

## Charlene Bello on taking a stand against corporal punishment in the European Parliament

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**In December 2008, three young people represented the NSPCC at the launch of the European Children's Network (EURONET)'s campaign to ban corporal punishment against children within the home across the European Union. Charlene Bello (16) shares her views on the issue, and recounts the experience that herself, KC Hart (14) and Abe Buckoke-Kleinman (14) had on their trip to Brussels.**

I got involved in the NSPCC through their 11 Million Takeover Day in 2007. It was weird at first because I hadn't worked with NSPCC through any youth clubs and groups like most other participants had. Now I'm a member of The Way Forward which is the NSPCC's advisory group for Public Policy, Communications and Appeals.

The EURONET launch in Brussels was really about finding young people and organisations who all want corporal punishment to be banned across Europe. I was asked to take part because I had already represented NSPCC in London, in a similar British conference. The British conference was trying to unite all religions and ethnicities against corporal punishment.

KC had worked with me at the British conference, so considering our age difference, it was good for us both to attend the EURONET launch. I'm almost 17, so KC is most likely to see the effects of the law change, if it happens. It wasn't just me and her though; we went with Abe who represents the Children Are Unbeatable! Alliance. NSPCC are part of that alliance too but it was good to have a young person who has done different things to promote the cause.

There were about 10 young people who worked on the presentation at our planning day. We created a storyboard with pictures to show the adults in Brussels. It showed how children and young people react to different forms of discipline - if a child suffers violence they are more prone to use violence. We researched other countries that had already banned corporal punishment and also looked for quotes gathered by the NSPCC from young people about how they felt about being smacked, to show EURONET how important their cause was.

The launch really showed us that it's very possible to change the law in this country, and also how important it is that we do it as soon as possible. There were quite a lot of people there, but they were all bundled down at the other side of the room – must have been scared of us teenagers! But seriously, I was happy that EURONET had asked the NSPCC to bring young people. It was nice to have a voice in what affects us. Often young people think that adults like to always make decisions about our lives without actually asking us, but that's not always true.

I think the best thing about the event, apart from writing the "thank you" rap for EURONET with KC and Abe on the way home (cringe!), was meeting the young people who were representing Save the Children Romania. They were a laugh, and their presentation was full of information. Romania have the ban on corporal punishment in place, but apparently parents haven't accepted that it's wrong, whereas in the UK the ban isn't in place but many parents would support it if it was. I told the Romanians that we could trade ideas and make both our countries safer for children and young people which is what EURONET is all about so I think the mission is well on it's way to being accomplished!



The NSPCC and Save The Children Romania groups outside European Parliament