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PRESS RELEASE

Time to act: charity urges Government to tackle England's poor record on children

Increasing numbers of children have been let down in 2016 and denied the basic things they need to develop and thrive says the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), a coalition of 150 organisations.

Their annual assessment of what life is like for children in England finds that they are bearing the brunt of the Government's spending decisions and welfare cuts. Increasing numbers of children will go into 2017 without a permanent roof over their head or living illegally in cramped, dirty and unsafe Bed & Breakfasts (B&Bs) for long periods of time.

Despite soaring levels of poor mental health and self harm amongst children, sometimes with fatal consequences, very vulnerable children are not being cared for properly or kept safe during periods of mental health crisis.

Children are also experiencing poor treatment when in contact with the police – as shown by shocking new statistics on the use of Tasers, strip searching and spit hoods. Children from black or minority ethnic backgrounds are increasingly over-represented in the youth justice system.

The annual report draws on hundreds of sources and responses to Freedom of Information requests (FOIs) to examine how children and young people are faring in all aspects of their lives. Ahead of Human Rights Day on the 10th December, it assesses how well England is meeting its commitments under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, an internationally binding treaty the UK ratified in 1991.

Children's rights are the basic things children need for a good childhood and the best start in life such as to be protected from all forms of violence and adequately cared for.

However, despite the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's warning in June 2016 that the UK is not doing enough to prioritise children, the Government has so far failed to take decisive action on their recommendations.^[1]

Findings from the report include:

- Children in mental health crisis are increasingly being placed in adult wards - despite the Government having made this illegal in 2010 and the UN Committee urging the UK to follow the law. New FOI responses show 202 children were admitted to adult mental health wards in 2015/16, a 43% increase on 2011/12.^[2]
- The numbers of children under 15 years old rose from two in 2011/12 to at least 10 in 2015/16. In both periods the youngest child was 13 years old. Being on an adult ward surrounded by adults with severe psychiatric problems can be an extremely frightening experience for children with mental health problems of their own and only serves to add to their anxiety.
- Local authorities are continuing to break the law at an astonishing rate and are housing families with children in B&B accommodation for longer than the six week legal limit, ignoring warnings from the UN Committee. 1,140 families with children are living in B&Bs, a staggering 710% increase since 2010. ^[3] The report highlights the impact living in B&Bs has on children's health, development and educational achievement, drawing on the experiences of Renee who lived in a B&B when she was 14 for five months.

- Official statistics show very young children, especially boys, are being permanently excluded from school. In the year 2014/15, two boys a week aged under 5 years and under were permanently excluded from school and 6,600 received a fixed term exclusion. [4] The report highlights the shocking case of 5 year old Jacob with special educational needs who was left in a room by himself, restrained by six teachers and then permanently excluded. [5]
- New FOI data reveals that in the first nine months of 2016 the use of spit hoods on children more than doubled: at least 24 children in England were hooded (with the youngest recorded age being 15 years old). The use of spit hoods can be extremely distressing for children – as illustrated in the report by the experiences of “Sophie” – an 11 year old disabled girl.[6]
- New FOI responses from 44 police forces in England and Wales revealed that in 2015, Taser was used against children at least 538 times despite the UN Committee saying it should be prohibited. Tasers were fired in 43 of these uses, with the youngest child fired on just 12 years old. Tasers can cause unbearable pain and even when only used as a threat we know through our work with children that this causes immense fear and distress.
- Other issues in the report include rising rates of child poverty and sexual exploitation, severe breaches to the rights of refugee children, cuts to children’s services and widening levels of health and educational inequality.

Louise King, Director of CRAE said

‘Our report reveals that Government has ignored the UN Committee’s urgent calls to protect the basic needs and rights of some of our most vulnerable children including those suffering from poor mental health, living in B&Bs and treated badly by the police.

The Government must take immediate steps to tackle the increasing failure to protect the human rights of children in England.

CRAE is calling on the Government to introduce a child rights duty on public authorities so that when decisions are made which affect children, their rights are properly taken into consideration. This would ensure that the welfare of vulnerable children can no longer be ignored.’

Ends

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Notes to Editors

1. The UK was last examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in June 2016, see UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* <http://www.crae.org.uk/media/93148/UK-concluding-observations-2016.pdf>
2. Responses to FOI requests submitted by CRAE from 33 NHS Trusts or Foundations in England.
3. Department for Communities and Local Government (June 2016) Statutory homelessness and prevention and relief live tables. In January 2017 young people from CRAE’s ‘See it, Say it, Change it!’ Steering group will be launching a campaign calling for the Government to take action to end the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks.
4. Department for Education (2016) *Permanent for fixed period exclusions in England 2014 to 2015*
5. Jacob, 5, case study available on request.
6. A spit hood is a bag made of mesh-like material, with a drawstring to tighten it, which is put over the head.

7. CRAE will launch its 'State of Children's Rights in England 2016' report on Tuesday 6th December in the Jubilee Room in the Houses of Parliament hosted by Sarah Champion MP.
8. The 10th December 2016 is International Human Rights Day.
9. The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) works with 150 organisations and individual members to promote children's rights, making us one of the biggest children's rights coalitions in the world.
10. We believe that human rights are a powerful tool in making life better for children. We fight for children's rights by listening to what they say, carrying out research to understand what children are going through and using the law to challenge those who violate children's rights. We campaign for the people in power to change things for children. And we empower children and those who care about children to push for the changes that they want to see.
11. CRAE's annual 'State of Children's Rights in England' report draws on evidence from its member organisations, as well as official data and material obtained through Freedom of Information requests.
12. Any views expressed in this report are CRAE's and may not necessarily reflect the views of these individuals and organisations, or of CRAE's members.
13. CRAE has produced an annual State of Children's Rights report since 2003.
14. Report available from CRAE's website: www.crae.org.uk from 00.01 06 December 2016.
15. The report is made up of eight briefings:
 1. Executive Summary
 2. Children at the Centre - The General Measures of Implementation & General Principles of the CRC
 3. Poverty & Homelessness
 4. Safeguarding Children
 5. Immigration, Asylum & Trafficking
 6. Education, Leisure & Cultural Activities
 7. Health
 8. Policing & Criminal Justice