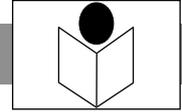


UN Convention on the Rights of the Child references:

Article 12: All children and young people have the right to give their opinion and for adults to listen and take them seriously.

Article 23: Children who have any kind of disability should have special care and support, so that they can lead full and independent lives.

Reading



Did you know that there are an estimated 1.2 billion young people aged 10–19 in the world? This is the largest generation of adolescents in history. More than four-fifths of them live in developing countries, particularly in the towns and cities.

All these 1.2 billion young people have rights, and these are celebrated on November 20. In 1954 the UN General Assembly recommended that all governments should institute a Universal Children's Day, to be observed as a day of worldwide fraternity (brotherhood) and understanding between children, and a day of activity promoting the welfare of the world's children. The date of November 20 marks the day on which the General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959, and on November 20, 1989, the much more binding Convention on the Rights of the Child, which all but two of the world's countries and states have now ratified.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was drawn up to ensure that children and young people are protected, and have their basic needs met during the time when they are vulnerable and growing, and cannot provide for themselves. These basic needs are given as rights and they include access to services such as education, health, recreation and justice, a safe environment, protection against neglect and cruelty and injustice, and opportunities to participate and have their voices heard. The 192 countries that have ratified the Convention are

required to take all the necessary steps to secure these rights for each and every child in their country. All these countries have to submit a report to the International Committee on the Rights of the Child, every five years.

Governments are supposed to help each other provide these rights for children; richer countries helping poorer countries. Children's and young people's rights, like all human rights, cannot be taken away.

Millions of young people publish newspapers and magazines, run businesses and become elected leaders in their schools and communities. Many of them manage households, care for younger siblings and ailing parents and educate their peers about life's challenges – in particular about protection from disease such as AIDS, and the dangers of high risk behaviours such as smoking or drinking. Many also work 15 hours a day in factories and fields, risk their lives on the front lines of armed conflict, or marry and have babies when they are still children themselves. They are imaginative and impassioned about the world and their place in it. What happens to these young people affects us all.

One of the articles of the Convention that is already making a big difference to the position of children and young people around the world is Article 12. Article 12 says that you have the right to give your opinion, and that adults should listen and take it seriously. Your views should be given

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due weight in accordance with your age and maturity. There are many ways of doing this. Here is the inspiring story of a girl in Mexico.

In Mexico City, 13-year-old Jimena Loza has taken Article 12 to heart. She believes that all children should know and understand the rights given to them in the Convention. In 2000 Mexico held a Children's Consultation and Jimena campaigned tirelessly to bring this about. Jimena was one of the four million Mexican children who cast their ballots and registered their opinions about family life, school, their communities and their country on July 2, 2000. The Children's Consultation started a new chapter in Mexican politics; politicians actually wanted to know what children thought!

Jimena was one of the child rights activists who inspired millions of children to register their opinions. She explained why.

"Adults really need to listen to young people of all ages, shapes, sizes and colours. We all have different opinions that are relevant to who we are and what we want out of life." says Jimena. "My disability is not an obstacle to me, it is part of who I am. I think, in a strange way that it actually

inspires people. They see that I don't consider it a problem and they realise that they can also reach their goals."

Jimena has cerebral palsy and is confined to a wheelchair. She speaks slowly with great difficulty but with lots of conviction, and she has the smile and confidence of a seasoned campaigner! She spent her summer promoting the voting project and encouraging other children to take part. Shortly before Election Day Jimena participated in a children's radio programme in which a panel of other children interviewed her.

"It is important to listen to children, because we are also citizens," Jimena explained during her interview. "After all, we are the ones who will rule the world and the country in the future."

Jimena is just one of thousands of children in Mexico who are exercising their right to give an opinion and using that opinion to bring about change. It is a sad fact that disabled children are four times more likely to be neglected and physically abused and over three times more likely to be emotionally abused. Therefore, it is doubly important that their voices should be heard and listened to.

Concluding remarks

What issues in our school do you think you should be consulted on? Do you know of any young people that are voicing their concerns and bringing about change who we could invite to speak to us?

Put your suggestions in a box outside my office and we will discuss them at school council, in tutor time, Citizenship/PHSE etc. Your ideas and solutions will be displayed for you to see/vote on etc.

NB. Some countries celebrate June 1 as International Children's Day.