



# **How can government act to increase the well-being and happiness of children and young people in the UK?**

A report on two citizens' juries: London and Edinburgh  
April and May 2009

Backing the Future: Citizens' jury report

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The analysis presented in this report has been developed by **nef** (the new economics foundation) through engaging with many stakeholders including Action for Children and the witnesses and members involved with the Citizens' Jury events. However, overall responsibility for the contents of the report rests with its authors.

We would like to extend our thanks to the jurors and witnesses, who gave up a significant amount of their time to make this strand of the research programme a possibility.

# Introduction

This document accompanies a larger report *Backing the future: why investing in children is good for us all*, which is the culmination of a programme of research carried out in partnership between Action for Children and **nef** (the new economics foundation).

*Backing the future* demonstrates the economic and social case for preventing social problems from emerging in the first place, rather than fixing them after they have occurred. It also shows the need for early intervention if and when problems do arise to stop them becoming entrenched. By making the transition to a more preventative system, the UK will improve children's well-being, create a better and more just society, and support our economy by being less wasteful economically and making far better use of our shared but increasingly scarce public resources.

This report summarises the process and findings of the citizens' juries, which formed a key part of the overall programme of research.

The aim of the citizens' juries was to bring together children and parents alongside policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and service users to hear evidence on the economic, social and human benefits to investing in a preventative approach to service delivery, which actively promotes well-being. We held two juries; one in London with a jury of young people and one in Edinburgh with a jury of parents. Holding juries in two different locations, with two different groups of jurors enabled us to get a wider spread of experiences, ideas and opinions.

The recommendations made by the young people and parents have informed the reform packages and recommendations in the final report. The aim of this report is to reflect in greater detail the specific recommendations made by young people and parents, which may be of particular interest to policy-makers and practitioners working to better enable child well-being. The findings may also be relevant to a wider audience interested in the citizen jury process.

# What are citizens' juries and why are they effective?

In many ways citizens' juries are similar to a jury in a court of law. However, it is not a person who is on trial but an issue or a question. The jurors are presented with evidence from witnesses, who they can then question. Unlike research methods which ask people what they currently think, such as opinion polls or focus groups, the jurors are in a position to gather information, examine the evidence and consider arguments they may not have thought of before. This can lead to more informed opinions and more realistic recommendations, especially when the jurors have time to consider the practical implications of their recommendations.<sup>1</sup>

## The question on trial

For both citizens' juries, we posed the same questions:

- How can government act to increase the well-being and happiness of children and young people in the UK?
- Should government do more to increase the happiness and well-being of children and young people in the UK?
- What actions by government would make the biggest difference?
- How would these actions change the way government spends money on children and young people?

## The process

The form that the citizens' juries took as part of the *Happiness Counts* programme of work was influenced by a number of contributing factors, including the project aims, available resources (including the time required of young people, parents and witnesses) and feedback from young people.

We held a mock jury at one of our Young Persons' Reference Group meetings, where the young people commented on the jury question, suggested witnesses, shaped the length of the presentations by witnesses, and the nature of the question sessions.

Each jury took place over a three-day period and comprised:

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see [www.studentvoice.co.uk](http://www.studentvoice.co.uk) for their briefing on the citizens' jury approach.

### **1. A meet-and-greet session**

The jurors met up for the first time on a Thursday afternoon/evening. They were introduced to the project, the citizens' jury process and the topic. This session also involved some ice-breaker activities to help people to get to know one another.

### **2. A witness session**

The following day (Friday) entailed six witness sessions each lasting 45 minutes. Witnesses were asked to speak for 10–15 minutes. The jurors asked questions to clarify anything in the presentations they had not understood before asking the witness to leave the room in order to consider and debate what they had heard. During this time, the jurors collectively decided on any additional evidence that they required and the remainder of the session was allotted to questioning the witness.

Between each witness session, jurors had a 30-minute break to take stock and prepare for the next witness. Each session had one or more witnesses from a single organisation, except in two cases where diary constraints determined that we combine witnesses from different organisations into one session (Tables 1 and 2).

### **3. A deliberative session**

On the Saturday morning, the jurors came back together to reflect on what they had heard the day before. They were also encouraged to draw on their own knowledge and experiences. Revisiting the question on trial, in each instance, the jury spent the morning preparing and making its recommendations.

## **The jurors**

*The London jury* was made up of 10 young people aged between 16 and 22 years. They lived in England, Scotland and Wales. All of the young people had either a previous or ongoing involvement with Action for Children projects. Half of the jurors were also part of the Young Person's Reference Group, who met an additional four times throughout the course of the project.

*The Edinburgh jury* was made up of 10 parents; 5 mothers and 5 fathers. Some parents lived in Edinburgh and some lived outside Edinburgh, within commuting distance. The majority of parents had children under the age of 12, although a few had children over 12 and one parent had a son over 18. Two of the parents were under 18 themselves.

## **The witnesses**

With only six witness sessions per jury we were limited in the number of witnesses that we could invite. In consultation with the Young Persons' Reference Group, we decided to aim to invite a broad range of witnesses, which would have different knowledge, skills and experience of child well-being and its influencing factors.

**Table 1: Witnesses at the young people’s jury, London**

Witnesses	Organisation	Information about the witness and their organisation
John Freeman	Association of Directors of Social Services; Raising Expectations Action Programme	John is President of the Association of Directors of Social Services. As Director of the newly formed <i>Raising Expectations Action Programme</i> , John’s remit is to help local authorities prepare for the £7 billion transfer of funding from the Learning and Skills Council to local authorities in 2010. It will see local authorities take responsibility for commissioning learning for 16–19-year-olds and sets the scene for raising the school leaving age to 18 by 2015.
Susan Langford	Magic Me	Susan Langford is the founder of <i>Magic Me</i> in London. <i>Magic Me</i> is a voluntary organisation that brings young and older people together through art projects. Susan describes <i>Magic Me</i> as looking ‘at what people can do together rather than what they can’t do. So often, services, particularly for older people, are about what they need and what they lack, whereas actually what they’ve got is an incredible amount of talent and skill and energy and time. And the same goes for young people’. <i>Magic Me</i> uses five criteria of success for its projects: a sense of purpose; a sense of place; a sense of adventure; a sense of achievement; a sense of occasion.
Mimi Ray, Gethin Hopkin and Susan Piers-Mantell  [shared a witness session with Norman Hole]	Learning to Lead	Mimi and Gethin are young people from an organisation founded by Susan called <i>Learning to Lead</i> , which is a highly inclusive approach to education created by students and teachers together. It takes the real life experience of ‘school’ as a community and offers tools, training and structures to support young people’s involvement in all its aspects of life and learning, working towards positive change. As Steve Jackson, Head Teacher of the first <i>Learning to Lead</i> school, The Blue School in Somerset, says: ‘I’ve seen initiatives come and go and I must say none have made such a sustained change for the good in the school as this one. It has had a profound effect.’.
Norman Hole	DCSF	Norman is Assistant Director of Activities Engagement Division in DCSF and responsible for implementation of the Government’s 10-year youth strategy in England, which includes <i>Youth Opportunity Fund</i> (a fund available for young people to bid for money for activities) and <i>My Place</i> (an initiative to provide youth facilities in local areas).
Jenifer Commin and Lura France	UNICEF UK	Jenifer and Lura both work for UNICEF, which in the UK raises funds for UNICEF’s worldwide emergency and development work and to advocate for lasting change for children. ‘Through our work in schools, hospitals and the community we engage partners and decision makers to work towards the realization of children’s rights both globally and locally.’ Lura is the Head of UNICEF UK’s <i>Youth Participation</i> programme and chairs the international organisation’s <i>Education for Development Task Force</i> promoting children’s rights, education and children and young people’s civic engagement and participation. Jenifer is a Policy and Parliamentary Officer in the Public Affairs Team at UNICEF UK. She works to raise the profile of child rights, education, youth participation and child poverty in Parliament.

Witnesses	Organisation	Information about the witness and their organisation
Karen Hough	Local resident	Karen is resident living very close to the location of the citizens' jury on the King's Square Estate in Islington, London. Karen is a parent, teaching assistant, an activist and very well known in her local community. She took the jurors on an impromptu tour of the housing estate she lives on in Islington and introduced us to children, young people, parents and a teacher living on the estate.

**Table 2: Witnesses at the parents' jury, Edinburgh**

Witnesses	Organisation	Information about the witness and their organisation
Caroline Black and Sheila Johnston	Action for Children	Caroline is a single mother of four children who lives in Inverness. She is a service user at one of Action for Children's projects to get support with mental health problems, which when at their worst, mean she is hospitalised and her children are taken into care. Sheila works for Action for Children and is Caroline's support worker.
Boyd McAdam	Head of the Getting it Right for Every Child team in the Scottish government	<p><i>Getting it Right for Every Child</i> is a programme that aims to improve outcomes for all children and young people. It promotes a shared approach that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• builds solutions with and around children and families;</li> <li>• enables children to get the help they need when they need it;</li> <li>• supports a positive shift in culture, systems and practice; and</li> <li>• involves working together to make things better.</li> </ul> <p><i>Getting it right for Every Child</i> is the foundation for work with all children and young people, including adult services where parents are involved. It builds on universal health and education services, and is embedded in the developing early years and youth frameworks.</p>
Evie Phillips, John Dixon and Susan Piers-Mantell	Learning to Lead	Evie and John are young people from an organisation founded by Susan called <i>Learning to Lead</i> – see Table 1 for more information.
Bill Alexander [shared a session with Carol Craig]	Highland's Joint Committee on Children and Young People	Bill is the lead officer for the Highland's Joint Committee on Children and Young People. This coordinates service planning for children in need across NHS Highland and the Council's Education, Culture and Sport and Social Work Services. His main remit is to develop better joined-up children's services in Highland.
Carol Craig	Centre for Confidence and Well-being	Carol is the Chief Executive of the Centre for Confidence and Well-being, which she founded. The Centre is based in Glasgow. She is the author of two books: <i>The Scots' Crisis of Confidence</i> and <i>Creating Confidence: a handbook for professionals working with young people</i> .
Lindsay Roy	MP	Lindsay was elected as the MP for Glenrothes at a by-election in November 2008. He is a member of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. Prior to being an MP, he was a head teacher for 20 years.

# The recommendations

Each jury made its own recommendations for how governments could do things differently to improve children and young people's lives in the UK, now and in the future.

For the purposes of this report and to help feed into the overall recommendations in *Backing the future* we have attempted to consolidate the recommendations into four key messages, derived directly from the suggestions made by young people and parents. Where relevant, we refer to the evidence presented by witnesses, which we think was likely to have had a direct impact on the decisions made by jurors.

## Young people's recommendations:

- Recognise the importance of community
- More development opportunities for young people, such as more voluntary training opportunities (e.g., cookery) and after school activities
- Healthy food for everybody
- The same national minimum wage for young people of all ages
- More money for care services

## Parent's recommendations

- Bring children and parents together
- Bring different service users together
- Encourage self-empowerment of children
- Promote good practice
- Use respite to prevent problems
- Spend to save

## Combined recommendations:

- Put more effort into connecting people
- Empower people to take action and 'be the change'
- Roll out successful projects and pilots
- Look for opportunities to spend now and save later

## Figure 1: Young people's and parent's recommendations

### 1. Put more effort into connecting people

This recommendation links a number of specific suggestions all of which had one theme in common: the importance of relationships for children and parents' well-being. Both sets of jurors also recognised the importance of wider social networks for a sense of community and shared understanding.

#### *What did the young people say?*

##### *Recognise the importance of community*

On reflection of Susan Langford's presentation of *Magic Me*, the young people asserted that 'age, sexuality and race do not matter when the community is under one roof'. The young people were particularly drawn to some of the benefits of *Magic Me*'s intergenerational work. For example, Susan reported young participants in her project saying things like 'I never thought I would be comfortable with those people' and gave examples of young and older people taking pleasure in being recognised in the street.

Other witnesses also spoke about the role of connection and community which may have contributed to the young people's suggestions. For example, Susan Piers-Mantell from *Learning to Lead* made a plea for school projects to be able to spill out into the community and Norman Hole described the young leadership programme, where young people spend a week shadowing council leaders.

#### *What did the parents say?*

##### *Bring children and parents together*

The parents recommended that children and parents should be encouraged to spend more quality time together. They commented on the need to 'open the eyes of parents to the difference between being in the same room as kids (TV, computer, iPod headphones) and being together (communication)'. They thought this could be done 'via TV ad or cinema ad'. A specific suggestion they made was about parents assisting in schools for half a day a week, based on the idea that this will encourage children and parents to understand each other's worlds a bit better.

Parents also made a specific recommendation to government to extend paid paternity and maternity leave. Evidence, which may have contributed to this recommendation, included Carol Craig's statement that in Scandinavia parents are paid to stay at home until children are two or three years old. Parents also shared their own experiences of having to make a difficult trade-off between being around to see their child grow up and earn enough money to have an adequate income. They noted that both household income and time with parents directly impacted on the well-being of their children, but that in some cases they had to make a choice between one and the other.

##### *Bring different service users together*

On a slightly different but related theme, the parents recognised the importance of support networks outside of service settings to act as mechanisms of support. They suggested that local users of services could be encouraged to share experiences along the model of Alcoholics Anonymous/drug users groups. This is a low-cost initiative to implement and,

as they noted, brings benefits that cannot be gained from service users talking to doctors or to health visitors alone. This recommendation reflected a comment by Caroline Black that she had never had the opportunity to share her experience with other people with mental health problems, or to share with them her ideas on how to improve things when her problems were acute.

## **2. Empower people to take action and 'be the change'**

For both the children and parents, there was a feeling that not enough is done to enable people to empower themselves to make a difference to their lives. The idea was that learning by doing was really important as well as the strength of people's networks to act as a support mechanism for positive change.

### ***What did the young people say?***

#### ***More development opportunities***

The young people made a request for more development opportunities, where they could become more actively involved in new activities, initiatives, or training including for children and young people who were particularly vulnerable. As an example, they made the recommendation that more optional training opportunities should be made available at community centres – e.g., free cooking classes. Largely, it seemed that these recommendations were based on young people's own experiences of growing up. The young people in our Young Person's Reference Group noted that feeling useful and feeling able was important for children's well-being.

### ***What did the parents say?***

#### ***Encourage self-empowerment of children***

The parents made a specific recommendation that governments recognise the merits of programmes designed to promote the self-empowerment of children. This suggestion is reflected in the presentation given by Susan Piers-Mantell, Evie Phillips and John Dixon from *Learning to Lead*, which noted that by being active shapers and deliverers of projects, children and young people are able to discover more about who they are and what they want to do in the future. The recommendation was reinforced by the views of Carol Craig. She argued that the Government was trying to standardise childhood by teaching social and emotional skills in schools. The parents agreed that it was bizarre to be trying in this way to achieve outcomes such as *I know how to make and break friendships without hurting people's feelings*. They much preferred an empowerment approach, where young people learned by doing. By working together in delivering projects, young people learn how to interact with one another in ways that are supportive and caring.

## **3. Roll out successful projects and pilots**

This recommendation reflected the information juries learnt about the personal and social well-being that is derived from successful projects and initiatives taking place in different locations over the UK. There was a general feeling that these attempts, while excellent, were piecemeal and that all children and young people should have experience of them. Some of the barriers to rolling out successful projects on a wider scale were also addressed by the jurors.

## **What did the young people say?**

### *Recognise the importance of community*

The young people commented on *Magic Me* that 'it should not (just) be situated in one specific area'. They thought the value that *Magic Me* generated by bringing young people and older people together was something that every community could benefit from.

The young people were also inspired by Karen Hough, local resident, who has played an active role in getting new projects and initiatives off the ground in her area which have helped bring different members of the community together.

## **What did the parents say?**

### *Promote good practice*

Lindsay Roy MP commented that a Rolls Royce project can become a Mini when it is rolled out, in the sense that the essence of what made the original initiative work can sometimes get weakened or diluted (e.g., through fewer resources, less tailored solutions). The parents' jury made a number of thoughtful recommendations on how to avoid this happening:

- Look for best practice (such as the *Getting it Right for Every Child* programme in Scotland and *Learning to Lead*) and copy it in a well-funded way.
- Consider the possibility of using incentives (e.g., tax breaks) offered by governments to businesses to help fund and support community-led projects that are used for best practice models.
- Don't dilute the original ideas when rolling out model/pilot schemes nationwide. Have a more confident push on schemes – it is better to fail with a proper try.
- Don't give up too quickly.
- The culture within which government-sponsored schemes operate should change. Governments should be open about the mistakes that are made as it proceeds in implementing new ideas. This culture change should mean there will be no need for 'blame' to be assigned when things go wrong and more cooperative working practices where lessons are learned can take hold.

The parents were also keen for governments to bring services together by better coordinating them. This suggestion was recommended in Lindsay Roy's experience of being a head-teacher of a high school. He organised a meeting for practitioners working with children to come together – police, social workers, community development workers – and found that it was the first time that they had been given the opportunity to meet. They soon discovered they were working with some of the same children and families. By one professional taking the lead responsibility for a child, they could better coordinate their efforts, which was more beneficial to the child and more efficient.

## **4. Look for opportunities to spend now and save later**

Both young people and parents felt that preventing problems from happening in the first instance was better for children and their communities. The parents in particular argued that this also made economic sense. Both groups could

easily identify the wide-ranging benefits that could be generated at the individual and the community level from having the right solutions in place. On this basis, they instinctively used the evidence they heard as a basis for making suggestions about how to spend now to save money in the longer run.

### ***What did the young people say?***

#### ***More activities for young people***

The young people suggested that more activities such as youth clubs and after school clubs for young people would keep children and young people off the streets. This would result in fewer social problems in communities. This recommendation was based on evidence provided by Norman Hole who described how a lack of activities led to antisocial behaviour. By contrast, activities during exam times have been shown to improve exam results. He reported that it is evidence such as this which has led to DCSF initiatives such as the *Youth Opportunity Fund* and *My Place*.

Karen Hough also provided evidence that the young people considered. She spoke about the lack of things to do on the estate where she lived in London. She mentioned that four youth clubs had closed down and that the government tended to talk about the problems of 'hoodies'. She argued that 'they're not troublemakers, they're bored kids'. She mentioned that Arsenal's after-school football club supported good attendance at school but that its existence was solely down to the efforts of one mother. She also highlighted turning the negative into a positive. While teenagers pinch motorbikes and mopeds to set them on fire, their energy and interest might be given a more constructive outlet if workshops on motorbike maintenance were organised. They might also help the young people find jobs as mechanics.

#### ***Healthy food for everybody***

The young people drew on some of their own experience to recommend the Government acts at a more universal level to improve the well-being of children. Thinking about health, they recommended the government give vouchers to families for free fruit and vegetables. This would help to make 5 a day a reality for all children, whether their parents could afford it or not, and save on health problems in the future.

#### ***The same national minimum wage for young people of all ages***

The young people felt that being poor impacted on children and young people's well-being. They couldn't afford to access activities or transport, even when working. They argued that the same national minimum wage for young people of all ages (instead of incremental increases at 16, 18 and 22 years of age) leaves some children in poverty. It is often the case that young people are working to exactly the same job description as older colleagues and trying to balance college, further education and family responsibilities all at the same time.

#### ***More money for care services***

Thinking about vulnerable groups of children, the young people suggested that more money for care services supporting young carers, children in care and care leavers would help prevent problems from happening again. This would ensure young people get support to deal with difficult circumstances early on, such as making sure young people who undertake caring tasks within their families have the right support from projects. Similarly providing more money for other service areas could better help with the early identification of

problems (e.g., care leavers, children in care) and prevent problems from getting worse or re-occurring.

### What did the parents say?

#### Use respite<sup>2</sup> to prevent problems

The parents made a specific recommendation around the use of respite as a mechanism for preventing more acute problems in the future. This idea was drawn from Caroline and Sheila’s discussion of Caroline’s situation. Caroline is a single mother of four children who lives in Inverness. She has had long-term support from Action for Children, stretching over 16 years, as a result of her mental health difficulties. These mean that every so often she is admitted to hospital. When this happens, her children go into foster care. The foster parents are different each time – there is no continuity. Often, her three younger children (her oldest no longer needs care) are split up. These factors make the experience very traumatic for the children.

Caroline argued that if her children could receive respite with a particular family, say one weekend in six, there would be two enormous benefits:

1. Her children would build up a relationship with that family and so would be more secure.
2. She would be more relaxed, and might well not need to be hospitalised.

Sheila added that research shows that children in families where there are mental health issues are more resilient if an adult from outside the family provides continuity. Related evidence included Boyd McAdam’s reference to cost-benefit research of the HighScope Perry Preschool project in the UK which showed that for every £1 spent on the programme to prevent problems from occurring, £7 was saved later.<sup>3</sup>

The parents found this evidence to be compelling and it provided the inspiration for their own calculations about what would need to be spent and what would be saved in Caroline’s case if regular respite were an option (Table 3).

**Table 3: A list of what the jurors thought would need to be spent, and what would be saved in relation to respite**

Spend	Save
1. £500 every six weeks for respite	1. Cost of social work involvement
	2. Cost of long-term foster care
	3. Cost of hospitalisation
	4. Additional help for children as a result of an intensive intervention when a crisis occurs
	5. Future costs associated with children because they will be more stable

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘respite’ was used by the witnesses and jurors in their discussions. Services for children and families that provide respite are now more commonly known as ‘short breaks’.

<sup>3</sup> Schweinhart LJ, Montie J, Xiang Z, Barnett WS, Belfield CR, Nores M (2005). *Lifetime effects: The HighScope Perry Preschool study through age 40*. (Monographs of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 14). (Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press).

### *Spend to save*

The parents also made a more general point about needing to implement the best ideas to spend money now to save it later. This is related to the other key point about rolling out the projects which have been evaluated and proven to work.

The parents advocated looking at the spend-to-save opportunities across a range of areas, such as in the example outlined in Table 3 in relation to respite provision. They said this required effective assessment and evaluation of pilot and pathfinder projects, and ensuring the most effective ideas and services get implemented.

They recommended that projects like *Learning to Lead*, which are cheap to roll out and clearly effective in meeting our aspirations for children and their communities, should be available as national initiatives. In their recommendation to government about implementing *Learning to Lead*, the parents heeded the following advice:

- Government should offer the programme to schools but not ‘control’ it.
- The fact that children can self-elect onto teams is a core element of the approach, which will need to be maintained.
- Instruct a ‘hands-off’ style by teaching staff to allow mistakes as well as success.

## Summary

The recommendations made by the young people and parents drew on the evidence presented to them by witnesses as part of the citizens' jury process and from their own experiences of life. They informed our thinking and the development of the recommendations in the reform packages in the overall project report *Backing the future*. The recommendations presented in *Backing the future* draw on the combined findings from the citizens' juries, social return on investment analyses, secondary data findings and the Young People's Reference Group and expert learning panel considerations. However, where a recommendation was directly informed by jurors' suggestions, a flag has been inserted in the overall report to clearly reflect this. Alongside these overall project recommendations, we also urge politicians, policy-makers and others to consider and act on the more specific recommendations emerging from the citizens' juries as outlined in this document.

## Other reports related to this project include:

- Full project report:
  - *Backing the future: why investing in children is good for us all*
- Practical 'how to' documents:
  - *A guide to commissioning children's services for better outcomes*
  - *A guide to measuring children's well-being*
  - *A guide to co-producing children's services*
- SROI assessment reports for three Action for Children services:
  - *The economic and social return of Action for Children's Wheatley Children's Centre, Doncaster*
  - *The economic and social return of Action for Children's Family Intervention Team / 5+ Project, Caerphilly*
  - *The economic and social return of Action for Children's East Dunbartonshire Family Service*

All available at [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org) and [www.actionforchildren.org.uk](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk)