

108 WIMPS CAMPAIGN

L to R

Christopher Madden, WIMPS; Gerry Kelly MLA; Patricia Lewsley, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People; Ian Paisley Junior, MLA; Ellen Diver, WIMPS. On the steps of Stormont on 20 November 2007 with 108 young people from around Northern Ireland. Photo Courtesy Harrison Photography



The Thrill of Getting Things Done - taking it to the Assembly



The 20th of November is **Universal Children's Day**, and to mark the occasion in 2007, 108 young people went to the Northern Ireland Assembly to campaign for the establishment of a Youth Assembly. The campaign was led by two young activists, Christopher Madden (14) from Carrickfergus and Ellen Diver (18) from Derry.

The event was supported by the office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) and by the Lottery's Big Deal programme, and by schools and youth groups from across Northern Ireland.

Early on the 20th November, young people started gathering at the Pavillion at Stormont to participate in a workshops aimed at gathering their views on a range of issues

relating to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Patricia Lewsley addressed the group, as did Chris and Ellen about the importance of getting the voices and views of children and young people into places where decisions are made that affect their lives.

In spite of it being a bitterly cold and overcast day, the 108 young people (actually there were 124 but the number is symbolic of the number of Members of the Legislative Assembly) walked up the one mile drive at Stormont. There they were greeted by Junior Ministers Ian Paisley Junior and Gerry Kelly. More than 15 other MLAs (including Environment Minister Arlene Foster) from all parties came out to receive the group, and to hear the views of young people first hand.

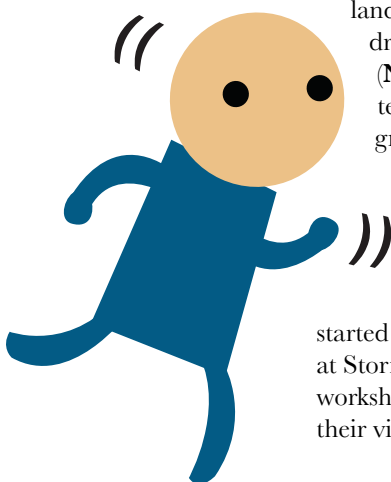
Christopher and Ellen put their views directly to the Ministers, calling for the creation of a meaningful structure that gives

young people a direct voice to the heart of government, and highlighting that Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK or Ireland without such a structure currently.

Young people held up placards with an 'X' on one side - indicating their support for a Youth Assembly, and on the other they had a range of issues affecting young people relating to the UNCRC.

"We are always looking for new and interesting ways to effectively directly engage young people," said Gerry Kelly, **"and marching up the steps of Stormont is certainly a direct approach!"**

"It is great to see so many young people interested in making their views known and contributing so positively to ensuring the views of young people are recognised" iterated Ian Paisley Junior.





Left: Arriving at Stormont, 108 young people from all across Northern Ireland, and Below: Ellen and Christopher meet First Minister, Dr Ian Paisley MP, MLA, inside Parliament Buildings

Photos, Paul Smyth



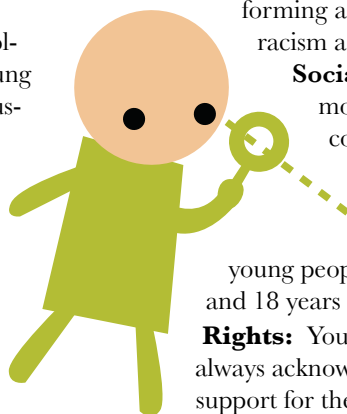
We are serious - take us seriously! The message from 108

At the workshop on the morning of 20th November, the young people present highlighted a very wide range of issues that they want the Assembly to address - but they also stressed that they as young people want to have a voice and a role in addressing these issues.

The workshop used a mobile messaging technology called 'Swarmtteams' to gather the views of young people on the day using texting, and also used discussion and postcards to get as much information as possible from the young people in attendance.

The issues young people wanted to help address, fall into four main categories - Health, Education, Social Development and Rights.

Health: Young people are very concerned about youth suicide, and about many of the problems that adults also worry about such as drug and alcohol abuse (including smoking), bullying, underage sexual activity and abuse. They also worry about mental health and the lack of adequate facilities for young people.



Education: Many in the group were concerned about the choice of courses and jobs available to them, and the need for better resourcing of schools. They suggested that there should be special 'academies' for sports and performing arts. They were also concerned about racism and sectarianism (in school and elsewhere).

Social Development: Young people felt that more resources needed to go into local communities to address their needs and the needs of their communities. Several members of the group felt that there are not sufficient facilities aimed at young people (the group were mostly between 14 and 18 years of age).

Rights: Young people felt that their rights are not always acknowledged or respected. There was broad support for the idea that a Youth Assembly could help champion these rights and help ensure that young people are involved in decisions that have an impact on their rights and their lives.

What Should it Do? wide range of views on role of youth assembly

There were a wide range of views on the role and functions of a Youth Assembly. We have divided the views into the following categories: communication (internal and external); structures and powers. There was consensus that there should be an ongoing process to examine, test and refine ideas about what the best structure for Northern Ireland would be -including reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of models elsewhere.

External Communication:

There was strong consensus that any Youth Assembly or similar body, needed to regularly and clearly communicate what it is doing (and why) to the wider population of young people. The Youth Assembly should be open and accountable. It was also agreed that

this body should have regular and ongoing contact with MLAs and the Assembly.

Internal Communication:

There was also some consensus on the internal communications of the body, with people using terms such as 'civilized debate' and 'respect'. It seemed important that the body sets the right tone, both in terms of constructive working internally and presenting a serious view of young people and



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their concerns about the issues they would be addressing.

Structures: There was less consensus on what the structures of the Youth Assembly might look like, with some favouring an 'Executive Style' committee who would do most of the direct engagement with MLAs and others favouring more open engagement. There was consensus that the body should be held accountable with a high level of scrutiny (again most likely related to the desire to be taken seriously). One person said it should be chaired by a Judge, and another said a 'Commissioner' should hold it accountable. Several people talked about the need for

proper resources and staffing for the body.

Powers: This issue brought up some of the most surprising points. Young people wanted the body to have real power - including powers to hold the Assembly (Stormont!) accountable. Sue the Government if they don't follow through", said one, and "have a law that if they don't follow through they're breaking the law" said another! Broadly the young people wanted to be taken seriously, to have their rights to participate acknowledged and upheld, and to be involved in making real decisions about real issues.

Who were the 108? who got involved on the day?



At the Pavillion

Some of the young people, teachers and youth workers involved on the day.

Firstly, the 108 were actually 124! The young people who participated in the 108 event on 20th November were mostly aged between 13 and 18, and came from 5 schools, 7 youth groups and organisations and there were also 3 students from Queens University and several youth workers, volunteers and teachers accompanying the participating groups. The breakdown of the 124 young people who participated is as follows:

- * Hazelwood Integrated School(14)
- *Dundonald High School (12)
- *Victoria College (15)
- *Newtownbreda High (7)
- *St Joseph's College (15)
- *WIMPS Belfast (7)
- *Colin Youth Forum (5)
- *Rathgill - Bangor (10)
- *Headliners (5)
- *Space - North Belfast (3)
- *React (4)
- *Cliftonville CEP (12)
- *Coleraine Youth Forum (12)
- *QUB students (3)

Where next? Next steps 108

The 108 event on 20th November was hailed as a great success by the young people, organisations and politicians involved, but clearly it is only a start. Public Achievement is submitting this report into the consultation on a 'Network for Youth' in Northern Ireland. As yet it is unclear whether that process will see the creation of a Youth Assembly or similar structure, but it is envisaged that there will be some structure at local and regional level to channel the views of young people. This network was envisaged as part of the 'Review of Public Administration' process.

Meanwhile, the 108 Campaign will continue, and the next phase will involve some research on the other models around these islands and more widely (particularly Scandinavia, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the Basque Country), and ongoing discussion with young people and between young people and politicians.

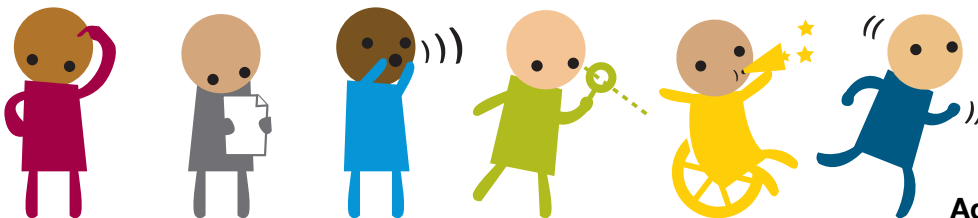
You can follow and get involved in the campaign on the WIMPS website at www.wimps.org.uk



On the Steps
Young people highlighting many of the issues they would like a Youth Assembly to address

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