



**Young People's Response To  
Independent Monitoring Board Annual Report  
Hydebank Wood YOC and Prison 2007/8**

*"It's because we're nobody's, because they don't care about us on the outside,  
we're nothing, we don't matter."*

**August 2009**

## **About Include Youth**

Include Youth promotes best practice with young people in need or at risk of social exclusion. We achieve this through the development and promotion of resources, the provision of training, information and support of practitioners and organisations. We also undertake activities aimed at influencing public policy and policy awareness – both locally and nationally as well as working directly with the most marginalised of young people.

Include Youth runs the Young Voices project, a participation project for young people who have been involved or are at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system, with the aim of supporting these young people to become involved in decision-making processes which impact on their lives. Young Voices runs group in custody (JJCNI – Woodlands and Hydebank Wood YOC) and in the community, particularly North Belfast.

## **This Report**

In response to the publication of the Independent Monitoring Board's report Include Youth carried out a number of consultations and focus groups with young people in Hydebank Young Offenders Centre. Include Youth were keen to gain a young persons perspective of the YOC and therefore we worked with young people on the juvenile (ie aged 17 and below) landings between April and July 2009 with verification undertaken in August. This included discussions around being locked up, the daily routine, relationships with staff, education provision, physical and mental health needs and the complaints procedure. We have attempted to verify and confirm young people's experiences and views as robustly as possible and are confident that this report is an accurate representation of the views of the young people we spoke to. The report outlines the opinions of the young people on each of these issues, drawing heavily on direct quotes and with minimal interpretation or analysis from us. It is important to note that this report does not represent either an evaluation or an inspection of Hydebank YOC but a reflection of the direct experiences, views and perceptions of the children who have been held there in 2009.

Young Voices has been operating in the YOC since 2008 and has undertaken a wide-range of policy and service delivery consultations with the young people which include Youth Justice Agency Corporate Plan, Priorities for the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Community Safety Strategy and Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. The work centred on the IMB report was undertaken with the knowledge and facilitation of the YOC authorities but without their involvement or participation. It must be stressed that Include Youth's work in the YOC has been undertaken with the co-operation and support of the prison staff particularly those on the Willow Landings. At no time was there any attempt to influence our activities.

## Daily Routine

The young people were asked to describe their daily routine in the Young Offenders Centre. This discussion was dominated by the young people's experiences of being locked up. Apart from during meal times, the young people appear to spend the majority of their day locked up.

*"It depends, you can be locked everyday, unless you're an orderly and there's none on this landing [Willow 1] - it's the only landing in the whole jail where there isn't one."*

*"You can be locked most of the day."*

*"Some days you can be lucky to get out for breakfast."*

There appears to be variation in the amount of time given for association depending on which prison officers are on shift. The young people stated that those prison officers on weekend shifts are less likely to let the young people have association time. There is also a widespread belief that some prison officers treat the young people less favourably than others and that lock up is used by some prison officers as a way of getting at the young people. Young people were asked specifically about their daily routine.

### **YOC Daily routine:**

#### **6.00 a.m.**

You get woken up, to make sure you're still alive – they bang on your door or shout in through the wee hatch

#### **7.30**

They bang on the door or shout through to get you up. Then you get washed and get dressed, get ready.

#### **8.00**

Out for breakfast – out in the association room. Unless you're "loss of" [either loss of association or "loss of everything" status], then you have breakfast locked in your room just.

#### **9.00**

You're out for breakfast for about 15 minutes, then back into your room for about 20 minutes, until they let you out again at about 9.00, if you've got a job or if you going to education.

If you don't have a job or you're not going to education you're locked till 12.00 normally. *Some* staff will let you out to work – to do things round the landing just, cleaning, tidying, whatever needs done

#### **12.00**

Lunch – till about 12.15, unless you're "loss of". Then we're locked again until 2/ half 2

#### **2/2.30 – 4.00**

You can be out then till about 4.00 – you can have a shower, play the PlayStation, make phone calls, whatever you want

#### **4.00**

Back in your rooms

#### **4.45/5.00**

Out for dinner – then we're out for association, until about 7/7.30

#### **7.00**

Everyone's locked, and that's you till the next morning.

When asked about the **weekends** the young people generally had differing experiences.

*“No – on Sundays there’s no association time “*

*“Because there’s not enough workers, not enough staff on”*

*“You’re locked 12-5, then out on association till 7/10 past. You get out for lunch, at 12/half 12, for 15 minutes at the most.”*

*“After 7 we’re locked, always. Some days there’s no asso at all.”*

*“There’s no asso on Sundays, cos it’s all the officers come on then, who can’t be bothered.”*

*“Or even if the staff just don’t want to let you out, then you’re locked.”*

*“Sundays you get locked from 5 o’clock, no association, you get locked till the next.”*

The only change in the lock up routine was at weekends with the opportunity to attend religious services which is seen as a way to break the boredom of the normal routine.

*“People only really go to Mass ‘cos it means they get out of their cells for a bit - you just sit there with your head down. It’s different, a change just.”*

*“Weekends are different. Sunday you go to the gym and people go to Mass.”*

The young people also enjoy the opportunity to go to the gym but complained about the long waiting list to use it and also about the fact that going to the gym can affect the amount of association time you get.

*“You can go to the gym Monday, Wednesday or Friday too, but it takes away from your association time then.”*

*“You have to wait 2 weeks to get on the timetable to go to the gym.”*

## **Lock Up**

Some of the young people experience lock up more than others. There appeared to be a division between those young people who had jobs within the Centre and those who did not. Likewise some of the young people regarded themselves as the ones most likely to be locked up because they were seen as the ones who were most badly behaved.

*“Boys like us get locked all the time, cos we’ve no job.”*

The young people were unclear as the criteria for awarding jobs and believed that it concerned length of sentence as well as behaviour.

*“Whoever’s in longest and on enhanced.”*

*“Nah, it’s not that, it’s just cos of your behaviour.”*

*“I’m out loads everyday – it depends if you’re out doing work or not.”*

Young people on remand appear to experience lock up the most.

*“Well on remand you’re not allowed out because of industrial action.”*

*“Last week them ones [remand inmates] were locked up in their cell all day, except for one day.”*

*“The only time I got out then was for breakfast – I didn’t get out at all on Thursday.”*

*“They can do that because we’re on remand.”*

Too often the young people felt that whether they were allowed out of their cells or not depended on the mood of the prison officer on the day. Rather than having procedures in place which are followed to regulate the daily routine, a lot of the young people’s daily routine and opportunity to be out off their cell appears to be a matter of ‘luck’. Many

decisions seem to be taken on the whim of the prison officers and favouritism results in some young people being treated differently than others.

*“We’re locked more than not – more than other landing.”*

*“It depends what mood staff are in.”*

*“You should be out for at least an hour everyday, even if you’re locked – but you might not be if staff don’t like you.”*

*“If any of the staff are pissed off with you, you get locked, no asso [association time].”*

*“But even if you don’t do anything you can get locked.”*

*“[Staff member] locks me for nothing (for chewing paper once)cos he doesn’t like me.”*

*“You can get locked 23 hours if the staff don’t like you – like [young person], he’s been locked for 3 weeks cos the staff don’t like him. Like I know he can be a dick and he annoys everyone, but it’s not right that he gets locked because of that - you’d go mad.”*

When asked if being locked up was used as a form of punishment in the Young Offenders Centre, the young people were emphatic in their reply.

*“I got locked in for 10 days, wasn’t let out of my cell – for writing my name on a desk.”*

*“they smelled smoke in the kitchen today and we got locked.”*

*“like you’re already locked up and you get “locked up” when you’re in here as well.”*

The young people also said withholding association, verbal harassment by prison officers, as well as being locked up for 24 hours was used as a form of punishment.

*“Lack of association.”*

*“The block – getting sent down to the block”*

*“That’s the f\*\*\*ing worst – you get locked in for 24 hours, out for your dinner just.”*

*“Blanket punishments – like if one person f\*\*\*s about, the whole landing gets punished for it.”*

*“Or you can get made to feel really small by the screws, call you names and all.”*

The young people are well aware what impact short staffing has on their experiences in the Young Offenders Centre. It results in the young people being locked up more often than not and also has a knock on effect in how they believe the prison officers interact with them.

*“Lucky means there’s enough staff on to let you out – if there’s only one [staff] on the landing, they’re not meant to let you out.”*

*“The whole jail’s short staffed and that means we get locked in our cells more.”*

*“Every Sunday’s going to be locked in now, cos they’re short staffed.”*

Other young people are less convinced that the reason they are locked up more is due to staffing shortages and more to do with prison officers lack of willingness to engage with the young people and to have more free time themselves to relax and socialise.

*“They say they’re short of staff, but that’s b\*\*\*\*\*s – me and [friend] are out, cos we’re orderlies, and there can be 3 [staff] on and they say that the reason they’re not letting people out is because they’re short staffed, but they’re not, we can see the 3 of them sitting drinking tea – they just cant be bothered.”*

*“You get told it’s because something happened in another part of the centre. Like if there’s trouble on Ash, we get locked – but it’s a separate prison! It’s not going to affect us here, why do we get locked?! Some staff are still sitting in the office drinking tea; it’s not even as if they’re running over to help. “*

The young people are often not fully informed of the reasons for being locked up.

*“You just get told it’s cos they’re short staffed.”  
“Or you get told, “Because I say so!””*

## **Staff**

The young people talked a lot about their relationship with the prison officers. There appears to be a division between those officers they regard as the ‘good ones’ and those that they have more problems with and who they see as completely disrespecting them. What appears to qualify as the characteristics of a ‘good’ prison officer is a willingness to show respect to the young people, an ability to be more relaxed in their interaction with the young people and less punitive generally.

*“Good ones won’t follow you everywhere you go – like if you go to the toilet, they won’t stand outside waiting for you.”*

*“The good ones have a laugh with you, they’re more relaxed – they won’t [let you] break the rules or nothing, but they’re just less strict, more relaxed.”*

*“Certain ones are ok – there’s about 5 of them are sweet [out of approx 10 staff on the landing].”*

*“And the good ones don’t look down on you, make out that they’re better than you cos you’re in here.”*

*“The ones you’ve a good relationship with give you extra wee things, let you do things more – the odd one or two are just a bit more relaxed.”*

*“Don’t get me wrong, lots of them are sound, dead on – like see [staff member], he’s 100% - he gives us a laugh, makes life better in here, he’s making it easier for us – especially us ones here on remand who don’t get outside at all.”*

Unfortunately, for all the number of positive comments about some prison officers there were many more negative comments about others. The young people described the negative behaviour of some prison officers, which could only be summed up as vindictive and highly unprofessional. There is a sense of a general lack of respect shown by some prison officers.

*“Some go at you like you’re a real f\*\*\*in criminal – whether you’re in here on remand or whatever.”*

*“The night people on the landing, they’re w\*\*\*\*ers – they blow smoke under your door at night cos they know we can’t smoke.”*

*“Some wind you up so you’ll crack, so they can lock you in your room.”*

*“The bad ones just pick on you for no reason, just because they don’t like you.”*

*“Some would lock you quicker than others.”*

*One of them called me over the other day, shouted over to me, “Come here I want you!”, then when I walked over to him, he just said, “F\*\*k you!”*

The young people gave examples of when they believe they have got on the wrong side of certain prison officers, and have received harsh and inappropriate treatment as a result.

*“They can make your life a misery – keep you in your cell, take your TV, call you all the names of the day.”*

*“Or they can bang on your cell door all night.”*

*“They only do that to make sure you’re ok – bang on the door and look through the wee slit.”*

*“Aye, but they can do it just to annoy you too.”*

*“And they can threaten you with stuff, say they’ll turn off your electric or something, and this that or the other.”*

*“You can never win, because at the end of the day you’re always going back to your cell and they can take your TV, leave you in there, just to show you who’s boss.”*

The young people dislike being called by their surname and see this as illustrative of how little respect they are shown.

*“They should use your first name – it’s like talking down to us using our second name. We have to call them “Sir”, or “Mr Whoever”, but they just say “[second name]!””*

A number of the young people made reference to the fact that many of the staff are not equipped to deal with young people and are more used to high security situations. Others felt that some of the staff use their position to assert unnecessary and unregulated authority.

*“Some twisted ones work here – they’ve been in with Provies and all, used to high security – they’re not used to working with 15/16 year olds.”*

*“Some staff abuse their power in here.”*

### **Impact of Treatment by Staff**

The young people talked about what impact staff mistreatment has on them. The consequences can be far reaching and should not be underestimated.

*“See the way they [staff] get on in here sometimes, it makes you...see some [young] people in here, they way they are it might make them throw a rope up.”*

*“It makes you feel that you’re not as good as they [staff] are.”*

Some of the young people believe that because of the way they are treated by staff they are more likely to become angry and stressed out and re-offend on release as a result. They are kicking back at a system which they see contributes to their pecking order in society. The following comments provide us with an invaluable insight into how their time at the Centre impacts on young people.

*“See if you get treated badly, like getting locked in your room all the time, you get angry and it makes you worse.”*

*“And you don’t want to let them put one over on you, so you wreck the place.”*

*“In here they more or less learn you how to be angry, then when you get out, it sticks with you.”*

*“That’s cos you sit in your cell just staring all day and when you get out...it’s like a dog – you can beat it all day long, then when you turn your back it might bite you.”*

*“It’s not just the sitting in your cell but, it’s the way they wind you up.”*

Others spoke of what a difference it can make if a ‘good’ prison officer is on duty. The general atmosphere improves as a result and the young people are less likely to kick back at what they regard as unfair behaviour.

*“There’s a better atmosphere if the staff are dead on.”*

*“Time passes quicker, cos everyone enjoys themselves.”*

*“You’re more relaxed, you feel less pressure.”*

*“If you have good craic, you don’t f\*\*\* about as much.”*

*“It makes you feel less angry.”*

*“You’re more happier, you aren’t cheeky back to them.”*

The variation in how staff treat the young people is most apparent. There does not appear to be any consistency of approach and too much of the routine and subsequent actions of officers are dependent on the personality and character of individual staff.

*“Yes, some – like see in the mornings, some bang on your door like f\*\*\* to get you up – like there’s no need for that, but others just give you a wee knock and look in to make sure you’re ok.”*

*“All of them stick to the rules, but some do things differently just – like some will let you go and make toast in the evening, let you out of your room, let you move about and do what you want – others make you ask for everything.”*

*“Well, some work the way they’re meant to and others don’t – like see [2 staff members], they’d do anything for you.”*

Some young people also felt that there was an element of religious discrimination at play.

*“You can have staff taking sides sometimes if there’s arguments about religion – like they’ll take one side or the other, Protestant or Catholic.”*

*“Aye, Prods get treated better than Catholics. Like if a Catholics cheeky, they’ll get locked or loss of association – a Prod’ll get locked then get let out again, or they’ll get their TV and all back quicker.”*

*“And us Catholics, we get all the serverly jobs, all the work.”*

Other young people felt that they were unfairly treated because of the cultural background or accents - a traveller young person stated that:

*“There’s slagging and shit – from inmates and staff – mostly staff, about my accent. Some of its ok, just messing, but some nasty stuff, they can be cheeky bastards”*

## **Rehabilitation and Resettlement**

The young people were asked how they thought the prison authorities valued and prioritised rehabilitation of young offenders.

*“They don’t give a f\*\*\* about rehabilitation.”*

*“They f\*\*\*ing do nothing about that here – see when we get out, we’re all just going to do more stuff, get into trouble again.”*

When asked which they felt the prison service prioritised – security or rehabilitation, once more the young people were clear in their responses.

*“Security.”*

*“Security – how do they expect you to change when all they do is lock you up? You need help with a job, teach you how to do job interviews, training for it. If you got out and you got a job, you wouldn’t want to lose it, you’d try hard not to lose it, so you wouldn’t get into any trouble. Plus, you’d have no time to re-offend.”*

*“Security and control – it’s a prison!”*

The young people gave varied responses as to why they think rehabilitation is not given a high priority, from the self interest of prison officers to the lack of specialised training.

*“Us getting into trouble’s keeping them in a job in here – why would they want us to not come back?!”*

*“Cos that’s all they have to worry about – their job is us in here, not what we do when we’re out. They haven’t got the training for that.”*

The young people did not think the YOC did anything to support them to stop re-offending on release. Several of the young people recalled remarks that had been made to them on release or on entry to the YOC by prison officers. These comments could not be described as being supportive or constructive in any shape or form.

*“They say nothing about not doing crime – not one of the screws has ever said that to me. Once when I was getting out, they said to me, “Come back, bring a friend!””*

*“They just tell you that you shouldn't do anything.”*

*“I got called a stupid bastard when I came back in.”*

*“they say, “Don't come back!”, when you're leaving – that's all they do.”*

*“Probation do f\*\*\* all in here. I've been in 5 days and I've asked to see probation 10 times (I can't get bail cos I've no address), but I've only seen them once.”*

This lack of focus on rehabilitation results in some young people leaving the Centre feeling more angry and stressed and no less inclined to desist from criminal activity. The young people's words demonstrate that denying a person freedom alone cannot address the root causes of offending.

*“They think thinking will make a difference, make you see the “error of your ways”, but you've got a long long time to think and you think about what you're going to do when you get out.”*

*“You get angry for all you're worth.”*

While some of the young people appeared to shun the idea of receiving any support to stop offending, the majority are open to it and want help to change their ways. They gave various suggestions as to how this could happen. This ranged from programmes to aid access to employment to a complete change in mindset and culture of the prison service – one which would value and respect young people.

*“They should do programmes that stop you re-offending.”*

*“They spend £37000 grand a year keeping one person in jail, but they could spend 15 grand a year getting someone a job and it would work better, it would stop them doing anymore [crime].”*

*“They could try to get you more qualifications, offer more things for you to do, other classes.”*

*“They should get you outside more, get some fresh air, get a bit of sanity about you for a while.”*

*“We're shown no respect either – if young people are shown respect they'd give respect back.”*

## **Education**

The young people were asked what their educational provision had been like since they came into the YOC. Many of the young people said that they had had an initial assessment after a few weeks but had not received any formal education as such. They complained that it took a long time for them to be assessed and expressed their regret that more effort was not made to educate them and support them to find employment on their release. Seven out of the eight young people who took part in the Young Voices discussion on this topic said they had not had any education at the YOC.

*“I haven't been down yet, to education – I've been in 3 or 4 weeks.”*

*“Me neither, but that's maybe cos I've only been in a wee while, a few weeks.”*

*“I've not been properly yet cos you have to do assessments first to see if you're dumb or smart – I've been in 3 ½ months and I haven't had any education. I'd like to, I can't read or write.”*

*“They showed me cards when I came in, to see if I could read and I could, so they talked about getting me a job, but nothing about education.”*

*“It’s like anything in here, you ask for it [education] and it takes f\*\*\*ing ages for something to get done. It takes ages to get assessed.”*

*“I’ve been in 2 months and was assessed 2 weeks ago, but I’ve still not got to education yet – I was told maybe this Tuesday.”*

It is clearly a cause for concern that the educational needs of the young people in the YOC are not being met.

## **Health**

The young people had mixed experiences from the healthcare system in the YOC. Some of them are not happy about the length of time it takes to see a GP/ Dentist or to get results back from tests as well as receive medication.

*“Health care is sh\*\*\* in here – I took a Chlamydia test 2 or 3 weeks ago and they haven’t even got back to me yet.”*

*“You can’t always get to see a doctor when you need to – you have to request it in the morning and it could be a couple of days before you get to see one. Sometimes it’s the next morning, if you’re lucky.”*

*“I’m still waiting for a dentist to get a tooth pulled out – it’s f\*\*\*ing aching – and I requested 2 weeks ago.”*

*“I’m an asthmatic and I asked for my inhalers as soon as I came in last Wednesday [a week ago] and I’ve still not got them. I gave them my doctors name and all, but nothing yet.”*

*“I asked for paracetamol and they gave me [laxatives]. They’ve done that a couple of times, just to piss me off.”*

They do not get access to fresh air as often as they would like and believe that increasing this would make a dramatic difference to how they feel and their general health.

*“And you should be let out into the fresh air more – I’ve been here a year and I’ve been outside once.”*

*“I’ve only been out once properly too, for about half an hour, in six months.”*

*“Or we should be allowed to walk about the centre too, out in the grounds.”*

*“The worst thing for me about being in here is not being allowed outside, to do activities or something.”*

The young people would like to see an improved menu and would be keen to take the healthier options on the menu if they were more filling.

*“The diets s\*\*\*\* too, not at all healthy. They do have a “healthy option” for the meals, but it wouldn’t fill your tooth! I wouldn’t mind eating healthier food, eating the healthy option, but if I do I know I’ll just be hungry all the time cos the healthy option’s so small.”*

*“The foods all rotten anyway .”*

Maintaining general hygiene was a bone of contention for some young people and they would welcome the opportunity to have showers when requested.

*“It [healthcare]’s crap. You have to request in the morning to get a shower even, and they might not even get back to you.”*

*“I requested 3 times - twice yesterday and once today and I still haven’t got one.”*

## **Mental Health**

Meeting the mental health needs of the young people remains a challenge and some of the young people talked about the long waiting time to talk to a trained professional.

*“I waited 10 ½ months to see a psychiatrist.”*

The young people talked about their experiences of staff reactions to suicidal feelings. In many instances the young people are restrained and put in a ‘safe’ room. However, the young people were clear that this response is not always the most beneficial and sometimes they would favour a more supportive and adaptive approach, which would address their needs.

*“If you ring your bell in the middle of the night to say you’re feeling suicidal, you get strapped to the bed, so you can’t hurt yourself - sometimes naked, if they haven’t got any anti ligation clothes.”*

*“If you say to staff at night that you’re suicidal, they put you straight down the block.”*

*“They put you down on the block because there’s no way you can kill yourself down there, you’re in a room with nothing, so there’s no way for you to hurt yourself – but you feel worse.”*

*“That’s the treatment for everything in here, lock you up.”*

*“What would work better would be getting a wee walk round the centre, walking round the grounds for a bit, being outside just. See even walking from here to education, that helps me.”*

*“You get put in a padded cell – there’s a new one on the landing.”*

*“You get put in a room and monitored all day.”*

The young people clearly feel their mental health needs are not being met. These are extremely vulnerable young people who need support and help to deal with their negative feelings. We are deeply concerned that current practice is doing nothing more than preventing self harm but is not addressing the root causes of these feelings and issues.

## **Complaints Procedure**

Some of the young people were not aware of the complaints procedure. There was an overwhelming sense that the young people were not keen to make a complaint, even if they were unhappy about something. The reasons for this were various. Firstly, the majority of the young people were worried about the reaction of the prison officers if they made a complaint and feared that they would be harassed and receive even worse treatment as a result.

*“No, cos you’d get into more shit if you made a complaint – its like going to the peelers and making a complaint – you just get into more trouble.”*

*“I wouldn’t – like see if you got hit by a screw and you told someone about it, SMACK!*

*“There you go, there’s another one for you!”*

*“This isn’t Woodlands, all nice.”*

*“It’s not like the Juvenile Justice Centre here, staff all there for your benefit, it’s all social workers and all there, but here it’s screws.”*

*“Like if you f\*\*\* about they make life difficult for you, but if you’re sound with them, they’re ok.”*

*“They’d f\*\*\* you about if you complained, they’d give you a hard time alright.”*

*“You can get a hard time if you piss them off.”*

*“Nobody’s going to make a complaint – see them screws, they’d make your life hell.””*

Other young people did not see the point in making the complaint because they did not believe that anything would change as a result. They believe that the prison officers would close ranks and protect each other if any allegation was made. There was a complete lack of faith in the complaints procedure.

*“Nobody complains, no point, nothing happens.”*

*“Nothing can be done about it - if you made a complaint, they’d say “Can you prove it? No? Shattered!!”*

*“I wouldn’t see the point of making a complaint.”*

*“See if you made a complaint about one, they’d tell the one you complained about and it would be all about the place that you’re a tout.”*

*“No, there’s no point, f\*\*\* all happens.”*

*“Why would you bother, nothing would happen.”*

*“if a screw hit you a dig in the mouth, another screw would say it didn’t happen, even if he’d not been there, just to back up their mate.”*

Some young people would not make a complaint for fear of how it would be perceived by their peers. There was a sense that ‘hard men’ did not complain but rather accepted any behaviour given out to them and dealt with it in a different way.

*“I wouldn’t complain no matter what, they could do anything to me and I wouldn’t complain – you just don’t.”*

*“We’re not touts, we’re not gurney bastards, you just take it on the chin. Unless you got raped or thrown down the stairs like - you just get on with it.”*

*“Think about it: if 4 or 5 screws came into your room and beat you, you wouldn’t let it slide, no way, you’d get them back, but you wouldn’t make a complaint.”*

*“Everyone would think badly of you if you made a complaint.”*

*“If you made a complaint, you couldn’t hold your head high in here, you couldn’t even walk out on the landing without being called names.”*

Several of the young people had attempted to make a complaint but had not had a satisfactory outcome. It would seem that some complaints are not taken seriously by the prison officers and in some occasions young people’s requests are not even processed.

*“Yes: we were locked [not allowed out of cells] for 4 weeks and I complained to the IMB. Nothing happened, I heard nothing back.”*

*“Me and [friend] complained about being locked 3 nights in a row, to a Class officer, the SO, the PO, but they all came back with the same reply: “People are locked on a rotational basis.” But it was hardly a rotational basis if we were locked 3 nights in a row. There’s no point complaining, nothing happens, they do what they want.”*

*“I saw a young person thumped on the chest by a screw – he wanted to make a complaint, but he wasn’t allowed. He asked for a form and he got told no.”*

*“I asked for a complaint form too and I got told, “Wise up ..... catch yourself on!””*

The young people were asked what would need to change to restore their faith in the complaints process. One suggestion was to have an independent representative to support them through the process. They are also adamant that they should be able to make a complaint without having to have any dealings with prison staff.

*“Have an independent representative there with you, not a screw but, not someone who works for the prison service.”*

*“If you could go straight to the ombudsman to make a complaint, like if they were in here everyday, so you wouldn’t have to talk to any of the staff about it, that would work better, that would make it ok to make a complaint.”*

Others believed that faith could only be restored if they were given examples where making a complaint had actually resulted in a change and in justice being done. Unfortunately, the young people did not hold out any hope that the process would change any time soon and are almost accepting that it is a flawed and ineffective mechanism to have their voices heard.

*“Nobody complains, no point, nothing happens.”*

*“If I was to get any faith in the complaints system I’d need to see something happening – like I make a complaint about something, something actually happens, something gets done about it.”*

*“When you make a complaint, you need to see justice done.”*

### **General Comments**

The young people are fully aware that their time at the YOC is not meant to be a holiday and in many ways they accept the regime, but they are also quick to point out that they have rights which should be adhered to and that their young age requires that certain standards and protocols are followed.

*“Well it’s not meant to be nice in here, but you still have your rights.”*

*“Because we’re juveniles it should be different – we’re still children, it should be different to Elm or Beech or Ash.”*

The young people feel powerless to change how they are treated in the Centre and this overall sense of powerlessness feeds into their already low self-esteem. The incidents that the young people cite when prison officers have made derogatory and degrading remarks only serve to exacerbate the situation. If they respond or complain about such treatment they threatened of an even more repressive regime being imposed.

*“You’re treated like you’re nothing in here, you’ve no power in here, no rights. If a screw’s rude to you and you say one word back, it’s down to your room, you get locked.”*

*“It’s because we’re nobody’s, because they don’t care about us on the outside, we’re nothing, we don’t matter.”*

*“You can’t complain, who are you going to complain to!?”*

An Include Youth worker whilst in conversation with a young person (in another part of the YOC) has witnessed the verbal harassment of young people and recalls an incident when a young person was spoken to by a prison officer in the following demeaning manner.

*“Hey f\*\*k head! F\*\*k head, come down here now I want you!”*

### **Concluding Comments**

*“It makes you worse in here – the government should know what it does to you.”*

It is clear from the young people’s comments that there remains much room for improvement in practice within Hydebank Young Offenders Centre. Much of the young people’s daily routine is characterised by frequent lock up and more disturbing is the reasons for being locked up are not always made evident and transparent. There is a concern that young people are being denied freedom as a punishment and too often at the whim of a prison officer’s individual decision making. The lack of consistency between prison officer practice and behaviour is deeply worrying and leaves much room for favouritism for some young people and harassment for others. The young people appear to be talked down to and verbally insulted on a regular basis by some prison officers. We accept that this is not standard practice but this type of behaviour should not be tolerated from any staff at any time. The young people believe that security is the overriding priority in the Centre at the expense of rehabilitation. They are dissatisfied with the standard of educational and health care provided to them. Perhaps most worrying is the young people’s complete lack of faith in the complaints system. As a result they feel unable to change anything and do not believe that they can make representation without reprisal. The subsequent tension and stress that builds up in these

young people as a result of this treatment not only impedes any rehabilitation efforts but actually results in increased risk of re-offending.

Whilst Include Youth has been determined not to offer unnecessary comment or analysis we feel compelled to comment that based on what we have heard from the juveniles held in the YOC in 2009 that the concerns expressed in the IMB and other reports are valid and current. However Include Youth does not endorse the policy of accommodating 17 year olds in an adult prison. It is apparent that the very fact that these children are held in Hydebank Wood which also accommodates adult males and females results with less facilities and resources being given to those on Willows one and two. Therefore Include Youth believe that the recommendation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (with regards to article 37) in September 2008 that the government should “ensure that, unless in his or her best interests, every child deprived of their liberty is separated from adults in all places of deprivation of liberty” should be implemented forthwith.

**Include Youth**

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