

justrights

**MAKE
OUR
RIGHTS
REALITY**

A manifesto created
by hundreds of young
people across England



**OUR RIGHTS MATTER
TO US! BUT NOT TO
EVERYONE...**

**OVER 1 MILLION
16-24 YEAR OLDS**



are left to
cope alone
with complex
rights-related
problems
each year

THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE!



We call on those responsible to:

- 1** Make it easier for us to get the correct information
- 2** Make independent advice services just for young people available in every local area
- 3** Give us free access to solicitors who specialise in working with young people
- 4** Make Citizens Advice Bureaux young person-friendly
- 5** Tailor services to meet our individual needs
- 6** Put our interests first – above those of the system



“Young people’s access to their rights and advice is important because without it young people wouldn’t have the skills and knowledge to turn them into good citizens”

Shannon, aged 19

“We aren’t asking to change the world – just simply provide the services we need – and to fund them. Every young person has a right to feel safe and have a warm meal every night.”

Courtney, aged 21



INTRODUCTION

Our basic rights – to housing, education, a reasonable standard of living, good health care and protection from abuse and exploitation – are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These rights matter to us. They are fundamental to our existence as equal citizens deserving of respect.

But rights mean nothing without the knowledge and means to enforce them. The Convention also sets out our rights to receive information, legal help and fair treatment under the law – and to be heard! Access to good quality information, advice, advocacy and representation is crucial if we are to understand our rights and responsibilities, deal with difficult problems in our lives and navigate our way to becoming confident and independent adults. However, many of us don't currently receive the help and support we need. This has to change!

“If you had basic things like money and a roof over your head you could think about all the other things in your life”

Fella, aged 20

We have had enough of:

- not being treated equally because of our age
- unfair and unlawful decisions being made that affect our wellbeing and quality of life
- our rights to housing and welfare benefits being ignored
- being taken for a ride by payday loan companies and employers
- being fobbed off by statutory services who are meant to be there to protect us, but who are more interested in saving money
- cuts to the services we desperately need, such as youth services, legal aid and mental health services
- getting passed around all over the place without anyone telling us what we're entitled to or where we can turn for help

We should always:

- be listened to, taken seriously and treated with the respect we deserve
- have our rights respected and upheld
- be treated as individuals, not as a problem
- get the help we need to enforce our rights and entitlements *before* we reach crisis point
- be allowed to participate in decisions that affect our lives

We want:

- to be able to help ourselves as far as possible – but we know that sometimes we need to access expert, independent advice, advocacy and representation to help us find our way through the system
- to receive help from workers we can trust, because they genuinely care about us, are skilled at working with young people, know what they're talking about, have only our best interests in mind and won't judge us

SO THAT WE CAN GET THE HELP WE NEED, WE CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT, LOCAL COUNCILS AND OTHERS TO...

1 Make it easier for us to get the correct information

Contrary to popular belief, we don't always know our rights! And when we have a problem, we often aren't told by anyone what we're entitled to or where to go for help.

Information on rights and the law should be easier to find and clearer for all young people to understand. So that we can get hold of all of the relevant information we need in order to help ourselves:

- There should be ONE website where we can find ALL the information we need about our rights and services.
- All young people should be taught about their rights at school as part of the National Curriculum.
- All young people should be sent a pack of information about their rights in the post with their National Insurance number when they turn 16.
- Teachers, youth workers and social workers must actively help us find out about our rights.
- Some young people should be trained up to educate others about young people's rights.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

2 MILLION The number of young people who experience problems requiring professional advice on rights-related issues, such as homelessness, money and employment, each year.

1 MILLION The number of young people left to cope alone with their problems.

£13,000 The cost to local public services of each young person who fails to get advice (as a result of stress, homelessness, disruption to education and contact with social services).

70% The proportion of young people reporting improvements in their mental or physical health after getting advice.

65% OF YOUNG PEOPLE believe that government doesn't want them to know about their rights and entitlements

"It took me a year of research to find out where I could go."

Lianne, aged 18

"They don't want us to know because they don't want to get into trouble. It's a lot less work for them to deal with if we don't know what to ask for."

Arlind, aged 16

"You are not told anything, you have to find out things for yourself and it isn't easy, you get conflicting information. I looked online and at some forums and there was different information, so I didn't know what was right until I saw an adviser."

Marcin, aged 19





2 Make independent advice services just for young people available in every local area

Our ability to make our rights a reality depends, above all, on being able to access a local advice service for young people, where we can have information and our options explained to us in terms we understand.

We want services to:

- be just for young people between the ages of 11 and 25
- allow us to just walk in off the street and ask anything, or nothing
- help us with a range of issues, including debt, employment, housing, homelessness, access to health services, education, family, relationships, welfare benefits, discrimination, crime, immigration and social services
- provide, or refer us on to, specialist legal advice services if our case is complicated and requires a lawyer
- provide advice alongside all the other services we need, particularly counselling and mental health services, advocacy, drug and alcohol support, help with finding work and managing our money
- respect our confidentiality and empower us to help ourselves
- be provided by charities that are genuinely independent from the organisations we have problems with (i.e. the Council, the Government, schools, employers)

The Government needs to recognise that access to these services is essential to our wellbeing. We find them helpful because we trust them – they are tailored to our needs, understand us, give us a voice and help us develop as individuals. Some of us are lucky to live in an area where services like this already exist, but cuts have forced some services to close. These cuts must stop!

“Advisers should have skills like youth workers and youth workers should have advice skills”

Ruby, aged 23

“A lot of young people need more than just practical support, they need emotional support as well”

Ayan, aged 17

80% OF YOUNG PEOPLE

feel it is important to get help with everything that is troubling you in one place

“It’s not just about having people around - people could be good or shit - it’s about having people who care to go to, who know their stuff, that will sit and give you some time but will also show you they give a shit, that’s important. My ideal place would be something like this [youth advice drop in centre], but where there is a solicitor involved - that would be my ideal place.”

Tom, aged 21



OUR IDEAL ADVISER

Respects us and earns our trust

Knows their stuff, but doesn't use jargon

Listens and understands, doesn't judge

Goes the extra mile to sort stuff out

Cares and is genuinely concerned

Empowers you and keeps you informed

Is honest and consistent

Is a mix between a youth worker and a lawyer



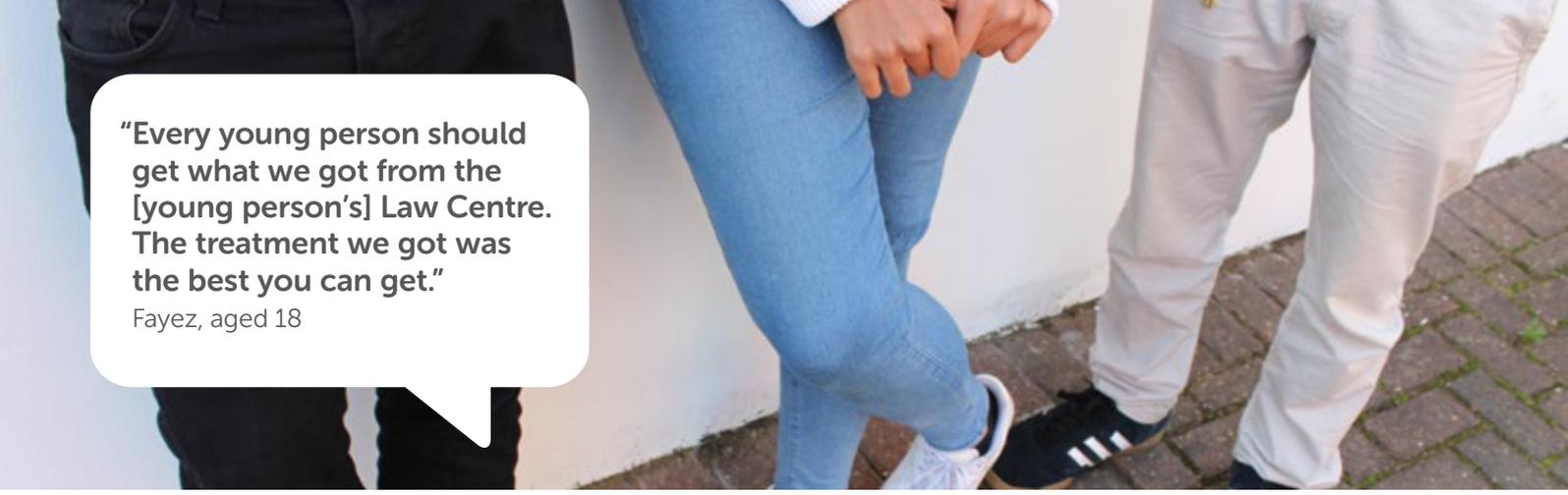
44% OF YOUTH ADVICE SERVICES
report scaling back or closing their services this year

96% OF YOUNG PEOPLE
believe a good advice service is one that allows you to drop in and ask anything (or nothing)



"It is important that young people have somewhere they can get all the help they need under one roof."

Tanya, aged 16



“Every young person should get what we got from the [young person’s] Law Centre. The treatment we got was the best you can get.”

Fayez, aged 18

3 Give us free access to solicitors who specialise in working with young people

Our inexperience and lack of knowledge of our rights make us especially vulnerable to exploitation and injustice. People in authority often don’t take our rights seriously. To force these people to meet their duties towards us, we sometimes need a legal representative.

Legal aid cuts are making it impossible to find a lawyer who can help us. Many of us now get no specialist help with social services, homelessness, immigration, education, employment, money and family problems – leaving us in desperate situations! It is shocking that some children and young people even have to represent themselves in court.

- We need to have free access to lawyers who specialise in working with young people.
- We need to be able to see these lawyers in places where we feel comfortable and can get the other support we need, e.g. youth advice centres.
- The legal support we need must be properly funded. The Government must ask us what we think before making any more changes to legal aid that affect us.
- All lawyers who ever come into contact with young people should be trained in how to talk and listen to us.

“I don’t know what I would have done without my [young person’s] solicitor. They [the authorities] are not respectful towards you unless you have a representative.”

Mani, aged 16

“It makes me feel grateful that I got [legal aid]. It makes me feel disgusted why they are cutting it, it makes no sense, it’s causing damage to our future society.”

Neha, aged 17

“Other solicitors just left us to wait – they never picked up the phone. [My young person’s solicitor] is different, she explained everything so that I could understand, she cares and helps you. She lets you know what is happening and doesn’t give you false hope.”

Aaban, aged 18

75,000 FEWER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
will get legal advice and representation each year because of legal aid cuts





4 Make Citizens Advice Bureaux young person-friendly

Many of us are not comfortable using services that are meant to be for everyone. We don't feel the CAB is for us – we don't expect to be taken seriously because of our age and are put off by all the waiting around.

Adult advice services should:

- have more flexible opening hours that suit young people, shorter waiting times and more friendly-looking reception areas
- employ advisers who can relate to us
- develop specialist services just for young people
- work more closely with youth organisations
- provide information that explains what they do and how they can help young people
- talk to us to find out what we want

If an advice service can't be bothered to do anything to make sure it is helping young people, it shouldn't carry on getting funding.

"I would never use a CAB, I wouldn't know how! They are for senior citizens"

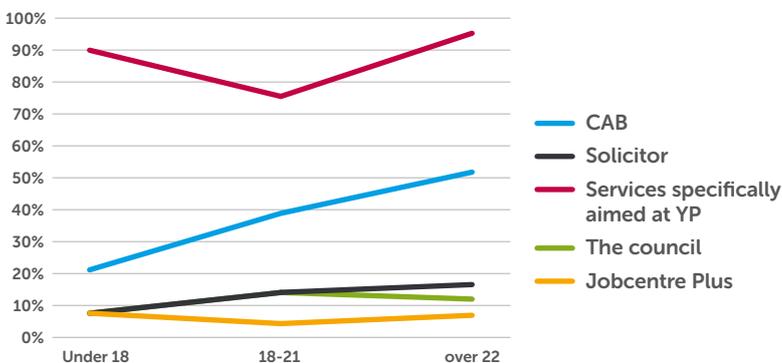
Taylor, aged 20

"The CAB's too formal – they should have more of a youth work approach"

Chris, aged 17

CHANGING ATTITUDES TO SERVICES WITH AGE

% of young people who said they would feel comfortable approaching different advice services



"The CAB is everyone's first point of call, but I've never used it. The opening times are difficult and the queue is always long and this puts off a lot of people, especially young people."

Tanya, aged 21

ONLY 35% OF 15-25 YEAR OLDS
feel comfortable approaching a CAB





5 Tailor services to meet our individual needs

Services should be for all young people, but we are all different and must be able to get the support we need in the way we need.

Adults assume that all young people want services delivered online. Some of us do and many of us would use websites and apps to find information about our rights and the services available. But, when we need more in-depth advice and support, most of us want to see an adviser face-to-face.

- We need as many options available to us as possible – including online information and telephone advice – **but always give us the option of seeing an adviser in person.**

Some of us are particularly vulnerable because of disabilities or because of our background, circumstances or health needs. This may mean services need to develop a range of approaches to reach us.

- Where we need extra support – e.g. interpreters or people on our side to attend meetings with us – this should always be available.

80% OF YOUNG PEOPLE

with legal problems are in at least one highly vulnerable group, e.g. a care leaver, a victim of abuse or unemployed

"Online advice helps me find a general idea of what's available to me, but is largely difficult to communicate with. Face-to-face advice allows a more in depth discussion with a knowledgeable individual."

Grace, aged 20

66% OF USERS

of youth advice services have a mental health problem

"All young people should see someone face-to-face if they have a problem, so they can see they are listening and you can tell if they are going to help you."

Brandon, aged 17

"Politicians should have a reality check. Just 'cause we are young doesn't mean we want to get our advice and support online, we aren't all tech savvy!"

Laura, aged 19

77% OF YOUNG PEOPLE want face-to-face advice





6 Put our interests first – above those of the system

We find it difficult to trust the advice we receive from the official services – e.g. Social Services, JobCentre Plus and Councils' housing departments – that are meant to be there to uphold our rights and protect us. They often patronise us, make our situation worse and let us down when we need them most. They rarely refer us on to someone who can give us good advice about our situation – and sometimes they actively prevent us from getting independent legal advice!

It should be illegal to put the interests of the system above the rights and protection of young people.

Statutory services must:

- employ staff who actually like young people
- train all their staff in young people's rights – and to listen to us, take us seriously and show us respect
- be far clearer about what they can and can't do for us and what we're entitled to
- stop fobbing us off with bad advice that isn't in **our** best interests – and realise that this approach doesn't save money in the long-term!
- recognise that they are part of the same system that is causing our problems, so may have a conflict when giving us advice
- actively support us to access independent sources of advice and legal support – and be held to account when they don't
- have simple young person-friendly complaints systems – so we can speak freely when we are not getting a good service without worrying about it harming our rights or the services we receive
- refer us to an independent advocacy service if we might need help to get our voice heard or make a complaint

"There are thousands of homeless people but none of the services care, they just see us as expensive. All they see is money – not young people"
India, aged 21

"I was homeless and alone at 16. Last time my social worker got in touch was when I was 16. I'm now 18!"
Chris, aged 18

We also need the Government to sort out the problems in the system that are causing us to need advice in the first place:

- blatantly unfair benefit sanctions that leave us destitute
- rip-off payday loans that are targeted at young people and get us into a spiral of debt
- Councils who routinely turn us away when we're homeless – even when the law is clear that we should be rehoused and given ongoing support
- a hostile immigration system that's almost impossible to navigate and can leave young migrants and asylum-seekers destitute, mentally ill and cut off from society

"How easy they are to sanction you....I've had it a few times. I haven't got the letter through [in time]. I've got the letter after the appointment happened. Three times I've had it, three times!"
Aedan, aged 18

75% OF YOUNG PEOPLE

think local Councils don't always give advice that's in young people's best interests



We aren't asking to change the world!
We just want to be given the help and
services we need so that we can get
on in life and become good citizens!

TAKE ACTION: SIGN OUR PETITION MAKE OUR RIGHTS REALITY



Hear from young
people in their own
words – watch our
film online

JustRights is a coalition of charities campaigning for fair access for children and young people to advice, advocacy and legal representation.

This manifesto has been developed by hundreds of young people all over England who participated in working groups, focus groups, a national survey and a youth editorial board. The development of the manifesto has been co-ordinated by Youth Access and made possible thanks to funding from The Baring Foundation and Youth Access.

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Young people's quotes are taken from JustRights' focus groups and survey responses.

Sources of data: *Young People's Views on Rights and Advice Services: results of a national survey to inform JustRights' Young People's Manifesto*, JustRights (2014); *The Advice Needs of Young People*, Youth Access (2009); *Youth advice: a mental health intervention?* Youth Access (2012); *The impact of legal aid cuts on children and young people*, JustRights (2013).

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