

# UK Youth Parliament Annual Sitting

## University of York

22-24/07/2016

The UK Youth Parliament is run by young people for young to make sure that we have a strong voice across the United Kingdom and beyond.

Last weekend (22nd - 24th July) over 200 Members of Youth Parliament gathered at the University of York for our annual sitting. We met for a weekend of debates, workshops, networking and campaign planning.

This was a great opportunity to share experiences with young people from across the UK and discuss how our youth voice journeys are making a change for young people.

### *Inspiration*

Over the course of the weekend my fellow MYPs and I heard from a number of inspirational speakers and invited guests including Rt. Hon John Bercow, MP and Speaker of the House Of Commons; Gulwali Passerlay, talking about his experiences as an unaccompanied refugee child and now campaigner; and Grace Jeremy from Young Minds telling us her personal and inspiring story of Mental health issues, recovery and campaigning.

John Bercow implored us to ensure that young people have a strong voice and to get out there and campaign. He told us about his own journey into politics and let us know that there is no shame in losing and that what is important is that we pick ourselves up and try again.



I should warn you that Mr Bercow also informed us that the key to influencing decision makers like councillors and MPs is repetition, repetition, repetition so if you don't respond to us we will keep knocking on your door.

Gulwali Passerlay arrived in this country as an unaccompanied child refugee from Afghanistan in 2007. The story of his arduous twelve month journey across Europe, hunger, detention and time spent in the notorious jungle camp at Calais was shocking but his quest to find safety and to be reunited with his brother was inspiring. The fact that he then went on to become an Member of Bolton Youth Council, Bolton Children in Care Council and Youthforia further shows us the importance of youth voice as a means of both individual and collective development.

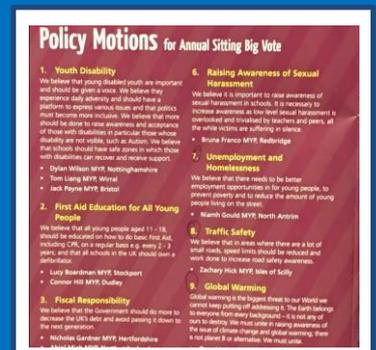
Grace Jeremy is a mental health and disability activist – two things that I am actually passionate about campaigning around too. During her teenage years Grace suffered a mental health breakdown. Her subsequent recovery embraced the idea that helping others through her campaigning work was of great benefit to her own mental health.

## Perspiration

It was a long, hot weekend in York and our packed agenda kept us hard at work. Over the course the weekend MYPs took part in a number of workshops to develop our national campaigns around Young People and Mental Health and Don't Hate Educate – a campaign to tackle racial and religious discrimination.

Last year Youth Parliament held a select committee on Mental Health and a result has developed a key campaign aim – to have a trained, professional counsellor in every school. We are also calling on MPs to debate the select committee report in the House of Commons. I have written our MPs here in Halton ask them sponsor such a debate and I have also asked them to meet with me at the UK Youth Parliament House of Commons Sitting later in the year to discuss this most important of topics. Mental health has been an important topic locally and I would urge all decision makers in the borough to reach out and involve young people in developing answers to this problematic area. I will be writing to schools later in the year to draw attention to this topic and to urge them to look at how they can best support their students with their mental health. I would urge you to take a keen interest in this area and support our national campaign.

On Friday evening I had the opportunity to address my fellow MYPs around our plans for Halton Against Hate, which is developing in response to the Don't Hate Educate campaign and Halton Youth Cabinet's HYC Vs Homophobia campaign. Alongside educating young people about hate, here in Halton I am determined that we celebrate diversity and difference. I would ask that you support this event and draw attention to this topic. In recent weeks I have written letters in our local and regional press drawing attention to hate incidents and imploring young people and adults to challenge hate. The UK Youth Parliament is currently convening a select committee into racial and religious discrimination and again I would ask that you keep an eye out for their forthcoming report.



## Aspiration

At the sitting we spent some time debating a range of motions to be added to the UK Youth Parliament's Manifesto. A range of proposals were put forward by Members of Youth Parliament and a number of these have now been adopted. I spoke in the debate around Youth Disability. As you may know I am a passionate supporter of disability awareness and have been campaigning on this issue for a number of years through my Speak Up Not Down campaign. I am very pleased to say that the motion passed and that the Youth Parliament is now committed to raising awareness and giving young people with disabilities a strong voice.

The manifesto is now agreed and I have attached a copy for your consideration. On 12th August we will be launching the UK Youth Parliament's Make Your Mark consultation. Here in Halton we have always had a strong turnout in this survey and this year I am aiming to ensure that a record breaking number of young people get their say on our priorities as a Parliament for the coming year. Alongside Youth Cabinet I will write with further details about Make Your Mark in the coming weeks and I hope that you will encourage schools and youth organisations to get involved and active in ensuring Halton's young people have a voice in this consultation.

The UK Youth Parliament's Annual Sitting is a very important event in the Youth Voice year. I believe that it is essential that the young people of Halton continue to be represented at the UK Youth Parliament and have the chance to have their say on local, regional and national issues. I would urge you to support youth voice in the borough and to support UK Youth Parliament, Youthforia, Halton Youth Cabinet, and our other youth voice structures such as the Children in Care Council, Young Carers and Halton Speak Out.

On a personal note my involvement in youth voice has greatly increased my confidence, allowed me to meet and engage with other young people from all backgrounds and cultures across the UK and to make a difference in the lives of young people. I would like to thank Halton Borough Council and Young Addaction Halton for supporting my youth voice journey and hope that you will be able to continue to do similar for other young people in the future.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. If you would like any more information about the UK Youth Parliament and the work that I am doing you can email me at [tomnorrismp@gmail.com](mailto:tomnorrismp@gmail.com) or follow me on Twitter and Facebook at @Tom Norris MYP

