alliance has supported children to contribute directly to the examination by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child of the *Second National Report* on Ireland's implementation of the Convention. This project has been an exciting step for the Alliance, borne out of a desire to not only represent the views of children but to enable their voices to be heard directly.

The compilation of the report was a collaborative project between the Alliance and thirteen of its member organisations that work directly with children.

In addition to having their own integral value, the experiences and ideas reflected in this report offer a vibrant and challenging complement to Ireland's *Second National Report* and to the *Shadow Report* submitted by the Alliance to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The children and organisations who took part in this project, and the Alliance itself, hope that the UN Committee will find in this report information and perspectives that will deepen its understanding of the issues affecting children in Ireland and assist its examination of *Ireland's Second Report*. From the Committee's examination will come recommendations that will have the potential to substantially improve the lives of children in Ireland over the remainder of this decade. The Alliance hopes that the effective implementation of these recommendations by the Irish Government, and Irish society in general, will lead to the emergence of a culture that respects children, listens to their voices, responds to their needs and upholds their rights.

**Jillian van Turnhout**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Children's Rights Alliance**  
*January 2006*





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# INTRODUCTION

## Background to *Our Voices, Our Realities*

In 1992, Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Signed by almost all countries in the world, this Convention is an international agreement, which sets out the rights to which all children under eighteen years of age are entitled. By ratifying the Convention, the Irish State made a commitment under international law to recognise, protect and promote the rights of all children living in Ireland.

The Irish State's progress towards realising the rights of children living in Ireland is examined at regular intervals by a group of experts on children's rights called the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. It carried out its first examination in 1998 and it will complete its second during 2006. To perform these checks on Ireland's children's rights record, the UN Committee examines a progress report prepared for it by the Irish Government. The Committee also accepts alternative or 'shadow' reports prepared by organisations that work for children in Ireland as well as reports from children themselves. Once it has examined these reports, the UN Committee makes recommendations on the next steps the Irish Government should take to improve children's rights and welfare in Ireland.

## *Our Voices, Our Realities*

*Our Voices, Our Realities* was compiled by children living in Ireland to help the UN Committee examine Ireland's progress towards realising children's rights since 1998. To support the UN Committee's work, 132 children took part in a Children's Rights Alliance project on what it is like to be a child living in Ireland today. The children who participated shared their views on the good and bad aspects of being a child in Ireland as well as their ideas for changes that could improve their lives. A selection of the children's views and ideas is presented in this report for the UN Committee to consider.

To create this report, the Children's Rights Alliance worked with thirteen organisations to complete seventeen consultation workshops with children under eighteen years between October and December 2005. The 132 children who took part in these workshops are of different age groups, live in different parts of the country, and have different ethnic and social backgrounds. They include children with disabilities, children seeking asylum who are separated from their parents, and children living in care. In the workshops, the children were invited to think about their own experiences and, with these experiences in mind, to identify good and bad aspects of being a child living in Ireland today as well as changes that could improve their lives.



A selection of the responses from the children is presented in this report in the form of a scrapbook.

See page 10



The children were supported to express their views and ideas in different ways: in writing, through artwork and photography and, in the case of one group of children, through a short film that they made themselves.

Taken together, the children's responses touch on a wide range of themes. Many of these themes relate to children's rights named in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example:

- What it means to be a child
- Being treated equally and fairly
- Making decisions based on what is best for children
- Listening to children and making sure they have opportunities to have their say
- School and education
- Health and well-being
- Family, friends and the local community
- Having a decent standard of living
- Being looked after and supported
- Being protected from violence, abuse and exploitation
- Having the freedom to express your own language, culture and religion
- Play and recreation

In identifying changes, children spoke of changes that could improve their current quality of life or that could help them reach their potential. Of these changes, some relate to the law and government policies while others concern specific services in children's local communities.

A selection of the responses from the children is presented in this report in the form of a scrapbook. The decision to create a scrapbook of the children's work comes from a desire to give the UN Committee direct access to their voices and views. These pieces were chosen by a Reference Group of seven children, all of whom also took part in the consultation workshops. *Our Voices, Our Realities* offers a snapshot of what it is like to be a child living in Ireland today, based on the experiences and opinions of individual children.

## Hearing Children's Voices in Ireland

In 2000, the Irish Government published the *National Children's Strategy*, a ten-year plan for improving the lives of all children in Ireland. The first goal of this *Strategy* is to make sure that meaningful opportunities are created for children to

have their say and be heard about issues that affect and interest them. This goal reflects Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which says that children have a right to be heard and that children's views should be taken seriously.

Since the *Strategy's* publication, much work and energy has gone into creating and developing opportunities for children to be heard. However, Ireland still has a long way to go before hearing children's voices becomes part and parcel of how plans, services and decisions affecting children are made. A great deal has to be done to create the range of opportunities needed to make sure that children can exercise their right to be heard in ways that give real meaning to their status as young citizens with rights of their own.

Money and other kinds of support need to go into making this happen. For progress to be made, it is also essential that a real effort is made to:

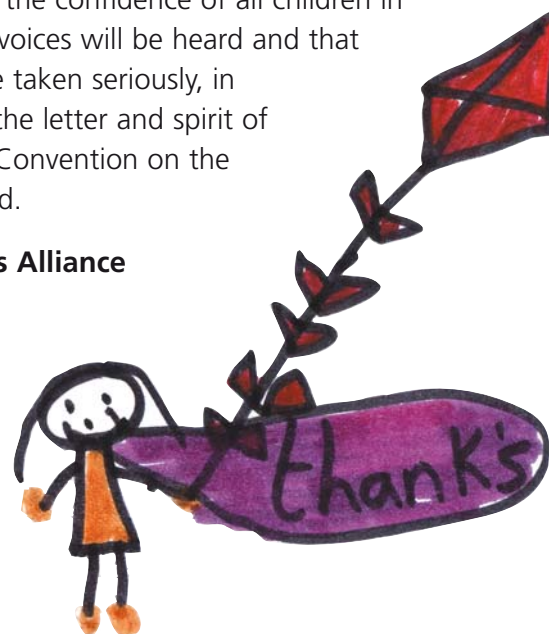
- Raise awareness of children's right to be heard among children and the general public, and in particular among adults whose work impacts directly or indirectly on the lives of children
- Support children to participate effectively, either on their own behalf or on behalf of other children

- Train and support all relevant agencies and professionals to develop ways of working that really value and include children's voices
- Develop effective ways of gathering and sharing the learning that emerges from work being done to involve children in decision-making.

Supporting children's right to be heard is a shared responsibility that will require co-operation and leadership. The Children's Rights Alliance hopes that national agencies such as the Office of the Minister for Children and the Ombudsman for Children's Office will play a lead role in making sure that the energy and effort of recent years is built on. Creative leadership is needed to inspire the confidence of all children in Ireland that their voices will be heard and that their views will be taken seriously, in accordance with the letter and spirit of Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## Children's Rights Alliance

January 2006





# A LETTER FROM THE CHILDREN'S REFERENCE GROUP

January 2006

**Dear UN Committee on the Rights of the Child,**

We are a group of young people from all across Ireland and we all live in different ways. We have worked very hard to produce this book.

We have selected comments and drawings from children living in Ireland, of all ages and from different backgrounds. Their work shows that children have different views and ideas about living in Ireland.

It was hard to choose what work to put in the book because it was all so good. But we tried to include work that is about a lot of different things. There were many ideas about how to make Ireland a better place for children and their loved ones.

We are really impressed that children have so much to say about their views on living in Ireland.

We are surprised and concerned by:

- How many children in Ireland are afraid
- How difficult life is for young asylum-seekers – they have only €19.10 weekly and are really scared of being deported
- How little access there is for young people with disabilities

- How many children complained about public transport

- How many complained of the lack of activities

We would like you to tell the Irish Government to:

- Keep its promises to people in Ireland
- Make Ireland an even better place to live for *all* children, including young asylum-seekers
- Listen more to children

All children are equal, so they should all be treated with the same respect and have the same opportunities in life. All people should have good memories of their childhood.

We would like you to treat this report with the same respect as the report from the Irish Government. Please read every single word carefully.

Thank you,

Melissa Boyd

PATRICK McDONAGH

Robert Kayitare

Daniel Meenan

Claire English

Lorraine Regan

Meán Mulvany





# SCRAP BOOK

Life in Ireland







If I had a magic wand what changes would I make?  
I would make money fall from heaven and make the world  
candy land. I would make the people fly. and I  
would be the king. what is good about being a child?  
I would crawl under the table and I would play  
a lot. they like to eat a lot and go to the fun  
fair a lot.

[ Arran, age 9, Gorey, Co. Wexford ]



[ “Girl being chased by a dog”, Jimmy, Traveller, age 7, Dublin ]





“ My house and the stones where I live. Children falling in the river when they climb the wall. Names wrote on the wall and rocks beside my house. Children call me names when I get off the Luas. The Luas is dangerous: children fall and burst their nose. Big bridge and sewage. All the dirt and litter around. It's a bad thing, the sun: you will get burnt.”

[ “Where I live”, Mary, Traveller, age 7, Dublin ]







What are the good things about being a child living in Ireland?

The park / and Barnardos / being near the school / being good today / being helpful



What are the bad things about being a child living in Ireland?

Poor people / no calling names / children beat me in my street / no boxing / it's not safe



If you had a magic wand,  
what changes would you like to see happen  
to make things better for you?

I pickt up a wand  
I trnt in to a  
Wich

[ Angel, age 8, Co. Offaly ]





There is loads of poor people in Ireland, even probably more than in bigger countries. I think that is very bad. I would like to bring the kind people back that died and help the poor people in Ireland.

[ Evan, age 8 and Des, age 11, Co. Offaly ]



A child can fit through small gaps. An adult can't. A child can play with Lego. An adult can't.

[ John, age 8, Co. Wexford ]

What are the good things about being a child living in Ireland?

- Schools
- Friends
- Cinema
- Having nice food
- Being able to have a shower in my house
- Being able to watch TV in my pjs
- Having warm clothes
- Having a Playstation and a playground
- Having a nice teacher
- Having buses and cars, nice shops
- Having lots of toys
- Having sisters and brothers
- Going on school trips and going to school
- P.E.
- Going to my club
- Living in a nice house

[ John, age 8, Connor, age 8 and Rebecca, age 9, Dublin ]





Hi! My name is Sophie.  
I am 9 years old. Things I  
like about being a child  
are being able to ride a  
tricycle and also able  
to get presents on Christmas  
Thing I hate about being  
a child are being bullied  
and also not able to  
drive a car. If I had a  
magic wand I would  
wish to be rich.

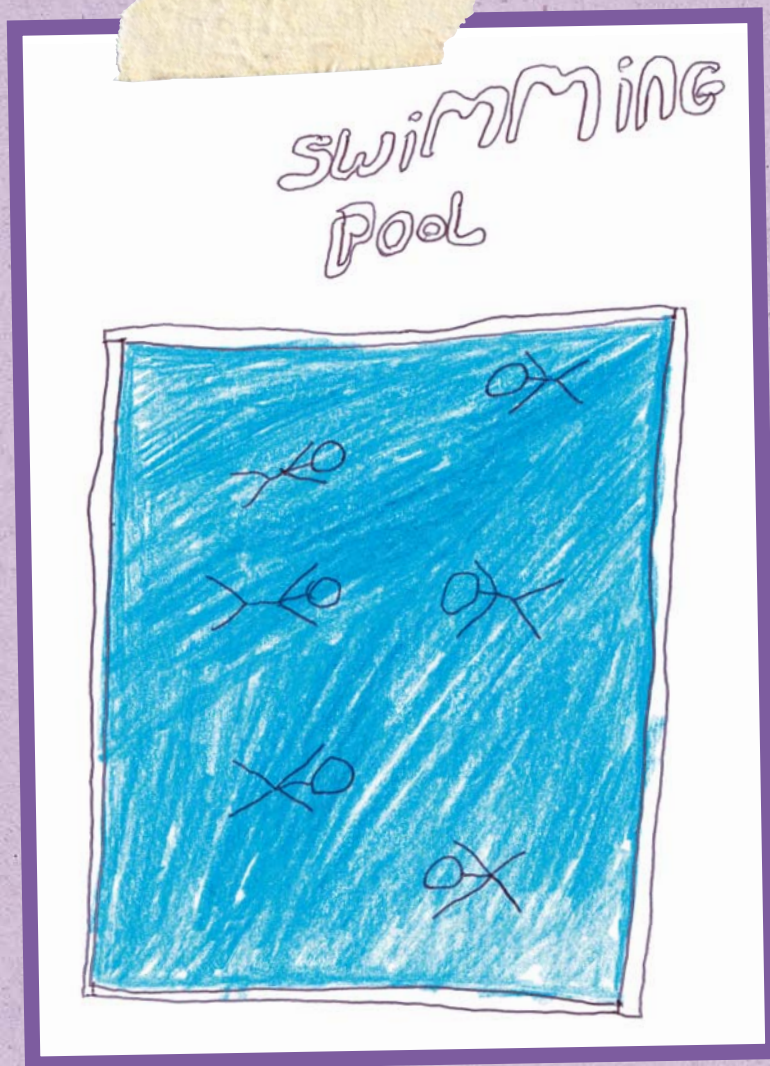


[ Sophie, age 9, Gorey, Co. Wexford ]



## What are the good things about being a child/young person living in Ireland?

Because children have lots more things than adults and adults can't play in parks and children can.



## What are the bad things about being a child/young person living in Ireland?

The bad things are you couldn't

- ① Walk to school because you might live too far away and you might have to take the bus.
- ② And in Ireland there are loads of rapists and all the kidnapers they could kidnap any of your family even your parents and if your parents get took away we would die with the hungary.
- ③ And if we ever had an tornado, hurricane, earth-quake
- ④ Kidnappers in your street because you would be un-safe.
- ⑤ Some times the water might not be safe.

[ Mark, age 9; Co. Offaly ]



**What are the good things about being a child living in Ireland?**



- There's helpful people in Ireland. And people are patient. Schools in Ireland are great. We're feeling safe because we're feeling safe about our water.

**What are the bad things about being a child living in Ireland?**

- It is a long way to school and we have to get a bus.
- We would be afraid about not having food.
- We are afraid for family in case anything happened to them.
- We would like more sport in school and soccer around our estate.
- We don't feel safe because there's robbers around our street.
- We feel sorry for the poor people.
- We would not feel safe in church in case the priest touches children.



**If you had a magic wand, what changes would you like to see happen to make things better for you?**



- To care for everybody and keep them safe.
- Get rid of the robbers.
- Make the world full of more better people.
- If people hurt your feelings, we would turn them into frogs.
- To keep all the poor people safe in Ireland and give them more food and money.
- If I had a magic wand, I would like my sister to have her baby without losing the baby.

[ Kirby, age 11 and Stacy, age 8, Co. Offaly ]



School is growing and you get put into prefabs, so there is little or no room to play. There was more room without the prefabs. New estates also take places away to play. There is vandalism at the pitches and changing rooms of the GAA. Teenagers have nothing to do. They need something for teenagers, so they won't get into trouble.

[ Sheena, 12 years old ]



### Good things...

- I like having friends.
- I like being with my family.
- There are Gardaí to help us and keep crime off the streets.
- In school you learn to read and write and do P.E. and make friends in the yard.



### Bad things...

- People robbing cars and rallying them.
- People shooting each other.
- I don't like seeing needles or rubbish on the ground.



### If I had a magic wand...

- I would like to put all the baddies in prison.
- Give people a better life. Give them money and food and a house and their children toys and give their parents a jeep, van and a car.
- In Ireland, I would make it sunny every day.
- No crime in Ireland.

[ Patrick, age 11, Dublin ]





### The Good Things !

There is a lot of activity camps and clubs around for children and teenagers.

There are many facilities around like cinema's and swimming pools. There are lots of places like the above that are good for making friends.

### The Bad Things !

Buses don't come regularly. Waiting out in the rain.

Homework is plentiful, especially on weekends. It interferes with the children's lives.

A lot of road accidents. Although there are many facilities, most of them are quite far away.

### Things to Change !

Amount of homework you get. Price of things. The weather. Too many people drink and drive. NO CHILD LABOURERS. Too many people litter.

There are too many road accidents. More places for children to play.



[“The way people live”, Seán, age 12.]

Good

• SCHOOL IS ABOUT

Learning

• Being **Safe**

• **Sports**

• I Like bowling and swimming

• **wheelchair** Buses

• Having a chance to have a say and being listened to.

Changes

• **more** lifts in buildings  
and **place** S.

• A chance to **join** in what other people are doing.

**improve**  
**facilities**

**right of each**  
**person to live,**  
**laugh and be free**

Bad

• Not enough lifts in public places

• Missing out on other things people do, like playing in playground and having

**FUN**

Everyone should be able to live life to the full.





[ Melissa, Dublin, aged 12 ]



[ "Having fun and getting along with people", Philip, 13, Waterford ]





### What are the good things about being a young person in Ireland?

- When you are younger, you have a lot of freedom. You can socialise a lot more when you are younger.
- You have the whole weekend to yourself.
- You get away with a lot more things when you are younger, e.g. if you do something wrong, your parents will forgive you and you won't get into trouble.
- You can get into some places for free.
- When you are younger, you don't have to work.
- There are good facilities for young people.



### What are the bad things about being a young person in Ireland?

- You can't get a job if younger than 16 years.
- You have to be supervised more when you're younger.
- Everyone treats you like a child, even if you're a teenager.
- Wheelchair access into places is a problem because of steps or because of the place being too small, e.g. shops, restaurants.
- You need to rely on parents more to bring you places.
- You can't be left on your own when you're young.
- You have to go places you don't want to, e.g. school.

[ Lorraine, age 15, Co. Offaly ]



The good thing about living in Ireland is that I am safe. I like going to school and I get a good education. I like playing football a lot. I like the people in Ireland. I like the people who are working with me because I think they are doing a very good job.

The bad things about living in Ireland are that we don't get enough money to spend. We don't have enough pitches to play football. We don't have enough swimming pools. We don't have enough dressing rooms to get changed when we are playing football. We don't have enough pitches to train. The streets in Dublin are dirty.

If I had a magic wand, I would build new stadiums for people to play football. Build new houses for people to live. More DARTS and buses because we don't have enough. Sometimes people wait for about 20 minutes.

[ Horun, 15, from Kosovo ]







# Young People In Ireland!!!

**Education** – The education system in Ireland is adequate. It has no major problems but it's not perfect. Schools could do with more funding. I don't like the way most public schools teach Catholicism.

**Support** – Support for sick young people in Ireland is very good. I am a member of a support group for teenagers with cancer called CanTeen Ireland, which is a great help. There are also organisations such as Barrettstown and Make A Wish for children with other illnesses.

[ Colm, 16, from Dublin ]

The good thing about living in Ireland is that if you have nowhere to go or you are on the streets, there are opportunities for young people like hostels, youth services and social workers that would help you and give you what you need.



The bad thing about living in Ireland is that there is nothing for older teenagers (16-19) to do in Ballyfermot. That's why me and my mates buy drink at the weekends – because there is nothing to do. I would change the amount of junkies and drug dealers that hang around the main road in Ballyfermot. There is too many fights and too many people dying up there.

[ Daniel, Ballyfermot, Dublin ]

#### The things that I would wish for would be:

- To be able to walk.
- In the future, to be in the Olympics.
- To have my own car.
- To travel the world.
- More activities for the disabled.

[ Dymphna, 16 years old, Tullamore ]



As young people are sexually active at younger and younger ages, they need to have access to proper sex education. However, it is difficult to do this, as making such information available to children and young people under the age of consent is contradicting the law that they shouldn't be sexually active in the first place. This is putting sexually active young people at risk, if they don't have the correct information. Telling young people to "abstain" is neglecting the rising trends evident in today's society.

[ Member of the Union of Secondary Students ]





### Things that are bad:

- Getting followed around by eight security guards when you go into shops.
- Nothing to do for the young people – no youth programmes.
- Don't get to learn nothing about your culture – in school it's all about learnin' about these people from other countries and how they get on, but not about ourselves.
- People mocking you for the way you talk.
- Feeling different from other people in school.
- Discrimination, being called 'knacker'.
- It does still happen that Travellers are livin' on the side of the road.
- Not havin' as much freedom 'cause you are a Traveller – not getting into the cinema.
- Racism, less than before, more behind your back.
- Some teachers give you too many chances – teachers are scared of us and don't want to cross us.



### Good things:

- Getting' better slowly for Travellers.
- Summer projects are great.
- Holidays to Ballymoney.
- Playing football in Priorswood F.C.



### Things that we'd change:

- All the hatred.
- I'd like to be recognised as an ethnic group.
- That Traveller law will change so that Travellers be allowed to stay in the same place for a week.
- I'd like that when something bad is done by a Traveller that they don't have it in the news as someone from the Travelling community.



[ Pavee Point Young Men's Group ]



There are not a lot of facilities for young people. A lot of young people binge drink out of boredom; especially for young people in more rural areas – it's very difficult. Any facilities available are managed by private companies and often are very expensive; a lot of young people have to work part-time jobs and balance school to be able to afford to do recreational activities.

[ Member of the Union of Secondary Students ]



Young people don't have a strong voice – most platforms are undemocratic and tokenistic.

[ Member of Union of Secondary Students ]



As a non-national residing in Eire in care, a fee of €19.10 is being given to us on a weekly basis, which is unsubstantial.

[ Shola, 16, Dublin ]



The thing I would like to improve in Ireland is our respect for the environment. Our country is currently known for being "green", but if our attitude towards the environment doesn't change, our country in the not too distant future will be known for being "barren and dull".

[ Róisín, 16, Waterford ]



### Good things about living in Ireland



Ireland is a safe and peaceful country for young people. Ireland cares about young people. Ireland can provide clothes, money and shelter for young people. Ireland can provide a good education for young people. The Irish Government is very friendly to young people.

### Bad things

I have been in Ireland for one year now and I live in a hostel. But the problem I have now is my status. It is not easy for a young person like me to get status; almost all the other young people living in my hostel have no status. Without status you cannot do anything – for example, you cannot work, go to college or live on your own. Without status when you are an adult (i.e. 18) they deport you back to your own country. Living in the hostel is not a life, you can't eat what you want, and you can't go where you want.



### Changes

If I had a magic wand, I would give status to every young person living in the hostel who is going to school every day and they have no criminal record at the police station.

[ Young man, age 16, from Nigeria ]



### Changes

I would change the education life in Ireland for people under care, and those that are asylum seekers because I am one of them. My plan is that after my second level education I want to go to college and study accounting and for me to be there I have to have status in Ireland. If I had a magic wand, I would like to make college education free for everyone in Ireland.

[ Rurayat, age 16,  
young person in care, Dublin ]





## Bad Things

- Ireland's expensive.
- Public transport is expensive, unreliable, uncomfortable and doesn't run often enough.
- School holidays are getting shorter.
- Public toilets smell and there's not enough of them.
- Most adults don't respect the views of young people.
- Public health is terrible.
- Dental services are terrible when using the public system.
- There is a lot of peer pressure.
- There is nothing for young people to do except "hang around"; if there was some place to go and "hang around", young people would be out of harm's way.
- There is a lot of bullying going on and nothing being done about it.
- Car insurance, car prices and petrol are too expensive for young people to be able to afford.

[ Niamh, 16 ]



## Changes

- Have more rights for children outlined in law.
- Have a helpline for teenagers. There is one for children, but most teenagers feel too old to call it, and too young to call the Samaritans.
- Young people need a proper platform to voice our opinions.

[ Member of Union of Secondary Students ]



November 2005

**Dear Committee Member,**

We are happy that we are given free education and the right to health care, which is important. Freedom of speech and protest – We can express ourselves and speak out our minds. Freedom of religion – We are happy we are given the right to practice our religion, which is most important in one's life. We are really grateful for all the rights you give us.

We are not given the right to work. Most of us immigrants are not legal and we can be deported back to our country at any time. We need to work for money to give us a good standard when we get back to our countries. Deportation – Some people left their country for one problem or another and we came here because we believed you can help us, but most of us end up in deportation and have to go back to our terrible and sad life, especially children. When we say our problems, they don't believe us and threaten to take us back to our country, and this doesn't help us concentrate in class. We don't have a good night's sleep at night. All we do is cry and some of us think about committing suicide. WE WANT DEPORTATION TO STOP. HAVE PITY. We can't come here if we didn't have problems in our countries or families. Please, we are begging you with all our hearts not to deport us and to give us status. We will forever be grateful and do something good in return for this country, Ireland. We love to be here.

Thanks very much for the good things you've done in our lives. Please help.

[ A Group of Young Immigrants, 15-16 years ]





### Good things

- There is a great atmosphere and community spirit in my area.
- Ireland is a wealthy country.
- People are forced to go to school, which creates a more intelligent workforce.
- There is a lot of sexual awareness in my community.
- I think young people have a lot of fun without the use of drugs and alcohol, just hanging around.
- Third level is very accessible.



### Bad things

- My opinion doesn't matter to the Government.
- There is a lack of festivals and music gigs.
- Everything is very expensive (even water).
- Not enough circular flow of money (wages, grants) for young people.
- Public transport is rarely on time.
- There is a lack of information for early school leavers on what to do after school.
- There is a large, regular flow of drugs in my area.
- A lot of discrimination towards men/young men in Ireland.



### Changes

- Cheaper goods/services.
- More voice for children, i.e. give children minor powers.
- Make grants more accessible.
- Better public transport (more supply/be on time).
- Better wages for under 18s in the workplace.
- More recreation/arts centres around the country.
- I'd like to see more festivals and music gigs in Waterford.
- Cheaper activities for young people.
- More awareness/facilities to help young people become aware of their health.

[ Anthony, aged 17, Waterford ]

Racism is a major problem. People might say that it is ignorance that causes racism, but from my experience even educated and qualified people are racist, especially against black people. If I had a magic wand, I would change everybody's mind so that we are all equal and no one is unequal.

[ Anonymous ]



Teen depression and the amount of young people suffering from depression is too high. This is not dealt with properly.

[ Member of Union of Secondary Students ]



You can't have doctor-patient confidentiality until you are older than 16. This stops young people/children from going to see the doctor if they are in need of one, out of fear that their parents will find out.

[ Member of Union of Secondary Students ]



### Good things

- People are very friendly, with a good community spirit.
- School holidays are nice and long.
- Freedom of speech
- It's a wealthy country.
- You are forced to go to school once you are under the age of 16, which is good as everyone gets an education.

[ Melanie, age 17 ]





November 2005

**Dear Committee Member,**

We are refugee children living in Ireland. We had to leave our family and friends behind, hoping that we will get to a place where we can live safely, a place to call home.

Article 22 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that we have the right to special protection and help. We feel grateful that we have the basic human needs now – accommodation, health care and education. But, unfortunately, we feel unhappy about the asylum process. For a minor, there's the issue of credibility and trust. We feel like the Department of Justice is not taking us seriously about our cases and stories. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a child has a right to express himself and to be taken seriously.

The credibility issue is based on documents: we have to show documents to support our claim. When we are leaving our countries, we leave like we are escaping from prison and, honestly, 'documents' are the last thing that you think about.

As a result, about 80% of the minors we know don't have refugee status. We receive negative decisions even from the courts. The Government will appoint a solicitor against you, saying our credibility can't be trusted. After failing to get refugee status, we try to apply for humanitarian leave to remain. Even then, about 90% of the decisions by the Minister for Justice will be negative. The solicitor will tell you that, having failed to get refugee status, you don't deserve humanitarian leave to remain because that will be like rewarding you for your lies. And then there's the deportation issue. After staying in the country for years, once we turn eighteen, there's the possibility of getting deported. Every day friends are being deported from school with their school uniforms on.

We just want to be helped, to be taken seriously and to be sure that we are not going to be sent back to war-torn countries. Countries where we lived the most difficult times of our lives. Where we lost family members and friends – loved ones in this life. Countries where there is no system of justice. The most hostile countries in the world, like Somalia, Afghanistan and Eritrea.

Thank you,

Four young asylum seekers, aged 16-17 years.



## METHODOLOGY

The Children's Rights Alliance collaborated with several of its member organisations to produce this report. Between October and December 2005, thirteen organisations held a total of seventeen consultation workshops with 132 children.

Participating organisations and their staff were given specially designed information and good practice guidelines to help them hold the workshops. Additional support was also provided to the individuals who planned and held the workshops.

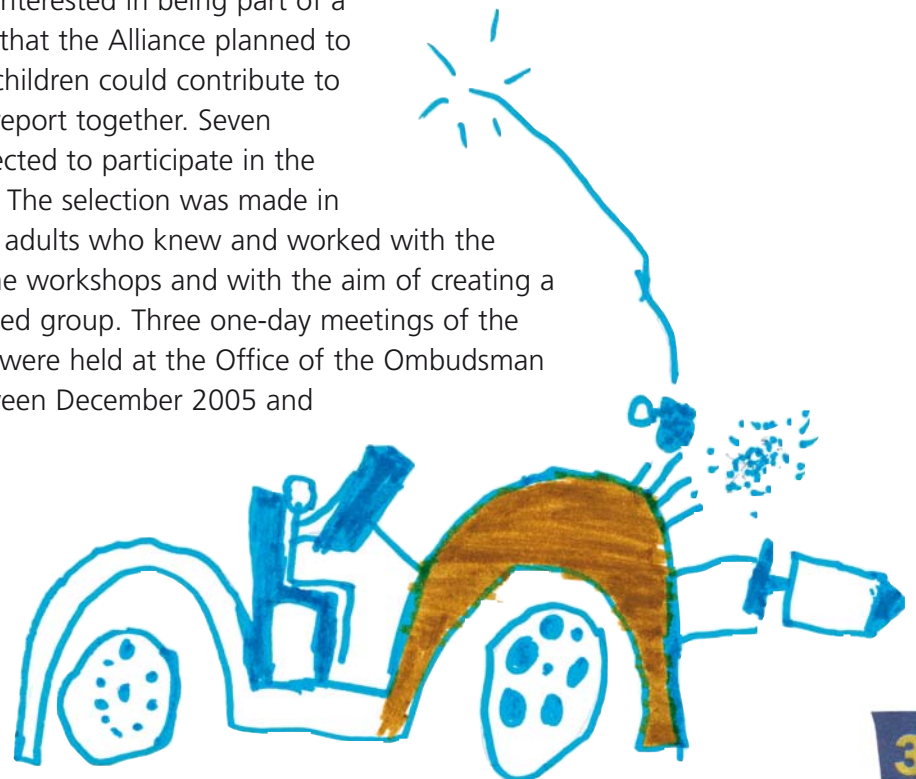
In the workshops, participating children were asked three open-ended questions:

1. What are the good things about being a child/young person living in Ireland?
2. What are the bad things about being a child/young person living in Ireland?
3. If you had a magic wand, what changes would you like to see happen to make things better for you?

The aim of asking these open questions was to give children the chance to decide what issues they wanted to raise. Furthermore, it was explained to the children that they were not being asked to speak on behalf of children in Ireland, but to respond to the questions based on their own experiences.

The methods used were chosen to support the creation of the children's scrapbook that is at the heart of this report. The majority of participating organisations followed the Alliance's suggestion that they support children to create written work and/or artwork. One organisation also used photography to enable very young children to be part of the project. Another organisation worked with a group of children belonging to a film club to make a short film.

Children aged 11 to 17 who were taking part in the workshops were invited to let the Alliance know if they would be interested in being part of a Reference Group that the Alliance planned to establish so that children could contribute to putting the final report together. Seven children were selected to participate in the Reference Group. The selection was made in consultation with adults who knew and worked with the children during the workshops and with the aim of creating a mixed and balanced group. Three one-day meetings of the Reference Group were held at the Office of the Ombudsman for Children between December 2005 and February 2006.







During these meetings, Reference Group members were supported to select material for inclusion in the report. In making their choices, the children made sure to include at least one piece of work from each of the seventeen consultation workshops. In addition, they were supported in selecting pieces that, taken together, would reflect the range of themes touched on by the 132 children who took part in the project. The Reference Group also participated in decisions relating to the title, design and layout of the report. Finally, the group worked together to write a comment for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the children's material. The group's comment is included in this report by way of a letter that introduces the scrapbook of children's views and ideas.

In all matters relating to this work the Alliance has conformed to standard ethical guidelines.

## Profile of Participating Children

Those who organised the consultation workshops were asked to complete an information form to enable the Alliance to create a general profile of children who participated in this project. The information the Alliance received is summarised below.

<sup>1</sup> 'Not known' is used where the data requested was not provided.

<sup>2</sup> 'Nationality' in this context refers to the identified country of origin of participating children.

## Age range of participating children

• 0-5 years	9
• 6-10 years	42
• 11-14 years	22
• 15-17 years	59

## Gender of participating children

• Girls	52
• Boys	74
• Not known <sup>1</sup>	6

## Home location of participating children

*(By county in the Republic of Ireland)*

• Cork	2
• Dublin	76
• Galway	1
• Louth	3
• Meath	4
• Monaghan	3
• Offaly	10
• Waterford	19
• Wexford	14

## 'Home' for participating children

• With family	97
• Residential hostel	32
• Residential care	2
• Foster care	1



### Nationality of participating children<sup>2</sup>

• Irish	93
• Nigerian	9
• Somalian	4
• Eritrean	2
• Ethiopian	1
• Kosovan	1
• Afghan	1
• Russian-American	1
• Russian-Irish	1
• Norwegian	1
• UK	1
• Not known	17

### Religion of participating children

• Roman Catholic	72
• Muslim	9
• Christian	8
• Pentecostal	2
• Orthodox	1
• None	4
• Not known	36

### Ethnicity of participating children

• Caucasian	77
• Traveller	19
• Black African	9
• Eastern European	1
• Not specified	26

### Additional information available

• Children using homeless services	7
• Children with disabilities	3
• Separated children seeking asylum	12
• Separated children with refugee status	2
• Separated children with residency status	1
• Separated children with leave to remain	1
• Separated children, status not known	17



Jack, Christopher and Karl like playing in the block area.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Participating Children

The Children's Rights Alliance would like to say **a big thank you** to the children who contributed their time and creativity to this project by taking part in workshops and sending material for inclusion in this report.

While it has not been possible to include all of the material received, the Alliance hopes that the children who took part will see the report as a successful reflection of the experiences, views and ideas, which they so generously shared with us.

The Alliance is especially grateful to members of the Reference Group for their work to finalise this report. They are:

- Melissa Boyd, age 12
- Claire English, age 15
- Rob  rt Kayitare, age 16
- Patrick McDonagh, age 16
- Daniel Meehan, age 17
- Sean Mulvany, age 11
- Lorraine Regan, age 15

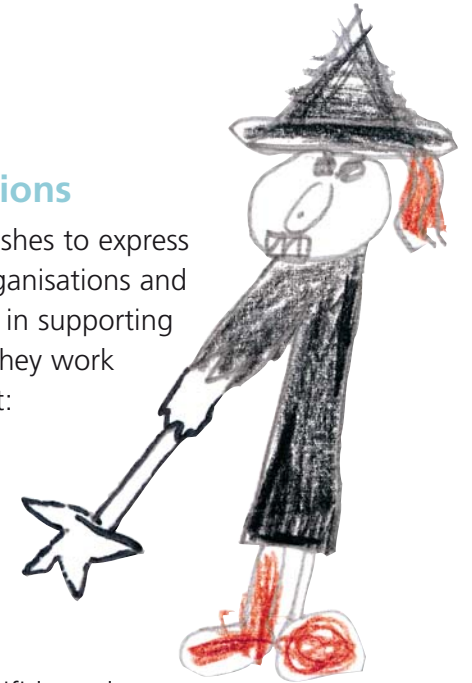
The energy, care and commitment that characterised their work have significantly enhanced the status of this report as a collaboration between the Children's Rights Alliance and children living in Ireland.



## Participating Organisations

The Children's Rights Alliance wishes to express its gratitude to the following organisations and their staff for their collaboration in supporting the children and young people they work with to contribute to this project:

- The Ark
- Barnardos
- Border Counties Childcare Network
- Children in Hospital Ireland
- Irish Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus
- Crosscare Aftercare
- Educate Together and Gorey Educate Together National School
- Focus Ireland
- Irish Association of Young People in Care
- Irish Refugee Council
- Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- Pavee Point
- Union of Secondary Students

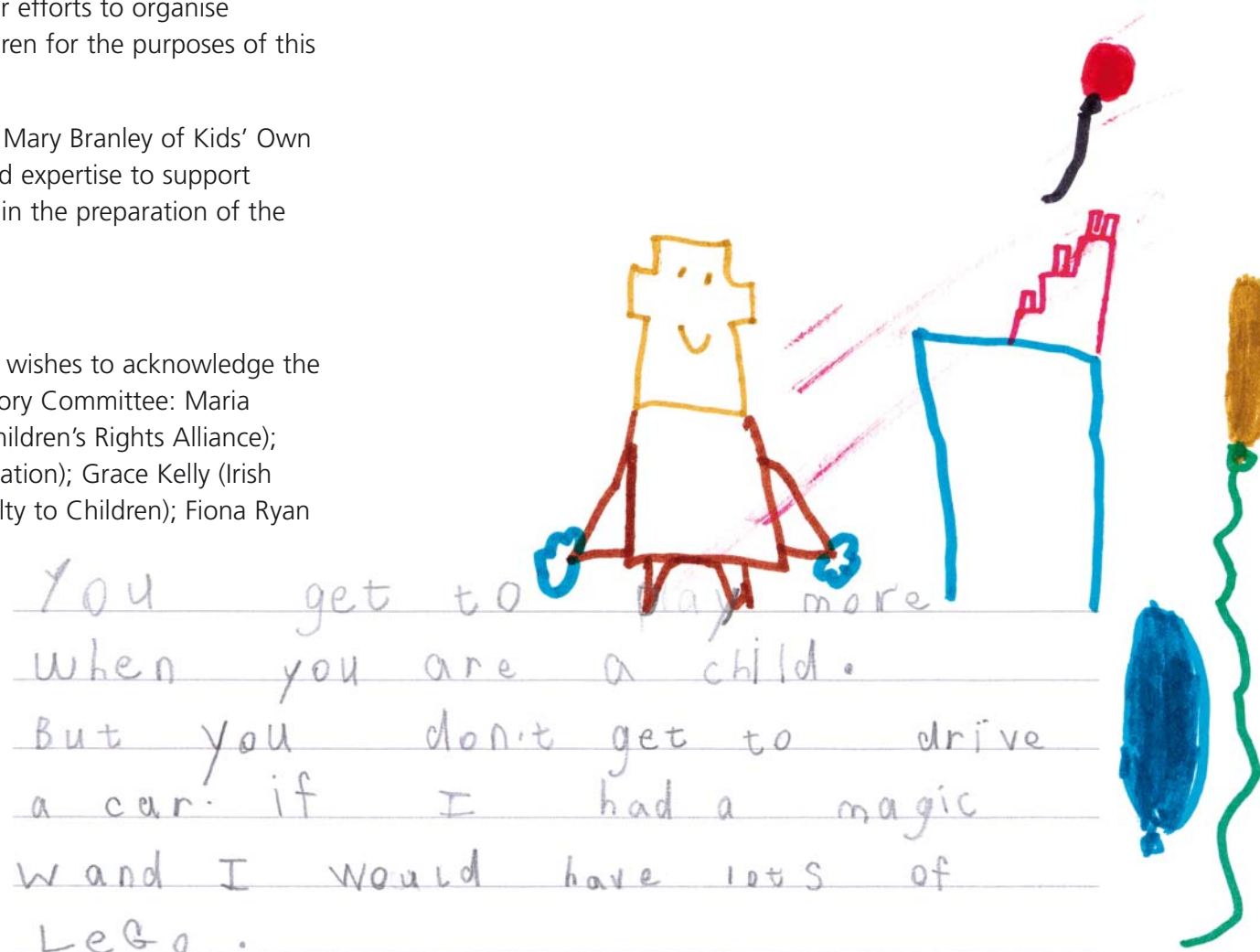


The Alliance would also like to thank Enable Ireland and the National Youth Federation for their efforts to organise consultation workshops with children for the purposes of this project.

A special note of thanks is due to Mary Branley of Kids' Own Publishing for sharing her time and expertise to support members of the Reference Group in the preparation of the final report.

### Advisory Committee

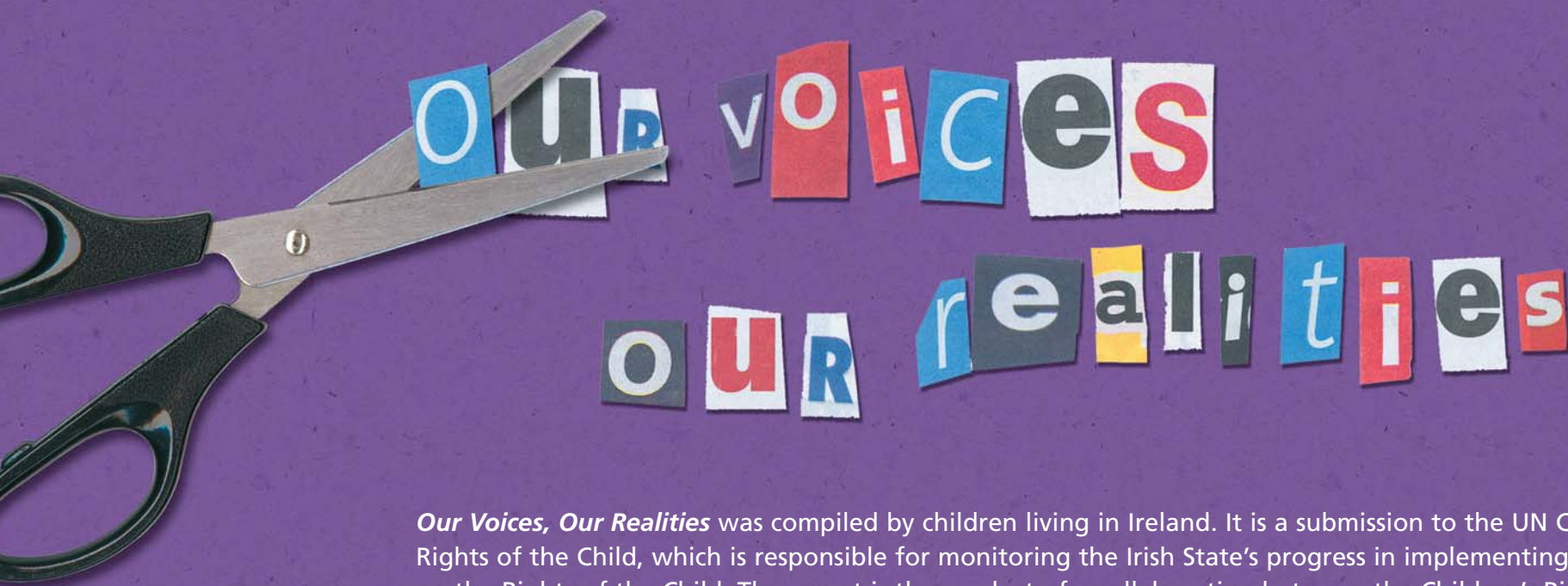
The Children's Rights Alliance also wishes to acknowledge the contribution of the project's Advisory Committee: Maria Corbett and Stacey Gutkowski (Children's Rights Alliance); Ruth Griffin (National Youth Federation); Grace Kelly (Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children); Fiona Ryan and June Tinsley (Barnardos).



[ Oisín, age 7, Co. Wexford ]







***Our Voices, Our Realities*** was compiled by children living in Ireland. It is a submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which is responsible for monitoring the Irish State's progress in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The report is the product of a collaboration between the Children's Rights Alliance (Republic of Ireland) and a number of its member organisations who work with children in Ireland. One hundred and thirty-two children of all ages took part in workshops in which they were invited to express their views and ideas. A selection of their work, chosen by a reference group of children, is presented here as a series of snapshots of what it is like to be a child living in Ireland to-day – the good things, the bad things and changes that could enhance their quality of life and support them to fulfil their potential.



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