

## Primary Congress 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2009

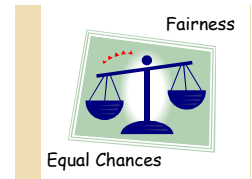


**Title** – Child Poverty Consultation “Making lives better for all”

**Participants** – 118 children / 34 staff from 31 schools

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### Introduction

The first Congress was launched almost five years ago to ascertain the views of children and young people around issues that affect them and their families. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2009 the eighth Congress took place at Britannia Stadium.

As this was the Primary Congress, the 118 participants were all primary school children aged between 6 and 11 years. (*Characteristics of the participants Table 1 below*) In the early days the young people were all members of their respective school councils as this is how young people were, and still are, involved as decision-makers, stakeholders and partners in their schools. The vision of the Congress was to move this process to the next level, actively involving young people as stakeholders in the plans for their City. Over time it became apparent that many of the young people attending Congresses were the same young people therefore the criteria for participation broadened. Now schools are asked to invite up to four young people, two of whom represent their school council to ensure sustainability for the process and two students who are new to Congress so that more young people can be empowered to have their say.

Table 1 – characteristics of the participants

Age	No	Gender	No	Ethnicity		Children in care	0
6	1	Female	55	White British	100		
7	1	Male	18	Pakistani	4		
8	9	Not stated	45	Indian	3		
9	26			Not stated	2		
10	37			White European	2		
11	40			Chinese Heritage	1		
Not stated	4			Other Asian Heritage	1		
				Other White Heritage	1		
				White & Black Afro Caribbean	1		
				White Bangladeshi	1		
				Not stated	2		
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>

Working on behalf of the **Children and Young People’s Trust** the theme for this Congress was ‘Child Poverty’ portrayed in more child friendly terms as ‘Making lives better for all’.

### Aims of the day – to find out:

- What young people feel is the effect when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, poor health and family breakdown
- What young people feel can help to reduce these effects when families suffer from the problems listed above

### Planning

The entire VAST Children and Families Engagement Team are actively involved in the planning, preparation and delivery of the Congress events. Partner services from the Children and Young People’s

Trust are encouraged to become involved from the outset but understandably, due to their other commitments, not many are able to take part at every stage. Sincere thanks and appreciation are extended to all these nineteen services for their support in making this recent congress another fantastic event:

**Table 2 – partnership at the event**

Claire Farrell – Children and Young People’s Trust	Claire Maxwell – Common Assessment Framework (CAF)
Elizabeth Goldstraw – Children and Young People’s Trust	Charlotte Tabrizi - Common Assessment Framework (CAF)
Pauline Davies – Staffordshire Children and Young People’s Participation	Miriam Adams – Voluntary Action Stoke on Trent (VAST)
Darren Baddeley – Connexions	Amanda Heath – Hanley Museum
Chris Hill – Police Community Support Officer	Ruth Mason-Tooth – Gingerbread Catherine Court
Simon Holmes - Police Community Support Officer	Jim Taffe – Staffordshire Fire Service
Katie Sullivan - Police Community Support Officer	Guy Volpe – Staffordshire Fire service
Sarah Wood - Police Community Support Officer	Becky Wood – Uth Crew (City Wide Young People’s Voice)
Sarah Hodgkiss - Police Community Support Officer	Jackie Baddeley – Edensor High School – VAST Children & Families Team Young Volunteer
Scott Holland - Police Community Support Officer	Alice Jones – Blurton High School – VAST Children & Families Team Young Volunteer
Louise Cooke - Youth & Play Service	Daniella Auld – Berryhill High School young person on work placement with VAST Children & Families Team
Sarah Emery – Youth & Play Service	Speakers – Sue Thomas Champion for Children and Anna Elderton – Assistant Psychologist, First Steps Psychological Service
Ian Boulderson – Youth Offending Service	Visitors - Janet Lee and Olwyn Twomey, Policy and Development Team & James Goode – young person on placement with the above team
Parins – Resources for goody bags	Visitor - Lynne Crockett – Education Officer, Special Educational Needs

Invitations to participate were sent to all the primary schools across the City. Invitations were also sent to many Strategic Senior Managers and nationally to Al Aynsley-Green, Children’s Commissioner, and Kate Green, Chief Executive of Child Poverty Action Group. Unfortunately everyone was busy that day except for the two speakers and four visitors listed in the table above.

Where possible, changes to the congress were made in accordance with the children’s views and wishes sought at the previous event. There were teenagers involved; arts and crafts; a fun activity with a good purpose (fire assault course); activity sheets in the goody bags; a theme around their community, jobs and the future. Also, the services that were involved in the consultation last time did feedback what changes had taken place based on the views expressed at the last congress.

The school staff who accompanied the children took part in adult workshops which mirrored the topics used for the children.

**Evaluation**

Primary school children were consulted on the concept of child poverty using three workshops. Workshop (1) Going without – looked at materialistic deprivation, workshop (2) Missing out – looked at emotional aspects, what opportunities do young people miss out on because they are too shy, feel they don’t fit in, or aren’t encouraged or supported to participate; and workshop (3) Fairness /equal chances – looked at their ideal community and the effect they felt living in such a community would have on their life chances and aspirations.

Eight themes emerged as being the most significant to children and the effect they have on their lives. These themes are listed below. There is no hierarchical order to the way the findings are laid out.

- ✚ **Parks, crime and vandalism** – many of the children were impressed with the new equipment in some of the parks like Longton and Shelton, with the exciting climbing frame and zip wires. They also liked how the parks are age segregated as this helped them to feel that bit safer. However, they were horrified with how they had watched their dream playground be so drastically ruined and spoilt by teenagers smashing glass bottles against the play equipment; writing abusive comments and ‘secrets’ about them all over the slides and apparatus.

**Suggestions they made for improvement** – park wardens and Police Community Support Officers manning the place all the time. Teenagers having to clear up the parks and the graffiti as pay back and role models to others in the park

*“Litter pickers, bin men, volunteers, teenagers setting a good example, community pay back”*

- ✚ **Costs and access** to activities and equipment – some of the children hadn’t even heard of the activities some of the others were saying they took part in, scuba diving amongst others. Even something with a nominal fee of a couple of pound if you have to add bus fare to that or you have several children in the family it makes it too expensive for them. Especially those families that don’t value the importance and impact most activities can have for their child. Also, a real barrier was transport. Buses were deemed to be too time consuming, they were too young to be allowed to travel on bus alone and parents wouldn’t have enough time to drop them off by bus return home then go back to collect them.

**Suggestions they made for improvement** – more choice in your own community or free supervised buses to transport you

- ✚ **People and how they are with you** – most referred to the friendliness of other children and bullying but quite a few referred to shop keepers and how they treat them.

**Suggestions they made for improvement** – welcoming shop keepers, lessons for them in how to be with children. Again, more supervision in public spaces like parks etc to help control bullying and threatening behaviour

- ✚ **Unemployment and lack of jobs** – many had parents on short weeks and one of the first things to be lost as a consequence is pocket money and activities so that there was enough money for the bills. Others feared for their future, what would be left for them, they just saw things as getting more bleak

**Suggestions they made for improvement** – helping their parents to go on courses without charge when they are on short time so that they can learn alternative skills;

*“Lack of jobs because most of the jobs have been made redundant and won’t be able to work and will have no money to pay for the house rent or food and drink. They won’t be able to go to different places like Mc Donald’s or cinema” – Courtney, age 11*

- ✚ **Age restrictions** – they felt that there were a lot of opportunities for older teenagers and for the under five year olds but for those aged 7 – 11 they felt there was nothing. If there was a club for their age it was usually just once a week whereas they wanted something every day of the week. Most things required an escort to take them and fetch them and if parents couldn’t be bothered, or unable to then the children couldn’t go.

**Suggestions they made for improvement** – free or cheap bus travel; carers on the bus to look out for children’s safety; more activities throughout the week rather than just once.

- ✚ **Child Safety** – some children were really concerned about child safety, mostly in the park and play areas but also against intruders to their home.

**Suggestions they made for improvement:**

*“Holes in doors so you can see who is knocking”,*  
*“More cameras on the streets and houses to keep you safe” – Brandon.*  
*“Road safety was most important because our roads need to be safer – Maisie, age 10*  
*“More police for people’s safety” – Stephen, age 11*

- ✚ **Learning and Education** – they liked school and learning and after school activities and breakfast clubs, they saw the importance of education and its relevance to their future life chances. Their aspirations were impressive and they seemed to have a good idea about how to reach their goal. They did feel that there wasn’t enough support for those who found learning and school challenging.

**Suggestions they made for improvement** – more support for those who can’t do the work and need extra help. Make lessons like going to the activities:

- ✚ **A Good Community** – Clean, safe, exciting, colourful and friendly.

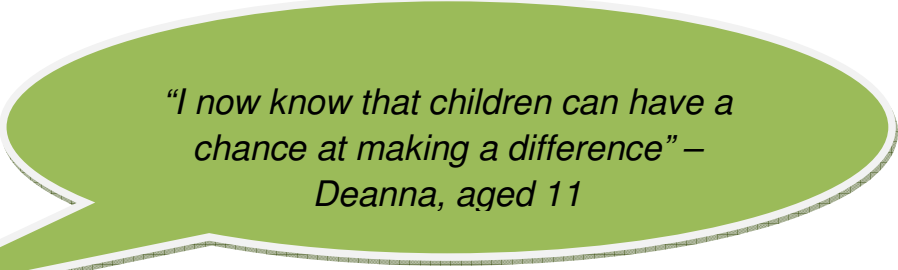
**Suggestions they made for improvement** – teambuilding, pulling together to make a better world.

The results of the consultation were not unusual; the findings mirrored previous research and backed the government’s national targets to assist in reducing child poverty. However, the key themes emerging are still the same key themes as were voiced at the last event in November which would suggest that not a lot has changed or at least young people aren’t able to see the changes made.

Although we had a larger response from schools new to Congress this time (80%) we had no more schools attending than usual, we will follow this up to ascertain why this happened.

Overall, the event was a huge success. The feedback is mostly very positive and all those involved, young and old, commenting on how much they want to be involved in future events. Team work is vital to the success of these events and this is the reason why this Congress was so successful. Many thanks to all involved. We all look forward to seeing the impact this event will have for the children of our City.

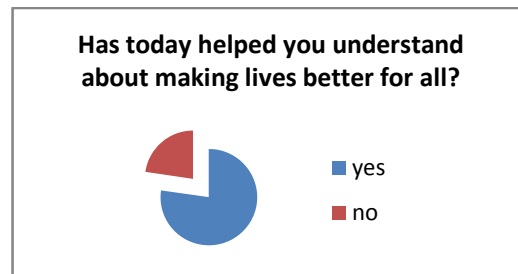
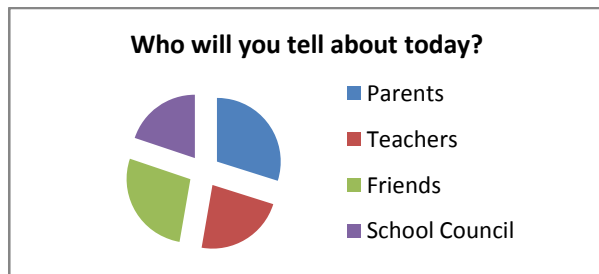
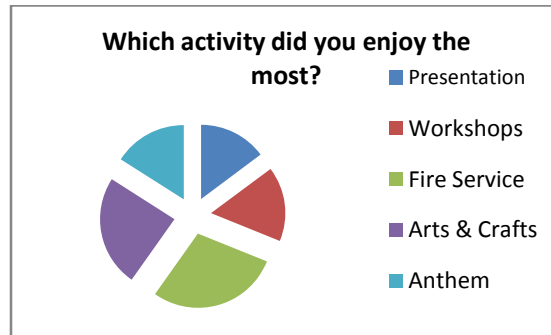
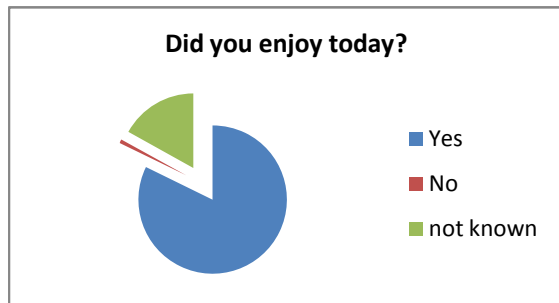
As for the impact, there was a disclosure made during a workshop. The mechanisms in place were followed and the young person concerned was allocated a social worker by the very next day. If this was the only impact as a result of this event then that would be enough, it served to improve the life of at least one child in our city.



*“I now know that children can have a chance at making a difference” – Deanna, aged 11*

**Young People's Evaluations:** (of the evaluations received)

Evaluations were carried out with a series of 'post box' exercises resulting in the following:



There is a full report which captures everything the young people said or told us on the day. This will be sent to all the schools so that they can use the information in their school assemblies, school council meetings and in the classroom to ensure that all the young people are aware that they have been listened to. For a copy of the full report or further information about anything within this summary please contact us, using the details below.

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The logo for Voluntary Action, featuring a stylized flame or arrow shape in orange and blue, with the text 'Voluntary Action' written vertically to its right.