



# Building a Culture of Participation

Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation

## RESEARCH REPORT

Perpetua Kirby  
Claire Lanyon  
Kathleen Cronin  
&  
Ruth Sinclair

The views expressed in this report are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education & Skills

ISBN: 0-9546695-0-9

## The National Children's Bureau (NCB)

**NCB** promotes the interests and well-being of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives. NCB advocates the participation of children and young people in all matters affecting them. NCB challenges disadvantage in childhood.

**NCB** achieves its mission by

- ensuring the views of children and young people are listened to and taken into account at all times
- playing an active role in policy development and advocacy
- undertaking high quality research and work from an evidence based perspective
- promoting multidisciplinary, cross-agency partnerships
- identifying, developing and promoting good practice
- disseminating information to professionals, policy makers, parents and children and young people

**NCB** has adopted and works within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## PK Research Consultancy (PKRC)

PK Research Consultancy is an independent research consultancy founded nearly four years ago. It specializes in research with children and young people, primarily in the area of children's participation. The consultancy provides research, training and advice to the voluntary and statutory sectors, and is a limited company. Children's active participation is seen as their right as citizens, essential for their well-being and to ensure a healthy, inclusive society. PKRC aims to promote children's views within research and to contribute to evidence-based practice on enabling children and young people's increased participation within society.



## The Research Team

**Perpetua Kirby** is Director of PK Research Consultancy and a Visiting Research Fellow at South Bank University. Previously she was a researcher at the Universities of Manchester and Staffordshire, at Save the Children and Centrepont. Her main research interests are the participation of children and young people, including child-centred and participatory research approaches.

**Claire Lanyon** is a Research Associate at NCB. She has a research Masters in Development Studies and has experience of community and youth work with children in Britain. She has recently undertaken research at Kids Company at the Arches, in South London and on the *Aim High, Stay Real* research conducted by NCB for the Children and Young People's Unit.

**Kathleen Cronin**, Head of Participation Unit, NCB has considerable experience in working with children and young people to ascertain their views and promote their participation and involvement. She also works to develop methodologies and set standards in involving children and young people from an evidence based perspective. Kathleen's recent work includes work on *Aim High, Stay Real* (CYPUP) and carrying out consultations with children and young people for the DfES.

**Ruth Sinclair** is Director of Research at NCB. She has many years experience in conducting research on and with children. She has a particular interest in children in public care or in receipt of social services and in developing child-centred research approaches that include the views and perspectives of children and involve them as widely as possible in the research process.

**Sue Chegini, Laura Critchton, Graham Duffy, Hannah Gibney, Mattie Kayukwa, Laureene Reeves Ndagire, Robin Parker** and **Jack Sharp** are all young people who were members of the research team, and acted either as Young Advisors and/or Young Researchers and **Memunatu Sesay** and **Richard Angel** attended the young researchers training.

## Acknowledgements

We have received support and help from many people and organisations in undertaking this research and preparing the report. First, we want to acknowledge the enthusiasm and hard work of the Young Advisors and Young Researchers whose advice and practical input was so important, not least in ensuring that we maintained a child/young person focus throughout the project.

Our thanks to the staff, children and young people at the case study projects who made us very welcome, responded to our requests, supplied us with information (and coffee) and were so open in their interviews. It is their thoughts and experiences that are the core of this report and give it validity.

The National Youth Agency was very cooperative in enabling us to use their database of participation projects, and we would like to give special thanks to Carolyn Oldfield for providing information and to Bill Badham for his initial input on the design of the research. Also Barbara Herts, Department of Health, and Richard Parsons DfES gave support to the project and advice to the project team. We had help from many colleagues in NCB, particularly Kate Thomas, Robert Harnett, and Steve Howell and others too numerous to mention. We wish to thank them all.

The Children and Young People's Unit funded the research and several staff from the Unit have supported and guided the research team over the past year. Our particular thanks to Wanda Brown, Robert Bell and Chris Cuthbert who sought to ensure that the final product would make a real contribution to taking forward the debate on children and young people's participation and help those seeking to create the necessary infrastructures to build a participation culture.

Perpetua Kirby  
Claire Lanyon  
Kathleen Cronin  
Ruth Sinclair

December 2003



# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Section One: The study and its context</b>	
1. What do we Mean by Participation?	18
2. The Research Study	32
<b>Section Two: Participation and the Organisation</b>	
3. Cultures of Participation	40
4. Purpose of Participation	49
5. Institutionalising Participation	57
<b>Section Three: Participation in Practice</b>	
6. Developing Positive Relationships	86
7. Participation Activities	102
<b>Section Four: Outcomes from Participation</b>	
Section Introduction	
8. Practical Benefits to Services	124
9. Citizenship and Social Inclusion	134
10. Personal Development	139
<b>Section Five: Conclusion</b>	
11. Making Participation Meaningful	144
<b>References</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	
1. Case Study Summaries	151
2. Database and Case Study Organisations	181

## List of Tables

Table 1.1:	How well children and young people feel listened to by people	25
Table 1.2:	How well children and young people feel listened to by organisations	26
Table 2.1	Organisational relationships	37

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1	A model of the level of participation	22
Figure A.1	Service area – database sample	181
Figure A.2	Groups of young people – database sample	184
Figure A.3	Ages of young people involved – database sample	184
Figure A.4	National, regional and local agencies – database sample	185
Figure A.5	Location – database sample	185
Figure A.6	Focus of participation – database sample	186
Figure A.7	Service area – case study sample	187
Figure A.8	Location – case study sample	191
Figure A.9	Ages of young people – case study sample	192
Figure A.10	Groups of young people involved – case study sample	193



# Executive Summary

The new Children, Young People and Families Directorate (CYPFD) in the DfES is keen to support those who want to involve children and young people in decision-making and to help them find ways to do so more effectively. They commissioned this study examining genuinely participatory practice with children and young people in case studies of 29 organisations. The research was undertaken by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and PK Research Consultancy (PKRC).

The growing acceptance of the principle of young people's involvement has led, in recent years, to a mushrooming of participation activity. However there is still work to be done in ensuring that this participation is meaningful to young people, that it is effective in bringing about change and that it is sustained. Moreover much participation activity is one-off, or isolated, rather than embedded within agencies. Many of the case studies in this research are attempting to make participation more integral to their organisation. They have much to tell us about how organisations can build organisational infrastructures and cultures that are more participative. We start with some of these key issues they have identified.

## Building a Culture of Participation: Key Issues

- Undertaking meaningful and sustainable participation requires organisations to change.
- Participation is a multi-layered concept: organisations need to understand these complexities and apply them appropriately, if participation is to be inclusive of all young people and in all decision-making that affects them.
- Meaningful participation is a process, not simply the application of isolated, one-off participation activities or events.
- Strategies designed to address both personal and public decision-making are needed to fulfil the rights of children and young people under the UNCRC, to be involved in *all* decisions affecting their lives.
- Listening needs to influence change. Taking account of what children say is what makes their involvement meaningful
- Acting on children and young people's views brings positive outcomes: in service developments; increasing young people's sense of citizenship and social inclusion; and enhancing their personal development
- There are different cultures of participation and organisations need to be clear about their reasons for undertaking participation and how they plan to develop this work into the future.

## Introduction

The study reported here has three purposes:

- To provide an overview of the range of participation activity currently being undertaken at local, regional and national levels.
- To draw on the experiences of a sample of organisations to describe the ways in which children and young people have been involved in decision-making; to point to practice that is genuinely participatory; to identify factors that seem to promote good outcomes; and to explore ways of developing participatory organisations.
- To report this and share it with others in order to advance thinking on participation and to assist in moving organisations towards cultures and infrastructures which will sustain and embed the participation of children and young people.

This research report is accompanied by a **Handbook**. This is addressed to management and staff at different levels within an organisation and aims to stimulate thinking, offer useful ideas about how to actively involve children and young people in decision-making and to encourage organisations to explore how they can develop a more participatory culture.

## Section 1 The study and its context

### The meaning of participation

- The past decade has seen major changes in our thinking and understanding about children that has led to a broad acceptance of children's right to be involved in decisions that affect them. This has led to a mushrooming of different participation activity. The extent of this varies in different contexts and sectors. However there is still limited documented evidence of the impact of participation in terms of substantial changes.
- Participation is a multi-layered concept, with the same term often used to describe very different processes. Participation can be considered under the following six dimensions: level of participation; focus of decision-making; content of decision-making; nature of participation activity; frequency and duration of participation; the children and young people involved.

## The Research Study

- The research team were supported throughout by a group of Young Advisors and Young Researchers. They not only provided a young person's perspective on all the work, but following training they worked with adult researchers in gathering the views of adults and children involved in the case studies.
- A database was established of almost 150 organisations with the following characteristics: they had to have involved children and young people; to have listened to them and taken action on that; to have had a degree of organisational commitment to participation, and to have attempted to assess or evaluate their activity. We actively sought to include organisations that were less well known.
- This database served as a sample frame from which to select 29 organisations to act as case studies for the research. Nine further criteria were used to select the case studies to ensure a diverse sample. 23 were major case studies and 6 minor studies.
- The major case studies involved: introductory telephone conversations; collation of documentary materials; visits to the project; data collection from adults/professionals; ascertaining the views of children and young people. The minor studies did not include visits or speaking to children or young people.
- The research was not an evaluation of the individual projects nor did it attempt to assess the comparative benefits of different approaches or tools used in participation.

## Database and case study sample

- The database sample comprises 146 organisations and the case study sample 29 organisations. The majority of the organisations are in England, with a small number of examples from other parts of the UK. Each of the 2 samples are described by a range of characteristics: their services area; the sector; whether they work nationally, regionally or locally; whether they work in rural, urban or inner-city areas; the circumstances of the children involved; the ages of the children involved; the focus of the participation work.
- While the database cannot be said to be comprehensive or necessarily representative of participation activity in England at this point in time, it captures a wide range of organisations that are engaged in participation work, the children and young people they work with and the great variety of that activity.

- While the sample includes agencies across most sectors and service areas, most participation is locally based and in small organisations or agencies, and is more likely to involve generic youth work or community regeneration than other areas, especially youth offending and the courts.
- A very wide range of children and young people are involved in the sample projects, but the most common age group is 12-16 year olds. Most services serve all young people, but many also target a wide range of different specialists groups.
- Most participation focuses on service development or delivery with less attention given to policy or strategic development.

## Section 2 Participation and the Organisation

### Cultures of Participation

We identified three different cultures of participation within the case studies, that describe how participation sits within their organisation. However, the boundaries between these are blurred as organisations move between types and there may be differences between departments. The three types are non-hierarchical, as each can be appropriate within different organisations or settings. These are:-

- **Consultation-focused organisations:** these consult children and young people to inform services, policy and product development.
- **Participation-focused organisations:** these involve young people in making decisions (as well as consultations) within participation activities that are time-bound or context specific. Often a sample rather than all relevant children and young people are involved.
- **Child/youth-focused organisations:** children and young people's participation is central to these organisations' practice and they establish a culture in which it is assumed that all children and young people will be listened to about all decisions that affect their lives.

### Purpose of Participation

Organisations have a range of different purposes in involving children and young people. Some have articulated and documented their reasons for doing so more than others. Most focus on involving children and young people internally, whereas some also promote participation within other agencies. The cited reasons for undertaking participation were:

- **Practical benefits to services:** ensuring adapted or new services best meet the expressed needs of children, as well as offering improved individual client support, improved clients' experience, access and use of services. Involving young people was also seen as a way of improving service accountability.
- **Citizenship and social inclusion:** Participation was seen as helping to establish inclusive practice, and fulfilling an obligation to ensure children's rights under the UNCRC; to empower children to effect change and to develop the self-belief in their ability to influence outcomes. Participation can offer children and young people opportunities to have increased responsibility within their lives, improve community relationships (between children, and between children and adults) and to enhance community feeling.
- **Personal and social development:** Participation was also seen as contributing to children and young people's wider personal development, including knowledge, skills and confidence.

## Institutionalizing Participation

To develop meaningful participatory practice, organisations have to establish the infrastructure that will promote and support new ways of working. This means becoming learning organisations that experiment and reflect on practice. Change needs to happen at senior management and staff levels, and in policy. There are a number of stages that organisations go through when building participatory cultures, although this is complex and dynamic, rather than a linear process. We describe these stages as *unfreeze*; *catalyse*, *internalise* and *institutionalize*.

- **Unfreeze:** The first challenge is to unfreeze or unblock existing attitudes, procedures and styles of working. Different factors herald the need to change, including external pressures (government agenda; funding requirement) or internal drives (professional belief; exposure to participatory practice). It may be necessary to highlight the need for change, although few organisations changed as a result of research evidence. It is valuable to demonstrate links between participation and policy initiatives.
- **Catalyse:** Once individuals and organisations have begun to see the need for change there are a number of factors that can help this to take-off. This includes identifying existing champions or, if necessary, establishing new champions of participation. Ultimately their role is to support change across the organisation rather than relying on these individuals to do all participation

work. Senior management support is a key catalyst for institutionalising participation; they create the climate that allows change to take place across the organisation and they can ensure young people's ideas are acted upon.

- It is important to develop a vision for children and young people's participation, and set this against an understanding of the culture and politics of the organization. Change needs some organisation and planning, while remaining flexible and manageable. Involving children and young people early helps to ensure plans are child/youth focused.
- Developing participation work in partnership working has benefits and increasing networks helps to influence change across a range of organisations. The amount of funding for participation varies across agencies; those services working most with children and young people on a daily basis appear to have least dedicated funding to develop this work. There is a danger that funding is focused on creating an elite workforce of participation workers.
- **Internalise:** Internalising change, and ensuring it is sustainable, involves communicating and developing a shared vision and understanding of participation. Putting time and resources into building staff capacity is essential, including – sufficient staffing and time, targeted recruitment, on-going training, and opportunities to discuss practice and experiment – and into motivating and celebrating achievements. Inevitable conflicts will need to be resolved. Reflection and evaluation helps to ensure organisations develop the learning culture needed to undergo change.
- **Institutionalize:** In order to ensure participation is institutionalised it will be necessary to mainstream practice. This might include developing internal policy and guidance, and agreed standards.

## Section 3: Participation in Practice

### Developing Positive Relationships

- Central to participatory practice is the development of positive relationships between adults and children and young people, including staff, peers, parents and the wider community.
- Building trust and respect is the starting point. This relies on positive worker attitudes towards children and young people, showing a genuine interest in them, as well as being interesting to them.

- Establishing dialogue between children and young people enables them to play an active role in their relationships with adults, rather than being passive recipients. Adults need to be open and up front about what they can offer, share their views and knowledge, and offer appropriate direction. The challenge is how to do so openly so adults do not impose their power. Children, young people and adults may need support to engage in dialogue with each other.
- Feedback to young people is an important and integral part of dialogue, not an afterthought. Adequate feedback includes information about how views have (or have not) been taken forward, ideally through discussion rather than simply in written form.
- To develop positive relationships with children and young people adults need to redress the power imbalance, although this does not (and cannot) necessarily mean equal power in all situations. Power is displayed in everyday behaviour and language, and it is this that adults need to change. Workers can act as brokers between young people and others in positions of power.
- Adult support for children and young people is necessary within participatory practice. This includes providing trusted one-to-one support, adult mentors, advocacy and training.
- Participation practice is often about increasing opportunities for children and young people to make decisions. This is about providing appropriate rather than limitless choices.
- Informal and formal peer support is an important part of many participation activities. It encourages children and young people to take responsibility for each other and to actively participate in developing positive relationships and community well-being.
- Parents are sometimes involved in supporting participatory practice, particularly with younger children, which can be highly valuable, although sometimes it is important to support parents to let their children engage in activities without their intervention.
- Involving children and young people within their wider communities, where they get to engage with different professionals and residents, helps to develop wider positive relationships, including redressing inter-generational conflict.

## Participation Activities

- Different organizations tend to involve children and young people in different types of decisions. Organisations delivering services directly to young clients often emphasise their involvement in public and personal decisions; youth work organisations emphasise activities for public decision-making; strategic bodies and dedicated participation organisations promote participation in public decision-making; research and product development organizations stress involvement for influencing services, policies and products.
- Those working with children, rather than teenagers, particularly stressed the importance of involving them in personal decisions, and usually involve all their clients, on a daily or frequent basis. The most common method is spending time 'being with' clients and engaging in informal dialogue and observation, but also 'focused dialogue' around specific issues. Other more formal activities can also be used including complaints procedures and advocacy.
- Formal communication systems and other communication methods are important for enabling children and young people with communication impairments to express their views and feelings and to initiate communication.
- Participation in public decision-making is dominated by formal group activities or one-off consultations. These usually limit involvement to pre-set times and to a sample of children and young people. There is frequently a trade-off between inclusiveness and the level of control. There are a few, but valuable, examples where information gained informally by workers is passed to decision makers to be used in public decisions.

## Section 4: Outcomes from Participation

Few case study organisations could provide rigorous evaluation or other empirical evidence to demonstrate the relationship between participation and the assumed and promoted benefits, although many could illustrate these with anecdotal evidence. Future development in the practice of participation must include appropriate evaluation, and further research in this area is needed. Identified outcomes are highlighted under three headings: practical benefits to services, citizenship and social inclusion and personal development.

### Outcomes – Practical Benefits to Services

- Improvements to an organisation's services for children and young people through involving them in decision-making were perceived to be considerable. Agencies adapt and develop their services, ensuring they better suit and



benefit their service users, and the implication is that resources are maximised. In addition, significant outcomes were achieved in the following areas: improved service development and client support; increased access and utilisation of services; and increased participatory practice.

### **Outcomes – Citizenship and Social Inclusion**

- Outcomes were achieved which benefit the citizenship and social inclusion of young people, organisations, communities and parents, and which can also have wider political outcomes. These were fulfilling children’s rights; increasing empowerment, citizenship and political education and responsibility, and improving relationships between children/young people and adults, as well as between young peers.

### **Outcomes – Personal Development**

- Nearly all agencies cited personal development as an outcome for the young people involved in participatory activities. This included confidence and self-esteem, communication skills, group work and practical skills.

## Introduction

Over recent years and particularly in the past decade there has been growing acceptance that children and young people should be involved in the making of decisions that affect them. Great impetus has been given to this in England by the commitment of the Government. Their objective is clear:

*'The Government wants children and young people to have more opportunities to get involved in the design, provision and evaluation of policies and services that affect them or which they use.'* (CYPUP, 2001)

Moreover the Government is setting an example to other organisations by requiring all central government departments to produce Action Plans detailing how they are to involve children and young people in the decision-making of their department (see <http://www.cypu.gov.uk>).

Increasingly we see acceptance of the principle of children's involvement being turned into practice through a great variety of participation activities across a wide range of organisations. There may still be some that need convincing and here good evidence of the benefits or outcomes from participation can be persuasive in changing attitudes. However, despite this growing commitment to participation, many organisations have difficulty in translating this into practice that is meaningful for the children and young people involved, that is sustained and effective in bringing about change.

While the participation of children and young people is an important principle and indeed a human right under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, participation should not be seen simply as an end in itself. The purpose of participation is to ensure better outcomes for children themselves and also for the organisation and the wider community. The involvement of children and young people is only likely to be meaningful to them if they can see that their views have been taken into account and have made a difference. So effective participation is likely to mean that the involvement of children actually leads to change (where they identify change is needed).

## The research project

The Children, Young People and Families Directorate (CYPFD) within the Department for Education and Skills is keen to support those who want to involve children and to help them to find ways of doing so more effectively. They have commissioned this study to assist in that process. The study originally had two primary purposes: first to provide an indication of the range of participation activity that is currently being undertaken at local, regional and national level; and second to draw on the experience of a wide ranging sample of organisations in order to provide information and practical advice on different ways of involving children and young people. However, as the research progressed it quickly became apparent that a third objective was appropriate. It became clear from the research data that organisations that are successful in involving children and young people are those that see participation as a wider concept, reaching beyond specific events to include a whole or overarching approach, leading to the development of participatory cultures. So a third purpose of this work is to report on the ways and means that have been employed in developing participatory organisations, and by sharing this with others to promote this approach to increasing effective participation by children and young people. Hence the title of the report – ***Building a Culture of Participation***.

CYPFD commissioned the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) and PK Research Consultancy (PKRC), working as a team, to carry out the research. The core team consisted of Ruth Sinclair, Claire Lanyon and Kathleen Cronin from NCB and Perpetua Kirby from PKRC, assisted by input from several colleagues across NCB. Most importantly the research team was assisted by a group of young advisors/researchers. Following a residential weekend receiving ‘Introduction to research’ training, young researchers joined members of the core team on case study visits. They also assisted in analysis of the material gathered and in drawing out policy and practice lessons.

There are two separate, but closely related, outputs from the project. The first is this report. The second is a Handbook which draws on the material gathered during the research, and has been designed specifically to assist those who wish to develop their participation practice and promote participatory organisations.

## Structure of the report

This report presents a picture of children’s participation as currently practiced in England. The broad picture is drawn from information collated on almost 150 different participation projects, mainly located within England, but with some examples from other parts of the UK. The detail is provided by 29 case studies again largely from England, but with 2 examples from Scotland. The case studies represent

a wide range of different contexts, but most are organisations which have been engaged in participation activity for some time and all are seen as being relatively successful in achieving their objectives. Great volumes of information were collected on each case study, and interviews were conducted with major stakeholders, including children and young people. From analysis of this material it has been possible to describe the very many ways in which children and young people are involved in decision-making; to explore the range of methods or processes that have been employed; to point to practice that seems to be genuinely participatory, to identify the factors that seem to promote good outcomes from participation and to explore ways of developing participatory organisations. All of this is described in this report.

The report is structured into 5 Sections. Section 1 provides the context and overview of the work. Chapter 1 first maps some of the drivers that have moved children's participation forward. Then, given that the term participation is used in a myriad of different ways, there is discussion of some of the frameworks that have been developed to try to disentangle how the term has been translated into practice and explains the frameworks employed in this report. The second chapter sets out briefly the aims of the research study and how it was conducted and presents a summary of the database projects and the case study projects.

Section 2 reviews participation from an organisational perspective. Here the focus is on the different participation cultures (Chapter 3), objectives (Chapter 4) and infrastructures (Chapter 5) within organisations that were found to support children and young people's participation that is sustainable and likely to become embedded as part of everyday practice.

Section 3 moves to examine the actual participation practice of the case studies. Using illustrations from the sample projects, Chapter 6 reports on the importance of positive relationships in developing meaningful participation and identifies examples of practice that were seen as helpful in building and sustaining good relationships – between young people and adults, between young peers, and between adults. Chapter 7 reports on the wide range of participation activities used in the case studies to involve children and young people in both personal decision-making and public decision-making.

The fourth section moves to examine outcomes from participation. Although rigorous or clearly documented evidence was not always available from the case studies, those interviewed were able to point to many changes that they believed were, at least in part, related to the involvement of children and young people. These are reported in chapters 8 to 10 – with a chapter each on outcomes related

to practical benefits to services, citizenship and social inclusion of children and young people, and the personal development of children and young people.

The final section, Section 5, draws together conclusions from the findings and makes suggestions for re-thinking children's participation to ensure that the current explosion of activity in this area is effective in bringing about significant changes: for children, for processes and relationships, for services and in moving organisations towards building cultures and infrastructures which sustain and embed children and young people's participation.





# Section One

The Study & Its Context

# Chapter 1:

## What do we mean by participation?

Over the past decade there has been a growing acceptance that children and young people should be more involved in making decisions that affect them. Increasingly, this has been turned into practice through a variety of participation activities. But if there is now wide acceptance of why children should be involved, there is still much uncertainty about how this should be done, especially how to ensure that participation creates appropriate change. It is hoped that the findings from the research reported here can offer some assistance to those striving to achieve participation that is meaningful. Also, that the research will move the idea of participation forward, so it is no longer seen simply as an end in itself, by demonstrating how participation can become a means to achieve better outcomes, both for young people and for organisations. However, before reporting the research study and its findings, this chapter aims to set the context, first by mapping briefly some of the influences that have promoted greater acceptance of children's participation and then by considering some of the frameworks that have been used to try to disentangle how the concept of participation can be understood in practice.

It has the following sub-sections:

- *Why increased participation?*
- *Participation activity.*
- *What do we mean by participation?*
- *The purpose of participation*
- *Cultures of participation*

## Why increased participation?

Growing acceptance of children's participation has been encouraged by new thinking from several different directions; for example, the increasing influence of the consumer; the children's rights agenda; and our increased understanding of the active role that children play in shaping their lives.

The consumer movement, which first came to prominence in the 1970s, and is now reflected in terms like 'engaging with users' has been successful in giving consumers more power in exercising choice and in influencing the nature and quality of the goods and services made available to them. Increasingly, there is recognition that



children are also users and should be included in user consultations. Also there is growing evidence that children are consulted more often as users of services, both as individuals and as a group, but there is limited evidence (and little from this research) that children are enabled to get involved in decision-making around wider agendas, for example in allocation of budgets.

The second important change relates to our understanding of the role that children can play in shaping their environment (James et al, 1999) and a changed understanding of the competences that children, even young children, have to be involved in decision-making (Alderson, 1993; Clark and Moss, 2001). Until the late 1980s children were invisible in social accounting (Qvortrup: 1997). Children and young people were identified as part of a family or care facility; they were rarely identified as a group in their own right. Parents, teachers and carers determined what was best for the child and spoke for children within research and policy development. General practice did not involve asking children what they saw as their needs or their views on the services they received; services were determined by adults' interpretations of children's needs and wants. Our understanding of children has changed, so they are now seen as active players, who make a valued contribution to society (Prout and James, 1997).

The third influence is the extension of the Rights agenda to include children, as exemplified by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by the British Government in 1991. The article of the Convention that deals specifically with participation is Article 12: 'State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'. This does not necessarily mean that children and young people make decisions autonomously but rather that adults involve children and young people in decision-making processes in ways appropriate to their ability and understanding.

The convention declares the human rights of children as individuals in their own right, but it also recognizes that children are vulnerable by placing the child's right to participate along side their right for protection and the provision of services. These themes, protection and provision, are traditionally rights that adults accept in order to protect children from harm and to provide food, shelter, education, and so on. However, participation rights can be more difficult for adults, in that they deal with the civil rights of children and touch on the power balance between adults and children.

In recognizing participation rights, adults must take on a different role from simply being protectors and providers. This requires working **with** children and young people rather than working for them; understanding that accepting responsibly **for** someone does not mean taking responsibility **away** from them. It is this shift that some adults find uncomfortable, but it is necessary if the participation rights of children are to be realised. As Lansdown (1995) states 'The Convention on the Rights of the Child has made explicit the obligations to recognize and include children as members of society. It requires that adults respect the rights of children and that children grow up in an environment which enables them to understand the mutuality and reciprocity associated with that respect.(p7)

This suggests that rather than seeing adult and children's rights in competition, adults and institutions could work with children and young people to develop the infrastructure to enable the rights of children to become a reality. In this way children's participation is more likely to become embedded and indeed automatic.

## Participation activity

In line with the Government's commitment to involving children and young people more in decision-making, there is now an increasing level of varied activity under the general title of children's participation across the statutory and voluntary sectors. Organisations such as the Children's Society, National Children's Bureau, Barnardo's, British Youth Council, Save the Children and National Youth Agency have been engaging with children and young people in participation projects and building up a wealth of experience to inform good practice. These Organisations now involve children and young people at the highest levels of decision-making, showing that it is possible for young people and adults to work together on complex issues. We have also seen the development of organisations run by or with children and young people, for example Article 12, UK Youth Parliament and Children's Express.

Many national initiatives and policies have highlighted children and young people's participation as a crucial element: Agenda 21 programmes, Single Regeneration Budget, New Deal for Communities, Children's Fund, Connexions, Local Strategic Partnerships, Children's Services Planning Guidance and the Local Government Act. Indeed, Willow (2002) identifies twenty-one major government initiatives which provide opportunities for children to influence decisions at a local level. Similarly, the database on participation activity maintained by the National Youth Agency ([www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk)) and this current research identify a great range of participation projects across most domains of children lives.

## What do we mean by participation?

When new concepts such as ‘participation’ are actively embraced, then terminology can become cloudy – with the same word being used to describe very varied activity in very differing circumstances. It feels important therefore that we clarify the way in which the term participation is being employed in this research.

Participation is a multi-layered concept. In unfolding those layers it is possible to distinguish at least seven dimensions along which children’s participation in decision-making can be described:

- level of participation;
- focus of the decision-making;
- content of the decision-making;
- nature of participation activity;
- frequency and duration of participation;
- children and young people involved.

Each of these dimensions is used within this study to explore participation activity. In this chapter we unpick the dimensions; in later chapters they serve as frameworks for considering the evidence from the case studies.

### Level of participation

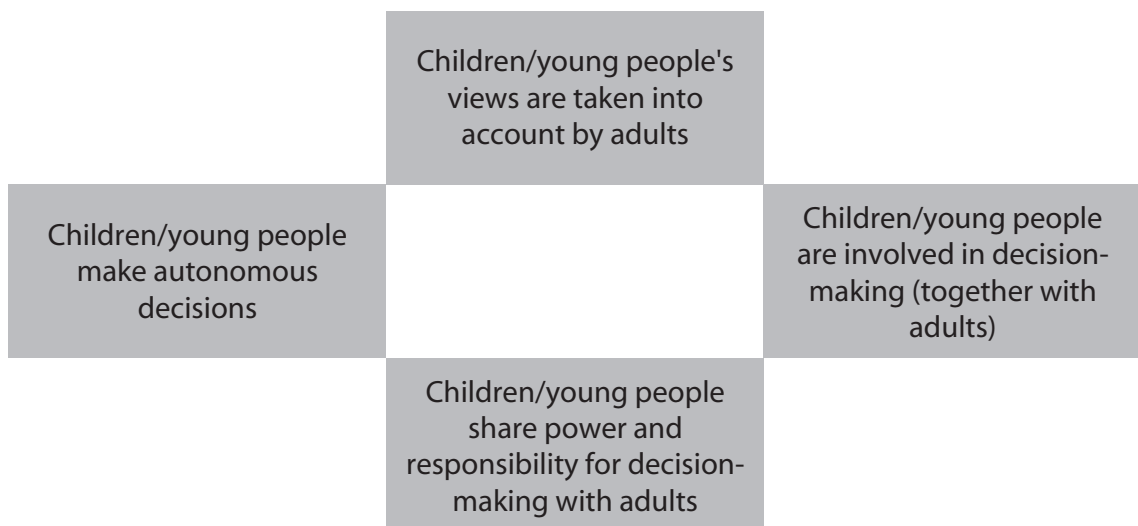
First, the level of active engagement by young people varies. This is often seen in terms of the amount of power shared between adults and children and has been depicted as steps on a ‘ladder of participation’ (Hart, 1997), where the steps describe the degree to which children initiate or are in control of the process. Others feel a ‘ladder’ is not the most useful model as it suggests a hierarchy with the objective of reaching the top rung (Treseder, 1997). Another model is Shier’s Pathways to Participation (Shier, 2001), which can be used to assess the appropriate degree of participation for a specific task, within a team or across the organisation, by asking those involved what power they are prepared to share and can realistically achieve.

These models help highlight the need to understand and distinguish different levels of empowerment afforded to children and young people in organisations. They prompt us to ask: what level of participation is appropriate for which activities; what level does a project or activity aspire to; at what level does it actually operate?

In exploring the participation activity covered by this research, we have drawn on these models and come up with a four level categorisation that we feel best describes current participatory practice. See Figure 1.1 below. There are a couple of things to note about this model:

- We take as our starting point the requirement of Article 12 that children's views be taken into account when making decisions affecting their lives and hence, we have not included consultations or participation activities that are token or employ manipulative approaches, in which children's views do not have any influence on decisions.
- The model is non-hierarchical, as no level is assumed to be better or worse than another. The appropriate level will need to be determined according to the circumstances and the participating children/young people.

**Figure 1.1 A model of the level of participation**



*Children and young people's views are taken into account:* children's views – whether volunteered or sought by adults – need to be taken into account if their rights are to be respected under the UNCRC. The information children provide is one source, amongst others, that adults use to make a decision.

*Children and young people are involved in decision-making:* at this level children are actively and 'directly involved in the point where decisions are made' (Shier, 2001, page 114). Children and adults share views and discuss issues together. Adults still hold ultimate responsibility for deciding the course of action, but children will be involved in steering that.

*Children and young people share power and responsibility for decision-making:* there is not always a clear difference between this level and the previous one; it is the degree of influence that children have on decisions. At this level adults have a commitment to share power and to undertake joint decision-making with children. Decisions may be made by negotiation, consensus or voting.

*Children and young people make autonomous decisions:* We have included situations where children make autonomous decisions, recognising that often the implementation of these decisions will require input from adults and is ultimately dependent on adult structures, responsibility and power

In the analysis we assign different participation activities a level of participation. This is only a guide, as the level depends more on how adults engage with children and young people during an activity than what activity they use. Even within an activity, power can change rapidly from task to task, from different types of decision and between individual young people. For example, adults may enable a youth forum to make certain decisions but not others, or may delegate and involve some young people (perhaps older young people) more in making decisions than others.

### **Focus of decision-making**

The second dimension along which participation can be described is the focus of the decision-making in which children are involved. Perhaps the first distinction to be made is between personal or individual decisions, and public decisions relating to matters which affect children as a group. These terms are sometimes used in different ways. In this report we use the same definition as that of the CYPU.

## **What do we mean by children and young people's 'participation'?**

In encouraging departments to consider how children and young people should be involved we include action at a number of levels:

### **Where individual decisions are being taken about children's own lives.**

For example, the Children Act 1989 says that looked after children should be involved in decisions about their care package, and statutory guidance is being developed to ensure that children and young people with special educational needs are, where possible, involved in all decisions relating to their education.

**Where services for, or used by, children are being developed or provided locally.** For example, many local partnerships and local authorities have discussion groups and special consultation events to influence the design and provision of play facilities, leisure, transport and guidance services and

### **Where national policies and services are being developed or evaluated.**

For example, where departments are producing consultation documents and using website design to seek children and young people's views on policy proposals

*From: CYP (2001) Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People.*

The nature of the participation will vary between these different types of decision-making. However there is considerable evidence that children and young people want to be consulted about both areas in their lives (e.g. RBA Research Ltd, 2002). Although children and young people can and do make many personal decisions every day there has been much less attention in the literature to decision-making in private contexts.

In respect of the involvement of children in individual decisions within public services, early statutory requirements were in the field of child welfare, with the inclusion in the 1975 Children Act of the requirement to ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child when making decisions about them. The reinforcement of this requirement in the Children Act 1989 has led to greater involvement of children in decisions about them, although the experience of this involvement has not always been a positive one for the children (Sinclair, 1997, Thomas, 2000; Danso et al, 2003); similar requirements for participation are now written into other formal procedures such as special education needs assessment or school exclusions (DfES, 2001; DfEE, 1999).

Despite the importance to children of these individually-focused decisions, the participation literature focuses predominantly on involving young people in public decisions. Here it is also helpful to disaggregate the focus of such decisions. The literature covers decision-making that relates to service delivery and development, those that are about public policy making, those that are about influencing policy (centrally or locally) and those that involve research or service evaluation where children may be involved either as users, as subjects or as co- or peer- researchers.

## Content of decisions

The extent or level of children’s involvement in decision-making is not consistent across different subjects or sectors. A review of the literature suggests at one end considerable participatory activity around community development and urban renewal, and at the other, limited involvement of children in the juvenile justice system. The place of any one sector would seem to relate to the culture and styles of practice of the relevant professionals and the contexts in which they work. This too seems to reflect children’s views on which professionals or institutions are good at listening to them. A recent large-scale national survey of 1,387 children and young people found that while many think adults are good at listening to them, a substantial proportion do not and that this varied between different groups of adults (RBS Research Ltd, 2002).

**Table 1.1: How well children and young people feel listened to by people**

Adults	% rating people ‘good’ or ‘very good’
Friends	83
Parents/guardians	76
Doctors	52
Teachers	60

This survey also indicated that most children believe that many organisations are not good listeners. Moreover those organisations which children felt should be listening to them were also those they considered poorest at listening – their local councils, the Government and the police.

**Table 1.2 How well children and young people feel listened to by organisations**

Organisations	% rating organisations 'good' or 'very good' at listening
Helplines	83
Clubs like Scouts/Guides	80
Police	36
Local council	20
The Government	18
High street shops	19
Local shops	20

(RBA Research Ltd, 2002)

Within the category of personal decision there are also various types, from everyday choices – such as what activity to do, which friends to spend time with and what to eat – to more serious decisions, such as medical treatment or which parent to live with; more recently there has been a growing interest in children’s involvement in the family (Morrow; 1998; NCB Highlight, 2003)

### Participation activity

A fourth dimension to participation is the way it is translated into practical action. Participation activity can take on many different forms, each with different characteristics. The various mapping exercises undertaken recently into public decision-making (Combe, 2002; LGA/IPPR 2001; Culter 2002) include a wide range of processes and activities: one-off consultation exercises, such as Yvote?Ynot? (CYPUP, 2002) or longer term consultation processes such as young residents groups, young citizens panels or advisory groups; on-going involvement in the governance of institution such as schools councils or youth forums; young people led organisations such as Article 12.

When involving children in making decisions about their own care and services it is necessary to understand their perspective of the world, their experiences, feelings and views. This can be done formally or informally. Formal mechanisms are set up to



provide designated opportunities for children and young people to influence decisions. Informal approaches enable children and young people to voice their views, and be listened to, as and when they feel it is appropriate.

Informal Listening	Formal Listening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● On-going dialogue</li> <li>● Observation</li> <li>● Listening to spontaneous communication</li> <li>● Engaging in joint activities.</li> </ul>	<p>Dedicated mechanisms and activities such as one-off consultations; regular group meetings; suggestion boxes.</p>

While there is much written in the participation literature about formal consultation, there is far less about more informal approaches that are inherent to child-focused practice. This report examines the different ways staff can listen to children and young people, both informally as part of their everyday practice and using more formal mechanisms that have specific purposes, which may be on-going, one-off or occasional events.

### Frequency and duration of participation

Children and young people’s power is also affected by how often and for how long they are enabled to influence decisions. Different activities vary in the frequency and duration of participation that they offer. Formal activities, for example, are often regular events (e.g. forum meetings), some of which are time-limited (e.g. project advisory groups), while others continue indefinitely. Consultations are often ‘one-off’ or irregular events, and only a few formal activities continue indefinitely (e.g. suggestion boxes), whereas informal engagement of listening and responding to children and young people can be used frequently and even daily as part of child-focused practice. When examining the case study activities, we explore the level of opportunity they provide children and young people to influence decisions about their own lives.

### Children and young people who participate

When using a generic term like ‘children’s participation’ it is important to recognize that children are not a single group. They differ in their personal circumstances (age, sex, ethnicity, culture, disability, social and economic circumstances) and in their changing interests and capacities as they grow older. What is appropriate for one group may not be for another. It is necessary to design forms of engagement and dialogue that start from the position of the child. For example see Clark and Moss

(2001) and Marchant and Kirby (2003) for methods appropriate to very young children. Some participation projects seek to serve particular groups of children (looked after children, refugee children); some seek to involve children of particular ages (teenagers); others are potentially open to participation by all young people (e.g. websites) or those within a certain area (e.g. youth councils).

Different participation activities involve varying numbers of young people. Many formal participation activities enable relatively small numbers of children and young people to get involved (e.g. councils, social action groups); larger consultations often involve higher numbers but to a lesser degree; whereas informal on-going dialogue can involve everyone. Only some young people will choose to get involved – children’s participation has to be by choice, based on informed consent and respecting their right not to participate. As yet we do not have a full understanding of how participation activity differs between groups, although some evidence of differences has been found in previous research, including between boys and girls and those living in affluence/deprivation (Borlands et al, 2001; Edwards & Alldred, 1999).

The variety of these activities makes any categorization complex, yet this is necessary in order to present an overview picture of current participation activity. Interesting examples of participation activities identified through the case study examples from this research will be presented using the following categorization:

- the four levels of participation (described above)
- whether decisions are personal or public
- whether activities are formal or informal
- whether activities are on-going, regular, or one-off events
- how many children and young people are involved.

## The Purpose of Participation

Our aim in discussing these different dimensions of participation is not to say that any one form is, of itself, better. Rather, it is to demonstrate the many facets of participation and the need to consider these in relation to different situations. In this way we are more likely to match the nature of activity to its purpose, to the decision-making context and the appropriate level of power-sharing. Also greater understanding of the complexities of participation can enable adults to be honest with themselves, and therefore with children, about what can be offered in terms of power sharing and a realistic assessment of the likelihood of the project or activity making a difference.

Earlier it was said that the case for children’s participation had been well made, and that this is now largely accepted, at least in principle. The reasons for participation have been expressed in several ways within the literature, often grouped into legal, political and social reasons (Sinclair and Franklin, 2000; Mc Neish and Newman, 2002; Willow, 2002). CYPUs (2001) publication *Learning to Listen* sets out three broad reasons why children and young people should be involved: better services; promoting citizenship and social inclusion; and personal and social education and development.

- **Better services.** It is accepted that the effectiveness of services depends on listening and responding to customers. Giving children and young people an active say in how policies and services are developed, provided, evaluated and improved should ensure that policies and services more genuinely meet their needs.
- **Promoting citizenship and social inclusion.** Promoting early engagement in public and community life is crucial to sustaining and building a healthy society. As successive reports from the Social Exclusion Unit have shown, listening to young people is a powerful means of persuading disadvantaged young people that they count and can contribute.
- **Personal and social education and development.** Good participation opportunities produce more confident and resilient young people. Promoting citizenship is already an important part of the Government’s education agenda, both pre-16 through the national curriculum and post-16. Departments and agencies that have a local presence can support participation projects that play their part in developing these skills.

From: CYPUs (2001) *Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People*.

This broad categorisation will be used later in this report to analyse and discuss the ways in which our case examples expressed their aims or purposes in undertaking children and young people’s participation and the extent to which these were reflected in the perceived outcomes from participation.

## A culture of participation

Much of the current literature, and indeed the discussion above on the nature of participation, tends to portray children's participation as a somewhat separate or fragmented set of activities, rather than an embedded approach. Also it can be seen that in practice the term participation is often used simply to mean 'involved in' or being 'consulted'. In this sense the term takes on a very passive connotation. This is in contrast to active participation, which could be taken to imply some presumption of empowerment of those involved – that children believe, and have reason to believe, that their involvement will make a difference.

If participation is to have the benefits that, for example, are set out above by CYPUP, then it is important that participation activity is undertaken with the specific purpose of enabling children to influence decision-making and bring about change. This then moves thinking away from the specifics of 'what methods do we use to talk and listen to children' to broader questions about organisational cultures. How do we ensure that participation or the active listening to children becomes part and parcel of the formal and informal ways in which organisations take decisions? How do participatory approaches become embedded within organisational processes?

In establishing the criteria for selecting the case study examples for this study it felt important to focus on those organisations that had used participation to both listen to children and to act on what they said. In this way it was hoped that the evidence gathered from their experience would offer more than useful tools or methods for involving children. While this is still important, especially to those without this experience, it is likely that sound participation practice will be more effective if undertaken within a supportive organisational structure. The question then becomes – what can we learn from our case study organisations that informs our thinking on institutionalising participation within organisations?

That children and young people's participation is part of international law or public policy is not always enough to convince those who work with children and young people to engage in this work. The promise of better, more responsive services, and getting things right by engaging the people for whom policy is intended, is more persuasive for some. Still more convincing is seeing evidence that participation works through tried, tested and evaluated ways of involving children and young people. This can ease the anxiety of adults who are engaging in participation work for the first time. It can also minimize the risk of tokenistic practice.

Despite the increased participation initiatives, there is far less evidence (partly because of a lack of rigorous evaluation studies) that children's participation is effective in terms of generating substantial change, and a lack of research on the extent to which it has become a sustained or embedded approach to decision-making. The research reported here provides an opportunity to learn from those that appear to be more successful in this, not only about their specific participation activities, but more importantly if, or how, they have been able to bring about a change in the overall organisational culture.

As the level of participation has increased, so too, has our thinking about how we can make children's involvement in decision-making more meaningful and beneficial to them, to organisations and to the wider community. Perhaps the time has now come to focus on wider organisational and governance issues and to explore how organisations can develop or change to become fully participatory in their approach.

## Chapter 2:

### The Research Study

#### Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of the research study, the construction of the database as a sample frame and the selection of the case study organisations. Fuller details are provided in Appendix 2.

#### Aims and Objectives of the Research

The purpose of the study was to find agencies that were *listening* to children and young people in order to *change* their practice or service. The definition of good practice employed within the research required that decision-making by children and young people must have been perceived to have made some *impact* – by influencing policy or service planning or the delivery or evaluation of services for children and young people.

With this in mind, the overall aim of the research was to draw on the experience of a selected range of agencies that had involved children and young people in decision-making, to ascertain from adult and young participants what they perceived to help or hinder effective participation, to identify its benefits and impacts and from this to contribute to the discussion to move children’s participation forward into a more sustained and everyday part of organisational practice.

#### Research Questions

The research set out to address a number of questions under 5 themes:

1. What do agencies see as the purpose of children’s involvement?
2. What is the focus and degree of participation?
3. How do agencies support participation work?
4. What outcomes have been produced from participation; are these evidence-based?
5. How fundamental are participatory processes to organisations?

The study is not an evaluation of the work of the agencies or the projects, nor does it address which approaches or methods works best, for whom, and in what circumstances.

## Methodology

The study had five main components, which are described briefly.

### ● Formation of a Young Advisory Group and Training Young Researchers

A group of 10 young people aged 14-19 worked with the research team as young advisors or as young researchers. These young people not only provided a young person's perspective on all the work of the project, but following a two day residential training course on research methods and skills, they worked with the adult researchers in visiting the projects and gathering the views of the adults and young people involved in the case studies.

### ● Establishing the Database

Drawing on existing databases, such as that at the National Youth Agency (NYA), and using the extensive networks of NCB, a database was established of organisations which had involved children and young people in policy development, service planning, delivery or evaluation. The criteria for inclusion in the database was fourfold – organisations should:

- have listened to, and put into action, young people's views
- be able to demonstrate a degree of organisational commitment
- have undertaken some informal or formal evaluation of the participatory process
- have a relatively low national profile.

After some initial telephone screening to check the criteria, a database sample of almost 150 organisations was established. A summary description of these organisations and their participation work is provided in Appendix 2.

### ● Selecting the Case Study Projects

This database acted as a sampling frame from which 29 organisations were selected to act as case studies for the research. A further set of nine criteria was used to select the case studies. The aim was not to achieve a representative sample, but rather to

capture as diverse a range of agencies and young participants as possible. The agencies were chosen to:

- Reflect a wide range of agencies that provide services for children and young people.
- Include both statutory and non-statutory work.
- Have wide-spread geographical distribution.
- Reflect work at national, regional and local levels.
- Include work in rural, inner-city and urban areas.
- Reflect the involvement of a broad age range of children and young people.
- Encompass diverse groups of children and young people.
- Cover a broad focus of participation.
- Include varying levels of involvement.

Using these criteria a group of 29 agencies were selected; 23 of these acted as major case studies and 6 as minor case studies.

### ● **Conducting the case studies**

Comparable research processes were used in each of the case studies although this was tailored to meet the specific circumstances of each project and the young people involved. Each major case study included a visit to the project and had the following components:

- *Introductory telephone conversations*  
To introduce the research; agree terms of participation; identify key respondents; make arrangements to meet with young people.
- *Collation of key documentary evidence*  
Including policies, procedures, evaluation reports and participation tools.
- *Data collection from adult respondents*  
Adult researchers, often together with young researchers, conducted interviews with 2 or 3 key staff, using semi-structured schedules designed to address the research questions highlighted earlier
- *Ascertaining the views of children and young people*  
The adult and young researchers spoke to children and young people involved in the projects in whatever capacity – users, advisors, representatives – asked



them about how and why they had become involved, what they felt worked well, what approaches and methods have been used to facilitate or support participation, what they felt works best, what differences they felt had been made, what differences they would like to see, and the impact on them from their involvement.

While the same research questions were put to each group, the specific method was decided on a case-by-case basis. The young researchers group, many of whom were involved in participation work in their own projects, helped adult researchers to devise suitable questions for children and young people.

Most interviews involved informal group discussions in some form, although one-to-one discussions were also conducted. Different methods were tried out, such as games, structured interviews and semi-structured interviews. The best approach seemed to be to sit round in any available space and talk informally to the young people, to tape record the conversation if the young people were willing and the setting allowed it, and to write notes if not.

- *Analysis of Data*

The database sample was analysed to provide an insight into the types of participation practice being carried out nationally, what kind of organisations are involving children and young people in decision-making, and what levels of participation are being employed.

The descriptive and qualitative data collected from the case studies were analysed manually within a thematic framework. A comprehensive coding structure was devised that allowed all sources of data from each case study to be entered. Analysis was performed across case studies section by section to enable the identification of examples of good practice within specific settings and of core mechanisms across participation work.

## Overview of Database Sample

The database sample comprises 146 agencies. There is considerable variety in the focus of these and in the participation work that they undertake with children and young people. These are summarised below and detailed in Appendix 2. While this does not purport to be comprehensive nor representative of the picture nationally, nonetheless this perspective provides a useful summary of a substantial slice of current participation activity with children and young people.

## ● Service area

The agencies provided a wide range of different services which have been grouped into 15 different categories: generic youth projects; sports and leisure; community regeneration; health; other youth initiatives; education; social care; youth offending; policy; play arts and culture; children's rights; courts; youth parliaments; youth forums. The service areas with the greatest representation in this sample are youth work and community regeneration, while those relating to youth justice and the courts are least well represented.

## ● Diverse groups of children and young people

While services are most often open to all children and young people, agencies may target or provide for specific groups of children and young people, such as black and minority ethnic groups or children in need or at risk and many work with several specific groups.

## ● Ages of children and young people involved

The most common age range for the agencies in the database sample to work with is 12 –16, but all ages are included in participation work, with many projects working across a number of age groups.

## ● Working nationally, regionally and locally

The majority of the agencies in the sample (65%) work at a local level, with a further quarter operating regionally and a small percent (7%) working nationally.

## ● Working in rural, inner-city and urban areas

Rural projects make up about 1 in 8 of the projects, compared to 4 out of 10 in urban areas and 1 in 3 in the inner city. Some regional and national provision encompasses all types of setting, inner city, urban and rural.

## ● Focus of participation

While service delivery and planning is the most common focus for participation activity, all the agencies involved children and young people in more than one area. Policy work and supporting participation in individual decision-making was much less common.

## Overview of Case Study Agencies

The criteria for selecting the case studies were presented earlier. The overall picture presented by the group is not too dissimilar to that of the database sample, although diversity of characteristics was important in the selection process. Details of the case study sample are presented in Appendix 2.

**Service area:** The scope of the agencies was broad and included the widest possible spread across the full range of services for young people, including government departments. The largest group was projects related to community regeneration (6 out of 29) reflecting the great deal of work being undertaken to engage young people in their communities.

**Size of the agency:** Nearly half of the agencies were small, employing less than 10 staff. A few agencies were in the mid-range, and nine had between twenty and one hundred staff. These tended to be statutory services.

**Sector:** the case studies were all in the statutory or voluntary sector with an array of different arrangements, as shown below.

**Table 2.1 Organisational Relationships**

Organisational Relationships	Number of Projects
Statutory and non-statutory partnership – Voluntary led	4
Statutory and non- statutory partnership – Statutory led	3
Statutory Partnership	6
Voluntary Partnership	1
Voluntary – Trust funded	3
Voluntary – Statutory funded.	3
Statutory – schools, hospitals etc.	8

**Geographical location:** The case study agencies demonstrated a wide geographical spread within England, with the addition of 2 projects from Scotland. The South-East has the highest representation (11 out of 29), reflecting its larger population.

**Coverage:** Over half of the selected agencies worked locally; 5 agencies worked nationally and 5 regionally. In three instances a regional agency provided a series of local projects within a region and 1 was a national project that delivered extensive local projects.

**Setting:** While inner city projects were well represented (31%), urban areas also featured (21%). A sixth of the projects (17%) provided services for children and young people in rural areas and the rest worked in mixed settings. This sample gives greater representation to rural and mixed settings than the overall database.

**Age range:** As with the database sample, teenagers (aged 12-16) were most often involved (25 projects); children aged 6 to 11 were also well represented (17 projects). The study also highlighted work with the 0-5 age group and included 10 such projects. Older teenagers (aged 17 to 19s) were service users in 14 projects, and young people aged 20+ in twelve projects. These older young people were often in low numbers by comparison and worked in formal roles, as youth link workers or peer mentors, for example.

**Which children:** Over half (55%) of the projects provided for all young people, although many also targeted groups of children and young people that are under-represented. Agencies working with Black and minority ethnic groups made up 21%, as did those providing for children and young people with disabilities and learning or behavioural difficulties.

**Focus of young people's involvement:** service planning was the most common focus, applying to nearly 90% of projects, with nearly 80% focusing on delivery of services.

**Form of involvement:** the most common form was regular/ongoing activities, which was true for almost half the projects. This was often a group that met, for example, weekly. A number of projects (22%), often schools or play projects, consulted with young people on a daily basis. Others involved children in one-off or intermittent consultation (29% of projects). Many organisations provided more than one of these forms of involvement.

From the analysis of the extensive information gathered from each case study it is possible to describe the many ways in which children and young people are involved in decision-making; to note practice that encourages meaningful participation and to identify outcomes from this. Examples of practice and the views of staff and participants from the case studies are used throughout this report to illustrate and illuminate the discussion on children's and young people's involvement.



# Section Two

Participation and the  
Organisation

## Chapter 3:

### Cultures of Participation

Our starting point for selecting case study organisations was that they both listen and act on what children and young people say. Beyond that there are many ways in which the chosen organisations involve children and young people. From our analysis of the data we have identified three types of organisations, according to the way participation sits within the organisation. These take into account the organisations' purpose and underlying values in involving young people and the extent to which they involve them in influencing decisions. These factors combine to create a different focus of child and youth involvement across these different types of organisations, which are characterised as:

- *Consultation-focused organisations*
- *Participation-focused organisations*
- *Child/youth-focused organisations*

The edges between these categories are blurred. Some organisations may be in the process of moving between categories – or different departments or staff teams are operating in different ways – while other organisations are clearly situated within just one category. The categories describe increasing levels of youth involvement within organisations, although there may be legitimate reasons for organisations not to work at the higher levels of involvement.

#### Consultation-focused organisations

These organisations ask children and young people's views and experiences – usually using one-off or regular consultations and/or evaluation exercises – to inform service and policy development. The young people have limited power in this process: their views are taken into account, and are considered important in ensuring services are tailored to their needs, but they do not decide how services are developed. This is not a new approach – market research by private companies has been used in this way for years, even with children – and the methods employed are generally standard (e.g. focus groups, interviews, questionnaires) although the methods used for consulting children and young people are sometimes innovative, particularly with younger children. A consultation-focused organisation primarily consults children and young people to ensure services and policies best fit their needs.

## A Consultative Organisation: Sportsearch

Sportsearch is an internet CD-ROM product developed by Sport England, to be used by secondary students and teachers to find the most appropriate sport available locally for individual young people in order to drive up participation in sports. Young people were consulted (as well as teachers) about the design of the website and each stage of the development was evaluated with young people's input. The aim of involving young people was 'just really to make the programme suitable for youngsters'. A private research company was commissioned to evaluate the pilot project:

*'They're the end user so, if young people are finding it difficult to navigate the [website] system, or they can find their way round but they don't find the programme very interesting or exciting then obviously, it's failed. Consultation with young people was important as part of that and it was a key element of how the success or failure of the programme could be tracked or monitored.'*  
(Researchers)

Organisations selling services or producing products (private companies, public and voluntary agencies) can use consultations to ensure their service or products meet with consumers' preferences and tastes, without necessarily developing higher levels of youth participation. Organisations providing services that rely on positive relationships between staff and clients, however, benefit from involving children and young people more fully as greater participation changes the nature of these relationships. Some organisations start as consultation-focused organisations and then develop higher-level participation activities. The organisation illustrated in the box below is moving from being a 'consultation-focused' to a 'participation-focused' organisation.

## A Consultative Organisation

Collingham Gardens child psychiatric in-patient unit has recently started to involve children more in making decisions within the organisation. It started by undertaking consultation with patients in 2002. A Specialist Registrar in Child Psychiatry undertook research with the child patients – interviewing them on admission and at discharge – to find out their perception of treatment. The research highlighted the extent to which children expect to be passive in their treatment and this surprised the staff. Since then the unit has started to consider ways to involve children more in making decisions about their own treatment, to increase their agency in their change so that it has lasting impact. Children now have a greater role in negotiating their own treatment goals, with staff. The organisation is exploring the use of other activities for involving children in other decisions.

## Participation-focused organisations

In participation-focused organisations the emphasis is on developing participation activities by which children and young people are able to influence certain decisions within the organisation. These organisations do more than just ask young people their opinions and preferences (although they may also undertake consultations); they enable them to influence certain decisions within the organisation. This is usually about decisions that directly impact on the young people themselves (either important personal decisions and/or decisions about services for young people). Some participation activities are on-going but restricted to a specific context, for example a youth forum, an autonomous youth social action group or school council. Whereas other participation activities may be time bound, such as a youth research advisory group.

Undertaking specific participation activities requires organisations to make some changes: introducing new practices, possibly employing dedicated staff, and encouraging adults and young people to support these participation activities and ensure they have influence. However, the change required is small – and usually an add-on rather than integral – and the participation activities do not greatly challenge the status quo of adult-youth relationships or result in large organisational transformation.



## Context specific participation activity: school councils

A couple of the groups of children and young people we visited told us that they had a good school council in their schools – which acts on what students say – but they do not feel listened to by many class teachers in their daily lives at school:

*It depends on the teacher, some teachers it is easier to, you can talk to them out of lessons and some teachers are like*

*'I don't want to' . . . they are so moody.*

*They don't want to hear it.*

*They seem to think it is not important. (Young people)*

The value of ensuring children feel they are listened to by their teachers in all settings is illustrated by children's views from a child-focused school

*'We discuss things about the school and make decisions. It helps sort out arguments around the school and everyone gets a chance to say what they think. I think it [circle time] is a really good idea.'* (Child)

*'I think it is an excellent idea that teachers and children work together and be a team. I think we have achieved a lot to work together.'* (Child)

Participation-focused organisations value young people's right to be involved in making decisions, as well as recognising this has benefits for the organisation, although often only a sample of children and young people are involved, rather than all of those being served. Young people may have a high level of participation and have real influence (see case study example in the box below), but because participation is not fundamental to the aims or underlying values of the whole organisation, and is limited to a certain context or project, these are not inherently participatory organisations. Some 'participation-focused' organisations may be at the early stages of becoming child-focused organisations.

## Context specific participation activity: local authority youth council (Lambeth Youth Council)

Lambeth Council has initiated and supported a youth council that is open to young people aged 11 to 24 years. The youth council is a highly participatory structure that meets weekly. The Youth Council is placed within the Democratic Services Department in the council, although the group is fairly autonomous, making its own decisions about what issues it examines (such as youth-police relations) and how. The young people on the group feed their ideas to relevant adults in the council, and they receive support in implementing these, but there do not appear to be formal links for young people's ideas to impact on council policy and planning, and it is not clear how council proposals are discussed with young people. Young people have had an influence however through their dedicated lobbying, as well as a professional willingness to listen. The dialogue between the council and young people is developing but is still localised and not integral to the local authority planning process. The council has not yet established youth participation across its different departments.

## Child/youth-focused organisations

These organisations place young people's involvement 'at the heart' of what they do. It is central to their values and often based on a theoretical position about why children and young people's participation is important within their service sector. For example, within child-focused schools participation is seen as key to learning; those working with specifically disadvantaged groups view participation as important for redressing oppression; and youth empowerment and participation is a cornerstone of much youth work theory.

Within child-focused organisations children and young people are involved on an on-going (daily and/or regular) basis. Their views shape the care they receive and the services they use. They are involved in many ways and have varying degrees of influence within different organisational contexts.

*'For these children, their involvement is continuous and not in relation to large projects. Children have a right to be involved all the time not just when it is convenient for adults or as a tick box to say 'yes we have consulted with under fives'' (Manager)*

The distinction between this category and ‘participation-focused’ organisations is somewhat blurred, for child-focused organisations use many of the same participation activities. The difference is that child-focused organisations have created – or begun to create – a culture in which it is automatically assumed that children and young people should and will be listened to about decisions (all decisions) that affect their lives – whether this has direct personal impact or will change the services that all children and young people use. Their participation cuts across the organisation, or at the very least, across relevant departments.

These organisations consult about adult agendas and also enable children and young people to identify their own agendas. There are mechanisms in place to support children and young people in expressing their views whenever they have something to say about their lives, needs or their services, and there are people who will listen.

*‘I’m always thinking things up, but really I’m led by [the young people].  
If they’re really interested in something we’ll do it.’ (Youth worker)*

Many of the case study ‘child/youth-focused’ organisations are working directly with children and young people – schools, youth projects and social care organisations. These provide a service that is based on developing caring relationships between staff and young people. Fundamentally developing a child-focused culture is about improving relationships between young people and adults (also between young people and even between staff) so that people are acknowledged, respected and included as a matter of course. These organisations should therefore be called ‘person-centred’, but to stress the focus on children and young people, we refer to them as child/youth-focused.

While the primary health organisation case studies were mostly situated within the ‘consultation-focused’ and ‘participation-focused’ categories, there was some move to become more child-focused. The growing emphasis on increasing ‘user-involvement’ within health seems to be restricted to involvement in specific contexts (particularly one-off or regular evaluation of services) rather than underpinning all service delivery. Past research on young patients having a say in health found that both staff and young people urged the development of a listening culture, in which young patients can raise issues when the time is right for them – not just in one off involvement projects – and for staff to hear their concerns and take them seriously (Lightfoot and Sloper, 2002). We found some moves in this direction, including examples of where children and young people have a say in decisions about their personal treatment.

## A Child-focused advocacy project (Skye & Lochalsh Young Carers Project)

The Young Carers Project is a small voluntary organisation working in a remote rural area with 40 children and young people, aged 5 to 18 years, with caring responsibilities. Working in partnership with young carers, local organisations and service providers, the project also aims to raise awareness and improve local support for young carers.

Young carers and their families play a major role in the development of the project and their own support. They choose how they wish to be involved and the project remains flexible to meet the different levels of participation that young people feel is appropriate for them. They participate at all levels of the organisation.

The project supports young carers to combat the social isolation that many experience and to develop their confidence and self-esteem. One-to-one support, counselling and advocacy ensure that young carers have an opportunity to discuss and be supported around their personal care needs. This allows young carers to problem solve or to just let out their views and feelings.

Decisions about the service also involve the children and young people, including decisions about the design of the website, choosing and planning trips, planning how to spend donated money and choosing which guest speakers to invite. The young people are involved in developing project policies, such as 'What we can expect from our worker', 'Our groundrules and breaking groundrules', 'transport arrangements and policy', 'volunteer policies', and they developed their own guidelines for medical staff on how to approach and support young carers, which they presented to hospital staff. Younger children designed Christmas cards and developed their own play about being a young carer, to help raise awareness of the issues. The young people are involved in evaluating the project, using questionnaires they helped to design. They are shown the evaluation report and also the project financial accounts. Two youth representatives are elected by peers to the Skye & Lochalsh Community Care Forum Management Committee.

Strategic and funding organisations can also be child-focused (although many currently fit into the 'consultation-focused' and 'participation-focused' categories) despite the fact that traditionally they have rarely worked directly with children and young people. The case study organisations include local authorities, Children's

Funds, New Deal for Communities and others, that are striving to work in more child-focused ways. They are doing this by developing on-going dialogues with children and young people – through working with child and youth organisations, supporting young people’s community action and involving young people in making decisions within their own organisations – and, as importantly, promoting other local organisations to work in participatory ways. They are starting to shift structural power relationships to narrow the divide between those who control the purse strings and those who use services.

### **Young people and adults on joint Executive Group (Dumfries & Galloway Youth Strategy Executive Group)**

The Dumfries & Galloway Youth Strategy Executive Group (D&G YSEG) is a working group of the Council’s Executive Committee – which is attended by both young people and adults. The aim of the group is to involve young people in the development of wide-reaching statutory policy and service delivery. There are 30 young people on the mailing list, and 25 regularly attend meetings. Young people meet every two months with councillors, and once a month alone to discuss issues amongst themselves, and are supported by a development worker.

The Youth Strategy Executive Group is placed at the centre of the council and is located within the Office of the Chief Executive rather than any one particular service department. The young people’s involvement mainly focuses on consulting them about council issues and public services and involving them in planning and designing these services.

Examples of how the young people have been involved include the local drug policy for schools, planning and designing a youth festival, producing The Rough Guide to Services for Young People and the Dumfries & Galloway Youth Strategy Development Plan, written in consultation with young people on YSEG plus others.

The young people have substantial influence on council decisions, primarily because they are placed within the Executive Committee – the most powerful council committee. The Chair of the group has always been a young person. This means that it is a young person who has the casting vote in any split.

## Young people and adults on joint Executive Group (Dumfries & Galloway Youth Strategy Executive Group) – *continued*

The young people on the YSEG do not usually formulate their own projects or initiatives, but the group has a budget of £60,000 to promote the views and opinions of young people, and to fund local groups and initiatives to develop their own projects. This way other young people in the area are supported to act on their own agendas, such as developing a skateboard park.

Even within the 'child/youth-focused' category there are many different levels of participation between organisations. Several cautioned that they are still developing and have a long way to go. However far along this path they are (or want to be) they fundamentally share a deep held belief in the importance of involving children and young people within their organisations in as many ways as appropriate and possible.

*'Integrate children's participation into all areas of [the organisation's] work so that it is not a separate activity, recognising that this may be a long process.'*  
(Save the Children policy statement)

## Chapter 4:

### Purpose of Participation

An important factor that relates to *how* children and young people are involved is the *aim or purpose* that organisations have for undertaking child and youth participation. This chapter explores the range of purposes that case study organisations identified for undertaking participation work with children and young people, using the framework discussed in chapter one it is divided into the following sub-sections:

- *Considering the purpose of participation*
- *Practical benefits to services*
- *Citizenship and social inclusion*
- *Personal development*

### Considering the purpose of participation

The chosen case studies had given some consideration as to why they involve children and young people. The level to which they have done so varies but all have considered their aims, approach and intended outcomes for the planned participation work, and some have documented these. Sometimes young people have been involved in developing written policies outlining organisational aims and strategies for promoting and developing youth participation. The broader purpose or intended outcomes of involving children and young people is less frequently stated clearly in writing. Often there is a written commitment to involve children and young people, but not a clear statement about what they hope to achieve by doing so.

Sometimes documentation does not always capture the range of staff views about why participation is considered important and on occasion there was inconsistency across different sources. We often gained a deeper insight into why organisations pursue participation by talking with staff and hearing their personal views and beliefs about the purpose of participation, as well as their organisational commitment. The wider personal development of the participating young people was rarely the focus of participation for these organisations, although often acknowledged as an important factor.

Most organisations focus on involving children and young people within their own organisation. Many – including dedicated participation voluntary organisations (e.g. Children’s Voice Project, Children in Neighbourhoods in London, Coalition 4 Youth) – also aim to promote children and young people’s participation to other

organisations and the wider community, by actively engaging in participation work, campaigning and supporting others to do so, and demonstrating its benefits.

Most organisations talked about child and young people's involvement, but a couple of organisations (health and legal) talked of 'customer involvement and focus', 'user involvement' or 'patient focus', viewing youth involvement as an extension of a wider move to include clients more in services.

The case studies had specific purposes for wanting to increase children and young people's participation. Consultation-focused organisations tend to stress the benefits to services, particularly improved service development and increased access and utilisation. Participation-focused organisations also aim to improve services by involving young people, but equally aimed to be inclusive of young people, and sometimes stressed other outcomes too. Child/youth-focused organisations had multiple reasons for involving children and young people, which include improved services – both for the individual and more generally – but also centre on young people's citizenship and social inclusion. In this way, child/youth-focused organisations accommodate a range of interests, including the need to improve services, as well as to support young people. As illustrated below, increased youth participation also has close parallels with the needs of corporate businesses to develop active team players with a commitment to social responsibility.

## Practical benefits to services

There are a number of ways in which the case study organisations hope to benefit services by listening to and acting on what children and young people have to say about those services:

**Improved Service Development:** Most organisations involving children and young people stated that an important reason for doing so is that this helps to improve their services. They feel that only by involving children and young people is it possible to find out their experiences, likes and dislikes, and unmet needs, so that services and policies can better adapt and develop to serve those needs and interests.

*'To make sure we have more appropriate services. An easy example is the youth work is what young people want rather than what the Youth Service wants. An example of that is the opening hours, we're working to tackle [that].'*  
(North Huyton NDC)



**Improved Client Support:** Organisations that focus a lot on involving children and young people in making personal decisions stressed that only by listening to their clients can they ensure staff best meet their individual and group needs.

*'[The aim of participation is] to meet what the young carers identify as their needs either individually or group. It is their project and the workers are there to facilitate the work for the young people.'*  
(Skye & Lochalsh Young Carers Project)

*'We believe that children and young people are the best people to tell us about their lives.'* (RAPP philosophy/mission statement)

An example of how participation is seen to improve personal support comes from education. The case study schools and early years settings stress the importance of children's participation for their learning and hence for achieving educational attainment. They try to enable young people to be active learners, working together with teachers, to identify what and how to learn.

*'I think every school in the land, if you looked at the aims and values, they'd all say they're wanting to develop individuality and extend people to the best of their ability, and all that kind of thing, but if you try to do that without listening to what the children have got to say, you're cutting out the most valuable source of information. So, I would say it's a crucial way of ensuring children have a happy time and achieve the most they can. I can't see how you can run a school without listening to what children are telling you.'* (Senior teacher)

**Improved Experience of Services:** A few organisations working with children also emphasise the importance of participation for emotional well-being, including reducing stress and increasing feelings of security. Listening and involving children makes their experiences of services more positive.

**Improved Access to and Use of Services:** Improving services, some believe, helps encourage children and young people to access and use services. Also, if young people have been involved in influencing service provision they are thought to have increased 'ownership' and are, therefore, more likely to use services.

**Improved Service Accountability:** Involving young people can help identify what is meant by a 'quality' service, from their perspective, and help to ensure that organisations are accountable to their users in delivering to these standards.

## Citizenship and social inclusion

Participation is underpinned by a number of values – including those about the nature of childhood, rights, responsibilities, power and communities – and organisations identified ways in which they believe youth participation can help to meet broader aims to increase citizenship and social inclusion:

**Inclusive Practice:** Case study organisations often aim to be inclusive of children and young people, recognising them as active and competent citizens.

**Right to Participate:** Less than a fifth of the case study organisations specifically mentioned that they involve children and young people because they have a *right* to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Fewer still cited the UNCRC as a guiding underlying influence. Some stressed that this right meant *all* children and young people need to be involved in decisions (rather than including a sample in participation activities). Some also mentioned other rights associated with participation, including a right to inclusion, to be treated with respect, to be safe and protected from harm, to be listened to and be taken seriously.

*‘An underpinning principle of Camden Play Service is that children have the right to express their views and have them heard in decisions that affect them and have a say in the services we provide. This principle reflects our commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular their right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account. Playcentres and After School Clubs play a significant role in children’s day-to-day experiences and it is important that children are listened to by the adults who provide these services. In play, children are always making decisions about what they do and there is agreement that provision for play should be based on the views and needs of children.’ (From Participation in Play, a report by Camden Play Service)*

**Empowerment:** Organisations often aim to enable children and young people who are often not heard to have opportunities to voice their views and be listened to. Through doing so they hope young people will develop the skills and knowledge needed to get their voices heard, as well as a deeper self-belief in their ability to create change and ‘feel they have control over their lives’ (Camden Play Service).

*‘Primarily the aim of their involvement is to give young people a sense of power, a sense of agency, that they have a voice, its worth expressing that voice and they can achieve change through doing that . . . I want young people to leave the school thinking I’ve got power and can use it in a positive way.’ (Teacher)*

Youth work organisations are rooted in an informal education model that values self-directed learning and participation. The North Somerset Youth Service, for example, has ‘four cornerstones of youth work’ that underlies its work with young people: Empowerment, Participation, Equality and Education.

Organisations working with children who face multiple disadvantage and oppression, in addition to being young – due to physical impairments, experience of abuse, ethnicity, gender, caring responsibilities, etc – often have a political aim of redressing power imbalances by enabling these children and young people to have a say and be heard.

*‘We can’t do what we do unless we actively [involve children and young people]. It’s central to what we’re doing. If you’re going to be a political organisation, as we are, and stand in the face of powerful social processes, you have to do that alongside your clients, and the clients are children. . . . So there’s that level which is very practical, you couldn’t impose, like in outreach you couldn’t say to a child we understand from all the adults in your life that the problems in your life is travelling to and from school, because you’ve trashed seven taxis, so we will do X. You can’t do that. You have to say can we come in the taxi with you, can we see how it is and then can you help us to make it better? The children are central to working out where the ‘problem’ is and what needs to change.’ (Triangle)*

*‘We teach them [young carers] to value their own needs, their right to choices and to make decisions. Many young carers do not have the chance to decide what they want or need and this is why the participation of young carers is so important.’ (Skye & Lochalsh Young Carers Project)*

**Citizenship and Political Education:** Involving children and young people also supports their political education and links with the citizenship agenda. This includes increasing their knowledge and awareness of children’s rights, decision-making structures, existing services.

**Responsibility:** A few organisations – particularly those working with children – said they aimed to increase children’s independence and develop a greater sense of responsibility for their actions.

*‘[The hopes and expected benefits are] that they feel a sense of responsibility, and they’ve held responsibility knowing that we trust them with their decisions, we want to hear their decisions, respect their decisions.’ (Primary teacher)*

*‘We will encourage children to be independent and responsible for their actions.’ (Nursery teacher)*

An investment bank that part funded the participation work in one school said they supported this work because there was synergy between encouraging children and young people to be active agents of change and having the responsibility for making decisions with shifts in the business sector. Firstly, there is a push for greater corporate responsibility following a decline in confidence in business to regulate itself (particularly after cases such as Enron) and the active citizenship agenda fits with this. Also, the investment bank requires workers to have both team skills and the ability to think independently to help identify new areas for business growth.

*'We need to constantly reinvent ourselves and be adaptable and flexible enough . . . I think that places a requirement on individuals to go out and do things pretty much off their own backs . . . people lower down, without heavy management, take it upon themselves to develop areas . . . a similar prerequisite to be flexible is becoming more apparent [in businesses].'*  
(Corporate sponsor of youth participation work)

Increased ownership of services – developed through greater involvement in decision-making – is also thought to increase young people's sense of responsibility and 'care' for these services. A few argued that this reduces the likelihood of vandalism.

*'What actually happens is that young people begin to respect their surroundings. Once they have a bit of ownership around it they stop graffitiing it, they stop wrecking it.'* (Youth worker – Griffin News/Grassroots)

**Community Relationships:** A few organisations working within education and play mentioned how through participation they aim to develop relationships between peers and between children and adults. This is through encouraging young people to work together with their peers and adults, which develops bonds and also the skills and knowledge to have meaningful relationships (e.g. improved communication and listening skills, and respect for others' views). Having others actively listening to them also develops these relationships. As will be seen in Section 3, developing positive relationships between children/young people and adults is central to involving them meaningfully within organisations.

*'I think the whole business of education is about working with young people and not doing unto them. It's all centrally about relationships, and when you work with a class if you establish the right relationship with them as a team and therefore you're all involved in a journey of learning and therefore everyone participates because they feel everyone has the right to participate. And so you're trying to help the children to learn.'* (Teacher)

This is not limited to improving relationships between young service users and workers, but also about developing more positive relationships between young and old across the community. In North Huyton, for example, 32% of the local population is under 16 and there is also a high ageing population. Young people often get blamed for a lot of local problems. The North Huyton New Deal for Communities (NDC) involves young people in the local regeneration partly to 'develop a better sense of community, to de-stigmatise young people and to create cross-generational links'. They want young people to be 'seen as part of the solution, not just as the cause of problems', to help ensure better community relations.

**Improved Communities:** By involving young people in their communities, a few organisations involved in regeneration hoped to develop 'a better sense of community', with children and young people having 'an increased sense of belonging'.

## Personal and social development

Participation is also seen as contributing to children and young people's wider personal development, increased self-worth and confidence, and practical skills (e.g. presentation skills, computing, arts) and knowledge.

*'Involvement is what makes a child feel proud and special within their families and community groups.'* (Children and Young People's Participation Project)

### **Children's views about why they think teachers should listen to them about school**

Children at Wheatcroft Primary School were asked (by teachers) to write **why they think teachers should listen to them about school**. Their views are illustrated below and mirror many of the reasons that adults think it is important to involve them in making decisions. The most common reasons are related to ensuring the education service best meets their needs, but they are also concerned with developing their relationships with staff, seeing a connection to their wider personal development and stressing that they have belief in their own ideas.

## **Children's views about why they think teachers should listen to them about school – *continued***

### **Improved services**

Improved service development:

*'Playground can be better.'*

*'Want to know if they like this school and if they think there are any improvements needed.'*

Improved client support: education

*'Helps you to learn.'*

*'Teachers wouldn't know the work is too hard if no one told them.'*

Improved client support: well-being and experience of school

*'Children are unhappy – 6 hours in school must be a happy time.'*

*'Feel safe.'*

*'We can tell you what we want.'*

*'To find out if they are happy and not being bullied.'*

*'So you can check if we're feeling alright about things.'*

### **Citizenship and Social Inclusion**

Children's views are valuable

*'Children have good opinions.'*

*'Children come up with better ideas because they have more imagination than grown ups.'*

To improve relationships between teachers and pupils

*'So that the teachers get to know the children better.'*

*'So they can look after us properly.'*

*'So that children feel able to talk about their problems.'*

### **Personal development**

*'Make us feel confident/comfortable.'*

## Chapter 5:

### Institutionalising Participation

In this chapter we examine how organisations that meaningfully involve children and young people change over time to develop their participatory practice and institutionalise this way of working. While the case study organisations often stressed they have 'not got it cracked' and still have some way to go, lessons can be learned from their experience of change. There are some common factors that have helped them to institutionalise participation and these are explored in this chapter.

#### Developing learning organisations

The increasing number of policy requirements, good practice guidance, manuals and research on participation are an indication of the move towards greater youth involvement. The primary focus in this literature is on the process of giving children and young people a say and, where funding exists, it frequently pays for dedicated participation workers to support young people to get involved. There has been a growing recognition also of the need to support adults to enable them to listen and engage with younger people, but there is still too little focus on the organisational changes required to develop infrastructure that enables *all* staff to work in different ways. This is more than just sending individuals on training courses. It is about managing a process of change across an organisation, which may well face resistance, personal and organisational. Training alone will not transform a traditionally run organisation into a person-centred, learning organisation. The 'true challenge' of participation is in organisations 'transforming themselves' (Blackburn, 1998, page 168). This includes 'profound changes in an institution's prevailing attitudes, behaviours, norms, skills and procedures' (Thompson, 1998, page 108).

Change happens at different levels within organisations. It needs to occur at **senior management level** to get their backing for the new ways of working, lead these through the organisation and to ensure they action young people's ideas. Change also needs to happen at the grassroots, with **staff** who engage with children and young people on a daily or regular basis: it is they who will make young people's involvement a reality. And change enshrined in **policy** helps ensure it becomes an openly stated and expected part of the way the organisation works.

We examine how organisations can develop into child/youth-focused organisations. These agencies have different histories of developing their participatory work:

- **Long established organisations** that have been developing their participatory practice over time.
- **Newer organisations** that have been in existence for relatively few years and established participation as central to their work from the start.
- **New youth participation development organisations** that have been set up with the primary purpose of promoting and supporting children and youth participation within other organisations and have enshrined participation from their inception.

We explore the different stages that organisations with these different histories pass through to change their infrastructure and the ways they work, and the factors that are important for ensuring participation is integral to organisations.

Change is not a linear process; it is complex, dynamic and unpredictable and needs to be flexible to accommodate the unexpected including the input of children and young people's ideas. The process of change requires trial and error and on-going reflection that builds on lessons learned in order to develop practice and adapt organisational structures.

The organisational change outlined in this section mirrors similar developments in the business world. New thinking in business-management, including ethical business theory (Semler, 2003; Hock, 1999) and the Japanese post-Fordist management model (Kaplinski, 1994 and Womack et al, 1990; cited in Blackburn and Holland, 1998, page 151), reflect similar themes on developing learning organisations (Argyris, 1999; Shaw, 2002) and integrating greater staff and user involvement. This includes devolved management, increased worker responsibility and greater flexibility to react to rapidly changing demands. The example was given earlier of the investment bank's willingness to fund citizenship work partly due to its synergy with the bank's management ethos.

*'What is clear is that the kind of donor pressure commonly applied to implementing agencies, for example to abide by unrealistic time constraints, pre-set targets and measurable outcomes, would be seen as archaic by the more progressive business managers of today . . . The heart of participation means allowing the proposed beneficiaries to increase their stake in the design, implementation and review of a project, whatever its nature.'*  
(Blackburn, 1998, page 169)



This chapter draws heavily on a framework developed by Kath Pasteur (2001), which maps out signposts and options useful for thinking about organisational change. Learning has also come from work on institutionalising participation within overseas development, particularly the book edited by James Blackburn and Jeremy Holland (1998).

*'A listening school where a learning culture is developed for teachers in order that they can have the confidence they need to avoid pre-judging outcomes and develop independence amongst the children.'* (Teacher)

### The process of developing a learning organisation:

Process	
UNFREEZE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● External pressures and internal drive</li> <li>● Highlight need for change</li> </ul>
CATALYSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identify existing champions</li> <li>● Establish new champions</li> <li>● Build senior management support</li> <li>● Develop a vision and commitment</li> <li>● Organise and plan for change</li> <li>● Develop partnerships and networks</li> <li>● Involve children and young people early on</li> <li>● Identify funding</li> <li>● Understand culture and politics of organisations</li> </ul>
INTERNALISE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Communicate and develop a common vision</li> <li>● Develop understanding of participation in practice</li> <li>● Build capacity</li> <li>● Motivate and sustain</li> <li>● Acknowledge conflict and opposition</li> <li>● Be organised</li> <li>● Reflect and evaluate</li> </ul>
INSTITUTIONALISE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Scale up, out and onwards</li> </ul>

[Adapted from: Pasteur, K. (2001) *Changing Organisations for Sustainable Livelihoods: a map to guide change*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex]

## Unfreeze

The first challenge for established organisations wanting (or required) to become more participatory is to unfreeze existing attitudes, procedures and styles of working. New organisations that start with a commitment to children and youth participation do not face the same challenges, as they can recruit new staff with shared values on participation. Over time, the aim is for individuals and organisations to perceive participation as the way to work – easy and natural. In the words of one youth worker,

*'It would be hard for me to see it another way . . . for me, it's a natural way to work.'* (Youth worker)

*'I came to the school and the ideas was of citizenship anyway, it was in the culture, so it was easy to do this.'* (Teacher)

There are a number of factors that help organisations to identify the need for change and these are explored below.

### External pressures and internal drives

Different pressures and drives may come from either within or outside an organisation that encourage staff to change their practice and develop more participatory organisations. Some of these are planned (e.g. policy or funding requirement), others develop slowly over time (e.g. professional theoretical beliefs) and some happen unexpectedly (e.g. being inspired by something one sees). A number of important drives were identified in the case study organisations:

**External – government agenda and policy requirement:** There is a growing requirement that public services involve their users in developing and planning services. Having a 'political climate where participation is the buzzword' has helped to encourage organisations to include children and young people. The health service case studies, for example, talked about 'the drive for user involvement from the Government'. The Government push for citizenship work in schools is an important factor in the secondary school and enabled them to gain citizenship specialist status.

*'I think there's no one thing driving it – it's not coming out of a disaster or an experience or anything – but I think there is the Government agenda; not so much the Government agenda, but that is in the background.'*  
(Health service manager)

**External – funding or partnership requirement:** case study organisations that are in a position to fund other organisations working with children and young people have made youth participation part of their funding criteria (e.g Children’s Fund, The Dumfries & Galloway Youth Strategy Executive Group). One organisation, responsible for managing a government initiative, refuses to fund agencies that have not consulted children or young people in developing their proposal ideas. Another organisation whose role it is to promote and support organisations to develop participation only works with those who are committed to doing so meaningfully, rather than in a token way.

**Internal – professional theoretical belief:** One of the most important factors for encouraging case study organisations to become participatory is a professional belief in the value and importance of this way of working. The most inspirational drivers of change appeared to be individuals who had read widely around participation. Several had been involved in studies or research related to their developing practice. They continued to read around their subject and situate their practice within a theoretical background. This includes social models of disability, theories of education, organisational change, sociological models of dialogue and models of empowerment.

**External – exposure to participatory practice:** One champion of participation first decided to promote youth involvement within his own organisation having seen on television examples of children’s involvement in private services – a ferry company and a zoo that involved children in deciding how to make their children’s areas more child-friendly.

## Highlight the need for change

The need to change had been highlighted to some organisations by understanding the links between participation and existing policy directives and, in the case of one organisation, research evidence, as described below.

**Research evidence:** There is little research that investigates the benefits of working in a participatory way and few organisations evaluate the outcomes of their participatory practice. We found only one example of an organisation being convinced of the need to develop more participatory work due to research evidence. At Collingham Gardens Residential In-patient Child Psychiatry Unit, research highlighting children’s expectations of passivity in their own treatment – and the negative implications this has for the therapeutic intervention – was an important factor in convincing staff to develop more participatory practice. Evidence can (and should) play a role in persuading individuals to consider other ways of working.

Certain groups are more risk adverse than others and may well require more convincing before they are prepared to consider change, and therefore more evaluation evidence is required.

**Highlight links to existing policy and guidance:** New initiatives can be perceived as yet another top down requirement and add pressure to deliver when workloads are already heavy. If participation is seen as a completely new initiative there is a danger that it will be viewed as a burden. We found evidence, for example, that some teachers see citizenship as an additional Government pressure.

Staff are sometimes restricted by other competing policy initiatives. For example, the pre-defined national curriculum can limit the degree to which students exercise their citizenship within schools and input into their learning. Concern has been expressed that early years teaching is moving away from a child-centred approach to focusing around subject teaching (Nutbrown, 1996). We found evidence of teaching staff (at nursery, primary and secondary level) feeling unable to involve children in directing their own learning. When looking for good early years practice we found a Local Education Authority with an impressive, forward thinking policy on listening to young children, but a local nursery they told us this had 'gone by the wayside' because of the pressure to implement the foundation curriculum, combined with a lack of senior support and staff confidence:

*'We're focused on planning: we tend to do a lot of planning, because of the curriculum. We feel pressure to keep to plan, rather take children's lead of it, to go where they want to go' (Nursery teacher)*

Others, in the sample, have overcome perceived barriers and developed participatory ways of working within existing curriculum boundaries. This requires vision, senior management backing and guidance on how participation integrates into existing policy and practice.

## Catalyse

Once individuals and organisations have begun to see the need to change, or even before, there are a number of factors that help to catalyse change. This includes having people to lead and promote change, developing a vision and understanding of what needs to change, organizing and building commitment, as well as involving young people in the process of change. These factors, and more, are described below.

## Identify Existing Champions of Participation

All the case study organisations had one or more champion of participation – individuals who promoted youth involvement, create organisational changes and supported others to develop their practice. A few organisations had existing champions of participation who were also considered to be ‘inspirational’ leaders. They promoted participation throughout their organisations, rather than setting up dedicated teams. These organisations often did not earmark money to develop participation, usually because it was unavailable but also because it is seen as integral to all their work.

## Establish New Champions of Participation

Many of the case study organisations had to establish distinct organisational units, sometimes with dedicated posts. This was either because they did not have an existing leading champion or because committed leaders did not have the capacity to push through change at all levels.

Several of the case study organisations recognised the importance of identifying champions both at the senior level and many workers who work directly with children and young people. Many of these have ring-fenced resources to develop the work, including money for dedicated participation workers. They use one or more of the following approaches:

- *Identifying existing staff to become champions:* The Dumfries & Galloway Youth Strategy Executive Group recruited youth workers to support young people’s participation and, recognising the importance of senior champions, asked the Director for Corporate Services to be an official champion for a new Scottish Executive initiative.
- *Establishing staff planning groups:* Collingham Gardens Residential In-patient Child Psychiatry Unit is at the early stages of transformation and has established a multi disciplinary staff ‘user involvement’ group to plan how to involve families and children more in the service.
- *Establishing a participation department:* Deptford Green School have a Citizenship department, with three staff members – including a senior teacher – dedicated to promoting citizenship work across the school and linking young people to wider community initiatives.
- *Commissioning external organisations and/or working in partnership with others:* Development organisations whose main purpose it is to promote participation can play a formal championing role within other organisations. For example:

the Brighton & Hove Children's Fund works in partnership with Coalition 4 Youth to ensure children are involved across all its work.

- *Establish young people as champions:* Formalising young people's participation by establishing youth groups enables young people themselves to promote their involvement: *'I think that the work of the young people, the contribution they've made has spoken for itself, and people have recognised it. And that's probably as powerful a champion as you can get'* (Youth worker).
- *Employ specialist participation workers:* Participation workers are employed to promote and support young people's involvement, and often to support young people's forums or councils.

Dedicated participation units and workers can be the 'conscience' within organisations, reminding them of the importance of including young people. Dedicating funding to specialist staff also indicates an organisational commitment to developing participation work.

Specialist staff or external participatory development organisations can also act as catalysts for change, bringing new ways of thinking and working, helping to share skills and build capacity, take risks and create space where changes can occur. Their skills and experience can be extremely important at this time when participation is much talked about and its importance is increasingly recognized, but many staff are still wondering *how* to do participation.

There is a danger that specialist staff and external development agencies are perceived as *the* focus of participatory action rather than making it a requirement for all workers. They can dedicate time to do interesting and often very innovative pieces of work with groups of children and young people but they cannot ensure *all* children and young people in an organisation are involved, they cannot build long-term relationships and their approach is unsustainable. In one case study with a dedicated specialist participation worker, young people felt that other staff do not listen to them. To fulfil young people's rights to influence decisions requires all staff to listen.

External development organisations stress the importance of developing local capacity within the organisations they support, and not to create dependency or duplicate existing work. Despite this stated intention, it is not always clear how external participation organisations are managing to build local capacity. For example, external participation workers plan and undertake consultations in schools alone rather than jointly with teaching staff.

Commissioning organisations play the role of champions by requiring those they fund to involve children and young people, and by commissioning those with a track record of commitment to youth involvement:

*'Our influence is going to be much, much bigger through the influence we have on the way other people do things, and part of what we can do is with every single thing we fund and every project we set up, have the aspects about children's participation and requiring groups and organisations to operate in a certain way and to involve children in what they do, to tell us and give us evidence of how they do that and how they change as a result.'*

*(Brighton & Hove Children's Fund manager)*

## **Build senior management support**

Organisations stressed the importance of having senior management support for participation work. Power-holders include head teachers, governors, NHS Trusts and management, MPs, councillors, local authorities, the police, parent organisations, and service providers such as the Department of Health and Social Services Departments.

Their backing is important for ensuring participation initiatives are agreed to and move forward, and for ensuring young people's views are acted upon. Senior management support is also crucial for creating organisational change, because they will ultimately decide whether the new ways of working receive institutional attention, resources and support and which staff to recruit and promote.

In the case studies where senior managers are clearly *highly committed* (rather than simply supportive) to child and youth participation, they do more than introduce a few isolated participation initiatives. They drive forward change across their organisations. They keep participation alive and high on the agenda.

*'I do think you need someone in the senior leadership team who is driving on this, because everyone is so busy. It's easy to think we asked the kids that three months ago, we don't need to think about that. It's easy to marginalise the importance, but it's essential to everything . . . We might be talking in the staff meeting and I can say we ought to see what the children think about this.'*

*(Senior manager)*

If managers are not supportive, it is harder and longer still for isolated staff to effect change. Lone champions of participation not in management positions struggled to establish and maintain participatory work and to fight off top down initiatives that threatened their ability to work in a participatory way:

*'I think it is fair to say that all the way through I've had to justify, stand my ground and by various means from deviousness, obstinacy, stubbornness, secretiveness, subversiveness, maintained that this is how I do it.'* (Practitioner)

When organisations have been in existence for a long time, it may be harder to develop senior management commitment to new ways of working and the challenge in creating change across the organisation is greater. Some public services are still 'getting to grips with involving adults'; involving young people is viewed as secondary, and involving younger children is given even less priority. Unless guidance specifically includes child and youth, rather than 'user' or 'community' involvement, this may continue to be the case. We identified few examples of senior management going on participation related training although some attended conferences or developed knowledge of participation through personal interest.

An organisation commitment to youth involvement needs to span the whole organisation if it is to survive when individual staff (particularly drivers of change) move on. A few organisations said that one of the barriers to developing their participation work was the instability of management support. We were told of a school that had reportedly lost many of its mechanisms for young people's participation that had been developed over numerous years when a new head arrived. National policy and guidance, which require organisations to involve children and young people is therefore important for helping to generate management commitment.

Even if there is support from senior managers, a lack of commitment from others can hinder young people's influence, especially those who will implement young people's recommendations elsewhere. This requires networking and building allies.

Managers have to take risks to create change. They have to share power, face possible staff resistance, one risked losing funding, and all have to find out whether new ways of working will achieve the required outputs demanded by funders and governing bodies. This can require a leap of faith, made easier when change is steered by a guiding vision.

*'I didn't concentrate on the targets for a year; I concentrated on getting the infrastructure right, the young people involvement, the community involvement, and our structure to deliver that. I almost forgot about the targets. If we got all that right and the education bits right, the targets would deliver themselves. So, a bit of risk-taking there.'* (Project manager)



## Develop a vision and commitment

Organisations have to have a clear vision that they want to increase youth participation. Those who have spent time developing their vision, and had thought long and hard about their work, have developed some of the most participatory practice.

*'We don't get it right all the time, it's just trying to keep that agenda in your mind all the time, this is where we're going, it's having the vision and maintaining that vision.'* (Senior manager)

As noted in a previous chapter ('Purpose of Participation'), not all organisations document their vision. Some feel that if the ethos is embedded in practice, formal documents are not required: *'there is an entrenched ethos of participation that has made a written commitment unnecessary'* (professional). While policy is valuable (discussed below), evidence of participation comes from day-to-day practice, rather than in written policies: *'most schools have similar aims and values, but whether they actually translate into practice, that's the crucial point'* (Senior teacher).

As well as vision, it requires commitment and belief to bring about change within organisations. Most of the people we met believed deeply in the importance of involving children and young people in making decisions and this helped them to continue selling this message to others. Others were new to the area but had an interest and 'a lot of drive and energy and creativity' which was helping to push forward the work.

## Organise and plan for change

Few of the organisations had developed strategic plans for institutionalizing participation. The Dumfries & Galloway YSEG stands out as having developed detailed written plans about how to do so. There is only so much planning that can be done for introducing participation work however. It is a dynamic process that develops in unforeseen ways over time with input from all levels: staff, management, children, young people, parents, external organisations. Being open to change, and learning from experiences, is key to developing in this way:

*'We started saying we don't know how to do this and everything we have done we have developed with young people. We started off as a learning organisation and we have been able to sustain that and I think that makes us exciting to work with from the young people's point of view.'* (Manager)

A fine balance needs to be reached to ensure change moves at the appropriate pace, neither too slow nor too fast, and this depends very much on the local context. Organisations stressed the importance of working towards long-term goals and outcomes and taking time to build up participation projects. Tight deadlines sometimes mean limiting young people's involvement because they have many other competing demands on their time.

*'It takes time to change mindsets about the capability of children to participate, but children never have time on their side.'* (Case study evaluation report)

Even if change in an organisation is slow, it is important to demonstrate to young people early on that their views are being listened to and for them to see some effect. These early outputs can also help placate funders. Where senior managers need convincing of the case for participation, early work can be viewed as pilot projects, which can be used to assess how to mainstream the programme.

New organisations can encourage staff to work in participatory ways through staff selection and induction. Established organisations will take more time to change and this requires *on-going* support and drive. Putting structures in place enables staff to develop their practice but *'you need time to nurture something like this, it's not something you can just impose on people'* (Senior manager). Some organisations, at the start of developing their participation work, stressed the need to introduce 'manageable' changes.

## Develop partnerships and networks

As discussed earlier a number of organisations work in partnership which can enable them to build on their skills and knowledge and help generate organisational change:

- On-going collaboration with dedicated participation development organisations brings the capacity and experience to develop new work.
- On-going collaboration between other organisations exposes staff to other ways of working and can encourage change in practice.
- Voluntary organisations can have more scope to develop innovative work and be less constrained by statutory policy requirements.
- Consultations and participation activities that are jointly funded by different agencies (e.g. health, social services and education) can help to ensure that young people's own agendas can be identified and explored, rather than keeping to topics defined or relevant just to one specific agency.

- Establishing partnerships between services and advocacy organisations helps ensure young people have an independent advocate in personal and group decisions and that their views are represented to a number of relevant agencies.

It can be difficult to work in partnership with those whose practice is very different, however, as one voluntary organisation found when trying to work with schools: *'teachers greatly influence the level of participation that is possible, this works to the detriment of participation in some cases where teachers can act in a very directive way'*.

A lot of information is collected from young people in consultations and this is not always sufficiently used. Networking to relevant professionals both internally and externally is important for ensuring young people's views influence change. This is more than giving out a written report. It is about attending meetings, establishing on-going contact and showing professionals how young people's views can be relevant to their services. One group of young people said that organisations producing written consultation reports should also 'teach reports' by having associated training and dissemination events. Involving young people in disseminating the learning and making the message of consultation or research real, is also beneficial for communicating messages.

*'[The young people] came and related the [research] findings to their experiences. It was very powerful.'* (Researcher)

## Involving children and young people early on

Some organisations stressed the importance of involving children and young people from the very beginning of developing participation work.

*'At the earliest opportunity with a project that has participation in its title, its job description, you have got to get involved with kids. Too many projects spend ages getting ready, to get ready, to get ready . . . Just do it. Just get the kids in and pave the space and that will change the project. Kids will demand that you operate in a genuine way.'* (Participation worker)

## Identify funding

While there has been a growth in guidance requiring children and young people's participation the case studies often have little or no accompanying ring-fenced funding to develop this work within most sectors.

*‘Participation and children’s rights, there’s no money with it. It’s a lot of recommendations but there’s no money and so what we’ve been battling with is we’ve got to come up with the ideas, then we’ve got to go and find the money as well and that is the most frustrating thing.’ (Youth project manager)*

Some organisations, mostly strategic organisations and dedicated participation development organisations, receive relatively large sums of money dedicated to promoting and supporting participation. One regeneration organisation had a yearly budget of £60,000 for youth engagement to pay for staff, training, residentials and social activities.

Most of the education and health case study organisations do not receive additional funding for their participatory work, even though they are working with many children and young people every day. One of these organisations could not afford to get notice boards to feedback the findings and action following children’s consultations. Whilst some inspirational leaders have pushed through participation without additional funding, it is hard to convince others of the need if not suitably funded and supported to do so.

It does not cost anything to listen to children. But it costs money to support staff to develop their skills, to give them the time to reflect and learn new ways of working, to pay for cover when staff take time out from their other work, to pay for participation events, to pay for any additional resources such a space needed to accommodate young employees and youth groups. Funding is also needed to undertake the service improvements suggested by children and young people.

*‘They want to know our opinions but as soon as it costs money they don’t want to know.’ (Young person)*

There is a danger that current funding is focused on creating an elite workforce of participation workers rather than spreading resources to also support those already working regularly with young people to develop their practice. Dedicated champions of participation can be important for supporting that work, but it appears that they are sometimes receiving a disproportionate amount of resources.

The organisations undertaking participation work often had short-term and insecure funding. New government funded organisations such as the Children’s Fund, YOT, Connexions and regeneration initiatives are important in participation. Funding, however, is often for three years or less, yet it takes longer to create the organisational change required to involve children and young people meaningfully across an organisation. Investing in Children – one of the case studies – is a

development initiative that is seen as long-term, with on-going funding, it is already six years old, has future long term goals and is therefore secure.

Voluntary play and youth organisations described extremely insecure core funding situations, which impacted negatively on their ability to develop and sustain their participation work. Managers' time is spent fundraising rather than developing practice, and short-term funding for posts can also create a high staff turnover, which is not good for relationship building with young people.

Insufficient funding sometimes means inadequate staff levels, and difficulties in providing simple expenses like food and travel. This is especially noticeable in more rural areas where transportation is extremely costly.

An important factor in enabling organisations to give children and young people a say about how services are delivered is 'supportive' funders who will allow flexibility in how money is spent so that it best meets group and individual young people's needs and wishes. Where they do not this inevitably constrains choice. The young people in one voluntary youth organisation decided to fundraise themselves (e.g. through car boot sales) rather than rely on funders who dictated how they participated in their service:

*'If you are getting funding make sure you get it from people who let you get on with it.'* (Young person)

## **Understand the cultural and political context**

Increasing children and young people's participation within organisations is a political process about shifting power relationships. Giving young people access to those in power gives them greater influence on decisions. This requires some understanding of the dynamics within an organisation that might help or hinder this process. For example, one local authority youth forum was located and supported by a department seen to have more influence than a number of other departments.

Institutionalizing young people's participation in organisations where staff themselves feel *'they don't have much of a voice'* (worker) means they are less enthusiastic about youth involvement. Organisations often try to ensure staff are involved in developing and discussing organisational changes so they have ownership of the new ways of work: through meetings, training events and residential. There were occasionally some differences between managers and others about how much staff get to have a say.

*'The principles of pupil voice are something that extend throughout the whole school community. It's not just listening to children, it's respecting the views of everybody in the organisation. Because schools are just people.'* (Manager)

Political relationships external to organisations also need to be considered.

A regeneration organisation had found it 'counterproductive' to be seen to support and fund organisations that are in conflict with young people. In this example, local young people and the police had a bad relationship and funding police initiatives was felt to be alienating young people, so the organisation was re-examining how to fund police work in other communities, relationships are poor between adult residents and young people, and joint work can help to overcome these differences.

Organisations working with children, particularly young children, often stress the importance of working with parents. Parents are far more influential in the lives of children than they are with older teenagers. Involving parents helps build their support for the organisation's work and also enables them to witness the methods and benefits of working in a participatory way.

Knowing which young people are most excluded, and developing an understanding of the cultural needs of specific groups, ensures organisations develop appropriate strategies to involve them appropriately. The Children's Voice Project, for example, employs a session worker to work with Bengali and Somali young women and one to work with disabled children.

## Internalise

Once organisations have started on the road to developing participatory structures and practice, more has to be done to ensure the changes are internalised and therefore sustainable, rather than short-lived initiatives. This includes developing a broad-based shared vision and understanding of participation, putting time and resources into developing staff capacity across the organisation, and into motivating and celebrating achievements, resolving conflicts and reflecting on the new ways of working. These are discussed further below.

## Establishing a common vision

Once an initial vision and commitment to developing participation has been established, this has to be promoted so that it is shared, and inevitably negotiated along the way.

**Repeating the message:** Repeating the message to involve young people can help encourage organisations to change. Dedicated participation workers and other champions are well placed to do this. Attending meetings, discussing ideas and informal conversations with individuals within and across organisations, and the wider community, can help sell the message. One pioneering teacher described how she talked ‘all the time’ with other workers – informally in the classroom and at team meetings – to support them to develop their practice and work in a more child-focused way.

*‘The first year was quite difficult because it was really hard to get through to adults, saying that children do have a voice . . . We did a lot of presentations, we did a lot of challenging: saying they do have a voice, like how do they know children don’t know anything? . . . But now they’re coming to us. We’ve done successful consultation and they know, they’ve got loads of information from children.’ (Participation worker)*

**Awareness Raising Events:** Opportunities to engage and observe participation events provide opportunities to gain greater awareness. Deptford Green School, for example, had a Citizenship Day to help launch their new specialist status and make the community, including teachers and young people, aware of the Citizenship agenda.

**Requiring commitment from all staff:** Some of the organisations working directly with children and young people specifically state that all staff, at all levels, work participatively with young people as it is integral to the philosophy of the organisation. A couple of organisations include participation in all staff job descriptions and expect all staff (however senior) to work directly with children and young people. There are a number of ways in which they ensure all staff have direct contact:

- Direct sessions/projects run by project workers
- Planning sessions involving the whole project
- Work experience/jobs for young people within the project
- Young people participating in staff training, workshops and recruitment
- Directors facilitating youth groups.

*‘As a participation organisation it is essential that all staff are involved with children and young people, particularly management staff, who can easily become removed from the issues affecting children and young people without regular face to face contact.’ (Children and Neighbourhoods in London)*

## Develop understanding of participation in practice

Fully comprehending what is meaningful 'participation' or 'user involvement' can be difficult. The danger of involving young people in token ways is widely written about and still happens. Even in these case studies, which were selected to highlight examples of good practice, we sometimes saw evidence of token involvement. No one can get it right all the time; this is a new way of working that requires some level of trial and error. Occasionally, however, workers do not realize they are getting it wrong, and even promote practice that is clearly not participatory.

Fundamentally, working in a participatory way is about having a different outlook and approach to engaging with children and young people. The differences between participatory and non-participatory practice are often glaringly obvious, but sometimes quite subtle. It may take time for staff and volunteers to get it. It is easy to misunderstand what participation means without opportunities to fully explore and witness other examples of good practice.

*'[A parent volunteer] is singing songs at them not with them. She has different systems, for example at Christmas she got children to draw round a template of a Christmas trees, whereas I avoid templates, as they can make children worry about their ability to draw a Christmas tree themselves and you don't get their perception of a Christmas tree. The parent agrees with the way I work, I feel a bit undermined by her, so I am trying to work out how to deal with it.'*

*(Practitioner)*

Children and young people have been involved in helping adults to understand what participation means in practice. In one organisation young people deliver a training session to management group members to help them understand the experience of attending the group from the young people's perspective. Providing staff with opportunities to observe and take part in children's participation activities also helps them to see the level of children's competency and also to learn how to make these activities meaningful.

*'The circle groups [facilitated by Year 6 pupils] I think have helped colleagues to see that if you ask an open question, the children genuinely think they're going to be listened to, they don't give you rubbish back . . . for teachers that may feel threatened, it helps them to observe how it's done and develop their understanding of working with children, rather than delivering to them.'*

*(Teacher)*



Adults including those who have worked for children and young people for many years repeatedly professed to being surprised by what children are capable of and the complexity of their understanding and analysis of experiences. This highlights one of the areas where staff can learn from children and young people. One teacher described how she intentionally creates a learning environment with open ended tasks in which the children have the capacity to surprise her.

## Build capacity

There are a number of ways in which organisations develop their capacity to undertake meaningful participation. This includes supporting staff to develop their knowledge, attitudes and skills, and the confidence to start working in new ways. Different ways to support staff are explored further below.

**Staffing levels:** Listening to children and young people as part of one's daily work requires time. For example, the time to listen when stopped in the corridor by a young person, to meet in the evening or to give young people the space to debate their ideas or negotiate a group decision. Setting up formal dedicated participation activities – such as school councils, youth forums, surveys and creative youth action projects – also requires considerable staff support and dedicated time. Putting young people's ideas into action and disseminating their views to others is also time consuming.

When managers and staff already have busy workloads delivering a service, it can be difficult to find the additional time. Some rely on dedicated participation workers or agencies, but this means children and young people's involvement may remain an add-on rather than integral to all practice. Some organisations support staff to develop participatory work within their existing jobs. For example, one school freed up 15 minutes of weekly class time for circle time to ensure it is manageable for staff to implement.

Organisations sometimes involve all staff in undertaking participation but also have a dedicated participation worker or team. Deptford Green School, for example, has a dedicated team, but the emphasis is still on all staff building citizenship into their curriculum areas. The role of the participation workers is to support the children to participate and other staff in involving children.

When dedicated participation workers are involved there must also be enough staff to support the children. When a participation worker is running formal participation activities they may not have the capacity to give all the participating children the adequate one-on-one support that they need. Additional support is also beneficial for those working with large numbers of children and young people. This role can be

taken by paid staff or by volunteers. Parents sometimes take on this role, particularly with younger children. In a nursery, for example, having lots of parental support enables the teacher to allow children to choose which activities they do because there are sufficient adults to support different children doing different tasks.

It is also essential that there are staff with the appropriate skills for working with young people. Youth workers may be necessary, for example, to engage in detached work. If children are being involved in service planning and delivery there needs to be staff available who know the organisational structures and have key contacts, and this may be different people to those working directly with young people.

**Recruitment criteria:** Organisations recruiting workers specifically to support youth involvement usually require experience of participation. Some organisations try to gauge whether applicants share similar values, and involving young people on recruitment panels helps to ensure they can get on with them.

*'I suppose we find people who think similarly and we give them the skills that we've found useful. And we actively encourage them to involve young people.'*  
(Senior manager)

Other research has found that this is as important to do this with senior staff and those in Government and funding organisations – whose commitment is required to push through organisational change at all levels – as it is with those working directly with young people:

**Induction and training:** Overseas development work has found that training is hugely important for institutionalising participation although this alone is insufficient unless it is seen as part of wider organisational learning and change.

A minority of case study organisations arrange training in participation related issues for their staff (although they received training in many other topics related to working with children and young people). Most of the training that we identified was one-off classroom events, rather than on-going learning opportunities with practice experience. There is a demand for training in this area (Kilgour, 2002). Exposure to participatory work and training for senior decision makers may also be necessary to help them shift their thinking and understanding. Coalition 4 Youth provides training for staff at all levels up to Chief Executive, which includes getting them to examine the frustrations and difficulties facing organisations wanting to involve young people, how decision-makers stand in the way of young people's participation, identifying champions, examining how systems and structures can change and being clear about the purpose of participation within organisations.

We did not find examples of profession-specific training that included participation issues, apart from youth work and legal advocacy. Much training focuses on the *methods* of involving children and young people, rather than the *principles* underlying participation. Some organisations have a problem identifying relevant training, and for very rural organisations, there is the additional difficulty of travel.

A few organisations ensure that all new staff receive induction training that includes the importance and/or mechanisms for involving children and young people and staff learn on the job sometimes accompanied by more experienced staff.

Those with experience of working with children and young people may not always have the skills necessary to work in participatory ways. Just because someone has worked with this age group for many years, this does not mean they will automatically be able (or willing) to work in new ways, and many will need support to shift their practice. In schools, for example, it was felt that teachers often require support to structure classroom discussions and to get children and young people to listen to each other. Training in circle time skills is seen as beneficial to help teachers with this.

*‘Sometimes you need to educate adults as well, because everyone makes the assumption that they’re good at working with young people. So, for example, [they] might think, ‘We like young people’, but in reality they don’t serve them [well].’ (Worker)*

**Supervision:** Supervision is used in some organisations to discuss participation work. One organisation stressed the value of this for supporting staff to work with children and young people but also, as importantly, to explore how best to work with adults (professionals and parents) who actively prevent children and young people from voicing their ideas. One organisation requires workers to complete session diary sheets of their support work with children and young people, and these are discussed with staff to explore how to develop their work.

*‘Lots of things staff will use supervision time for is how to manage adults who behave in ways that we think are outrageous. That whole business of ‘he loves his [club], he loves it there, don’t you?’ right through to teachers talking across a child as if they aren’t there, and giving staff the confidence to address that in ways that aren’t offensive.’ (Service manager)*

**Opportunities to undertake participation work and experiment:** Case study staff primarily learn by *doing*, by actively involving children and young people in making decisions. Very few organisations stressed workers are encouraged to experiment, although in the overseas literature this is a key factor identified as necessary for

developing new practice: 'an open, supportive, yet challenging organisational climate in which it is safe to experiment and safe to fail' (Thompson, 1988, page 117).

*'[We were] unsure how that [youth advisory group] would work, but the whole process for [the organisation] was in the learning of it, what were the issues of getting a disparate group of young people, what could they contribute, ourselves not being sure? And trying to find vehicles for doing that, through games, through activities.'* (Senior manager and practitioner)

**Sharing and discussing learning with others:** Several staff stressed the value of meeting with other professionals, within their own and other organisations, to share ideas about how to develop participation. This was through conferences, study days, inset, informal discussions, team meetings and on-going email discussion with team mates.

Champions tend to make links with others who share similar values. This includes identifying others internally and by building formal and informal networks with those in other organisations (e.g. school advisers, professional groups). Lone workers who are pushing for change from the bottom can particularly depend on contact with others who think similarly:

*'[Another teacher] and I have stood together through thick and thin because she works similarly . . . we've supported each other and kept each other going and reassured each other when we wobbled.'* (Teacher)

Camden Play Service have a staff conference every year which has included sessions on participation issues. Their ideas are listened to and developed by the specialist Consultation and Participation Officer and then promoted across the different play centres locally. The Children's Fund in London have a Participation Officers' Forum where staff from London Boroughs meet, which is seen as good for exchanging practice and getting new ideas. There is a Citizenship Network in Deptford that is attended by two schools, the LEA, Health Schools Partnership, the local Education Action Zone (EAZ) plus others. They discuss and promote citizenship, including running workshops and conferences for educators and young people.

Visits to other projects and participation organisations are also valuable, although few get the opportunity to do this. Sometimes just dedicated participation workers are able to do so, although this has clear value for all those working with children and young people. In the same way, young people benefit from visiting other youth groups.

**Even fewer go on visits overseas:** which may be of particular value to those who are highly experienced and could most benefit from visiting well developed participatory practice in other countries. Investing in Children has striven to build and sustain links with projects abroad, to learn from and contribute to the debate about children's rights: they have been involved in a series of national and international seminars and conferences on issues surrounding children's participation and citizenship. International visitors have been to several of the case study organisations to benefit from their practice.

**Documenting practice and learning:** Many of the case study organisations documented their participatory practice with children and young people, either in written reports, photocopies of discussion activities (e.g. flipchart brainstorm) or using videos or photography. This helps to build an 'institutional memory' (Thompson, 1998, page 117) and share learning across the organisation and externally.

**Appropriate time for ensuring action:** It can take a long time for children and young people's ideas to be acted on. The more distant the people who commission the consultation, the longer it can take for feedback to be given and for young people's views to turn into action. The time involved in pushing through change frustrates workers and young people. Those who work closely with children can respond and act far more easily and quickly to what is said, both to personal and public issues.

At the other end of the spectrum, action could be taken too quickly before children and young people have had sufficient time to share their views. CAFCASS, for example, stress that it may take repeated visits to meet with children and discuss their personal views about court cases, what they want to happen and that it may be necessary, therefore, to inform judges that more time is needed to ascertain children's views.

## Motivate and sustain

Once participation is underway, the challenge is to ensure staff do not lose momentum and that the work is sustainable. This can be done in a number of ways:

**Celebrate achievements:** Celebrate what has been achieved on the path towards changing practice. This can be done internally through meetings or inset, or when presenting and sharing work at external conferences and meetings.

*'Taking the time in that day to remind each other what we have achieved amongst ourselves. There's nothing more powerful than looking back over a period of time, and saying actually a year ago we weren't doing that, oh yeah we've done that. It helps people to see that this is a process that is worthwhile and things have happened along the way. All change is incremental, you can't do things overnight.'* (Manager)

**Outside recognition:** Outside recognition of the value of working in a participatory way has been important for those developing the work over time, particularly for those who have been doing so alone or against some opposition. When outside visitors come to find out more about an organisation's work it is important to let everyone know and celebrate the accolade. Outside recognition can also be helpful in persuading senior people of its value: the governors of one school had been impressed by participation work when the school council was highlighted in a practice video. A good school reputation and Ofsted report, and parental support, have also been important for reinforcing the work in schools. Given the value of independent review and evaluation for demonstrating benefits it is surprising that more organisations have not chosen to assess outcomes.

**Ongoing training and discussion opportunities:** Initial training can be important, but as change is an on-going process, so too are further opportunities for discussion and learning about participation. One organisation, that had put in a lot of time to staff training and discussion when first developing its participation work, admitted that this had dropped off recently and there is a need to revisit this: *'I don't think there is sufficient shared ownership of what we're trying to do, and some of these issues are quite sensitive'* (Participation worker).

**Stress benefits/rewards to organisation:** One organisation had developed new facilities for the community with part of the money gained for participation work, so the advantages of adopting participation were stressed as having additional benefits to the staff and the wider community.

**Awards and incentives:** Award schemes for organisations developing high standards of participation work are useful for recognising achievements. Some of the case study organisations had received awards for their participation work. The Dumfries & Galloway YSEG has an established Valuing Young People Award that requires organisations to demonstrate that young people have participated in their work. The award criteria are as follows:

1. Provide a direct service to young people at the community level.
2. Show evidence of dialogue with young people.

3. Show evidence of change as a result of dialogue with young people.
4. The process and changes must be meaningful to young people.

Lessons from participation in overseas development include the importance of material and professional awards and incentives for project managers who have demonstrated changed attitudes and increased participatory practice (IDS workshop in IDS Workshop in Blackburn and Holland, 1998). Suggestions include bonuses, privileges and promotion. No evidence was identified of these types of incentives being used in the case study organisations.

## Acknowledge conflict and opposition

Inevitably, within a process of change, there will be some resistance and conflict between the old and new ways of working. Any change can be difficult, and change that involves sharing power with others – particularly in traditionally hierarchical organisations such as education and health – is potentially very difficult and progress may be slow. This needs to be acknowledged, identified and addressed.

*‘One of the things that has been happening recently is that, as the student voice increases in the school, traditional hierarchical relationships are threatened and some middle managers feel very uneasy. I have heard people say, and they have said it to me in fact, you are focusing too much on the young people’s rights and not enough on their responsibilities.’ (Teaching professional)*

**Professional resistance:** Since sharing control poses problems, it makes it tempting to justify not involving young people. One teacher explained the need to overcome the tendency for teachers to revert back to modes of learning and behaviour that were in existence when they were themselves students. This shows the importance of continually promoting the vision of participation and seeing capacity building as an on-going process. Having the backing of senior management can help address resistance.

*‘There have been people who are reluctant to shift the balance because people, adults feel threatened I think. So having the backing of the Head, the Head being willing to support that process to encourage teachers to have a sort of listening school I think makes a huge difference.’ (Teaching professional)*

Senior managers may have to actively resolve conflict between young people and adults. Encouraging children and young people to make decisions in one situation can raise their expectations to be involved similarly by other adults in other contexts. A senior manager was called in to resolve conflict between pupils and

a more traditional new teacher and stressed the importance of acknowledging feelings on both sides:

*'I was in a very difficult position because I could see the children's point of view was actually valid. I could also see that the teacher felt very threatened. And if I supported the children, and not in favour of her, that would undermine her professionally. It was a difficult situation. I had to talk with the children about how different adults had different expectations and what could they do within the parameters in which she wanted to work with them, that could enable them to negotiate more appropriately, without confrontational . . . I did talk with the teacher and I tried to get her to see their point of view.'* (Senior manager)

Implementing young people's ideas as pilot initiatives, that will be monitored and reviewed, can help to deal with real and perceived concerns.

**Competing Parents' and Children's Rights:** The priority focus that some organisations give to adult involvement can compromise the needs of young people. One health worker told us that teenagers want access to unbiased health education, including sex and drugs education, which some parents do not want them to have. Staff in this organisation are still struggling with how to meet both their needs.

## Be organised

Some workers stressed the need to structure their work and to be organised. This includes being clear about individual roles and responsibilities and requiring workers to deliver on time. To enable young people to exercise choice and to benefit from this, the setting has to be highly organised. Middle Street School nursery was described as 'extremely well organised' by Ofsted and it is because of these clearly defined boundaries that the teacher believes children are able to engage independently in activities and in self-directed learning.

The need for tight organisation is necessary when working with older young people as well as young children. Solid organisational foundations are needed to adequately support young people and help contain those who may be experiencing chaos in the rest of their lives. In one youth project a lack of organisation amongst youth workers was seen as a large barrier:

*'Youth workers are a nightmare at paperwork, and admin, and getting stuff in time . . . things very easily slip and slip and slip.'* (Youth worker)



## Reflect and Evaluate

On going reflection and self-evaluation by staff, children and young people on participatory practice can help to increase positive outcomes. This is because it gives young people and organisations a 'reality-check' on the effect of the work they are doing and it can move individual projects forward by learning through experience and prevent them from repeating past mistakes. The degree to which case study organisations engaged in reflection and evaluation varied widely. Whilst most undertook some reflection on their practice, few related this to rigorous evaluation of how practice influenced outcomes (see section 4). Having the time to think about practice is important: at least one case study organisation was prompted to do so by participating in this research study.

Busy practitioners often do not have time to stop and reflect on what they do. Only the most committed will make time in their day. Others need the encouragement and support from management, and systems in place that prioritise a reflective approach to developing participatory ways of working. Some ways in which this is done within the case study organisations include:

- Sessional observation and recording sheet for staff to complete
- End of session or activity feedback from young people, which is then discussed in staff meetings
- Occasional 'snap shot' feedback from young people using surveys, focus groups, dictaphones, artwork, video box, etc.
- Organisational youth advisory groups which enable staff and young people to discuss and reflect on practice
- Regular (e.g. six monthly) away day for project workers to examine and discuss practice
- Participating in university research projects that enable staff and young people to reflect on practice
- Independent evaluation

Several organisations have commissioned external evaluations, sometimes as part of their funding agreement. Most of these looked at the overall service, rather than specifically the participatory practice, although Investing in Children have contracted an academic to provide an on-going, reflective (formative) evaluation of their participatory work. The academic regularly meets with the central staff team, and occasionally with young people and local organisations, and 'holds a mirror up to the project', which is considered hugely beneficial.

## INSTITUTIONALISE

### Scale Up, Out and Onwards

Even organisations that promote participation at many or all levels often start with developing practice in just one or a few areas of work or teams before scaling up and out for wider replication. There are a number of factors that can help scale this work within and across organisations over time.

**Internal policy and guidance:** Organisational policy requirements and guidance to involve children and young people are indicators of the change process. These can help ensure that staff implement the new ways of working. Establishing policy is not sufficient, however, without also building the commitment and skills to deliver the work, and providing on-going support to develop new ways of working. Sometimes supervision is used to ensure a level of staff accountability for fulfilling organisational policy and plans.

Even when policies exist it takes time to undo long-established and ingrained behaviour and sometimes it is the small things that are hardest to change. One child-focused organisation undertaking a lot of impressive participation work had developed a rule that children and young people should not be referred to as 'kids', but the workers we interviewed repeatedly used this word, seemingly unaware that they were doing so.

As was discussed in an earlier sub-section, new policies can compete, or be perceived to compete, with existing guidance and some work may be needed to ensure this is not the case and to encourage staff to understand the importance and value of new policy directions.

**Agreed Standards:** There is a growing push to set standards and kite mark services for participation and some organisations are working towards developing these for youth participation (e.g. North Huyton NDC). Investing in Children have developed a county-wide initiative through which local organisations can become a partner by fulfilling certain criteria, which young people are involved in assessing. This is helping to ensure the child-focused approach scales out to many organisations. (see Cutler, 2003 for overview of different organisational standards on participation).

This chapter has explored the many ways in which the case study organisations were learning about and working towards sustaining their participation work and ensuring this becomes an integral part of practice across the whole organisation.



# Section Three

Participation in Practice

## Chapter 6:

### Developing Positive Relationships

Participation is a way of working, and central to this is the importance of the development of positive relationships between adults and children and young people. In this chapter we explore how to develop these relationships. Workers' personalities are often seen by children and young people as important for engaging them, but equally so is the way they act and engage with young people. Whatever participation activities are used, meaningful and successful participation happens in a supportive environment where there is trust and mutual respect between adults and young people. In the case study organisations the continued involvement from children and young people was largely rooted in the relationships they had developed with staff, and sometimes also with parents and the wider community.

This chapter explores the following:

- *Building trust and respect.*
- *Dialogue between adults and children and young people.*
- *Feedback to children and young people.*
- *Reducing the power imbalance.*
- *Support for children and young people.*
- *Making appropriate choices.*
- *Peer support.*
- *Parental support.*
- *Building relationships with the wider community.*

#### Building Trust and Respect

*Interviewer: 'What is it about the organisation that helps you have your say?'*

*Child: 'I think it's the staff. They don't interfere but they ask if we're OK. We can trust them to keep it to themselves.'*

*Interviewer: 'What do you think makes a good worker?'*

*Child: 'That you can really trust them. Being able to listen to what you have to say and understanding [our situations].' (Young person)*

It is vital that adults keep children and young people at the centre of any interaction. The crux of this is in the workers' attitudes towards the children and young people and the interactions between them. The reciprocation of trust and respect is important in order to enable a relationship of mutuality in which a child or young person (and adults) can develop. In pupil-led research on what makes a good teacher, at one of the case study schools, children said one of the most important factors (after 'doesn't tell people off') is trust between pupil and teacher; both that a teacher 'will trust you' and equally that teachers are someone 'you can trust'. Without this shared respect children and young people are unlikely to engage openly with adults.

*'[Good support workers] are really friendly and non-judgemental. Bad support people don't listen to what you're saying. You can tell when someone's not listening to you; people who don't listen, people who are arrogant and ignorant; and people who haven't got a lot of time for you.'* (Young person)

First impressions are important otherwise a child may decide not to become involved by not returning or simply turning off and not engaging with the adult(s). Children and young people should be made to feel welcome and given space to assess the situation and absorb what is going on around them. Therefore, being open and welcoming and establishing an environment of mutual respect and trust from the beginning is vital.

*Interviewer: 'What made you get more and more involved?'*

*Young person: 'It was that the [project] team made me feel welcomed, and the project made me feel like part of the project and one of them through the training and all that. So I think its just a sense of that relationship and that they are making us feel welcome and part of the project.'*

To lay the foundations of trust and respect, adults need to show a genuine interest in getting to know the children and young people. This means moving past stereotypes and approaching children and young people as people, not as issues. A young person is less likely to respond to an adult if they sense that they are being labelled. In a small village where there were problems with perceived anti-social behaviour amongst young people, the detached project worker did not address the young people as troublemakers, but simply asked what it was like to be a young person in the village, and following subsequent project work some of these young people have become key decision makers in the village.

Recognising children and young people's individuality is important in terms of helping them to discover their own strengths and abilities. Being aware of the abilities of individual children and young people will enable adults to trust and support them to make decisions based on their competencies.

*'And real life should be about us recognising we've got different strengths and we all muck in together, and we're not all good at everything ... getting to the nuts and bolts which is to respect the individual to take the task forward in the way that suits them best in terms of their learning. Rather than us deciding what it is, it's a control thing again. You've got to be a pretty confident teacher to hand it back to them.'* (Teacher)

Recognising individuality is necessary not only in personal or individual decision-making but also within group decision-making, where the interaction between individuals is crucial for ensuring effective communication, listening and negotiation. It is important to recognise, particularly in medium to long-term work on public issues, that children and young people may also have private issues that cannot be ignored. This does not mean becoming involved in every aspect of their life, but recognising and acknowledging that they may need assistance from adults they know to access external support.

*'I have a job remit, but at times it has to go beyond that. I've always found that you have to deal with the whole of the young person's life; it's no good just taking out the bit that you want to use and abuse. It's about taking a more holistic approach to young people... There's a range of things: sexual behaviour, safe sex, coming out, drug use, health, benefits, housing. It's no good saying to the young person, 'I'm sorry æ that's not my job.'*  
(Youth development worker)

*'When I got out of foster placement and then I came here...and they sorted me out and they helped me out. They took me down to social services and things like that. Just really stood by me and helped me and they knew I was going through a bad patch and that and they were just there if you needed to speak to them.'* (Young person)

A large factor in building mutual trust and respect is the dialogue between children and young people and adults.

*'They [project staff] ask you to do things instead of telling you to do things – and they say thank you!'* (Young person)

## Dialogue between adults and children and young people

*Interviewer: 'What are the things that make a bad Youth Worker?'*

*Young person: 'Someone that thinks they're the boss, and talks so much ... but they don't like to listen. They're supposed to listen to our suggestions, but they don't.'*

*Interviewer: What effect does that have on you then?*

*Young person: We just boycott them, don't we? We just don't go.*

Traditionally, social knowledge is presented to children based on adult experience, so children are passive recipients. Active participation and positive relationships with others allow the child to gain social knowledge through experience. The case studies demonstrate the importance of changing former ways of working to establish dialogue between children and adults: listening and learning, understanding other perspectives and responding constructively. The next chapter provides a number of illustrations of how 'informal' and 'focused dialogue' activities can be used to involve children and young people in both personal and public decisions. Here we look at the principles that underlie meaningful dialogue.

*'We believe that children learn best as partners with their teachers. True partnership and team work is easy to talk about and difficult to develop: one step towards this is by providing opportunities for open dialogue between all stakeholders including children.'* (Teacher)

A clear message from the research is that adults must be open and up front about what they can offer to children and young people, otherwise the latter can become frustrated and potentially disengaged.

*'If they want to consult children, say they said, whatever we wanted to improve, they would improve it, they need to say something that is really true. Some people they say if you say you want your school to have like, say more activities, but they don't do it. They should say something that is true.'* (Child)

Discussion between the adults and children and young people can minimise this problem; asking the children to reflect back their understanding of what is on offer and discussing any differences in interpretation. This can be a learning process for the adults as well, as they understand how to effectively communicate with children. By being clear about the limits of what is on offer, children are more able to see what part they can play to achieve what they want. By discussing possibilities and asking questions of adults, children and young people can begin to think critically about

their own capabilities. This can enable the children and young people to ask adults for the support that they feel they need in order to achieve their goal. This turns the relationship around and places children in an active position.

*'A lot of them [children], once I started asking questions, they started asking questions themselves. When I asked their opinions, and they would ask could I do this, I didn't take actions forward, I made it clear I wasn't there to advocate for them. But some of them left with ideas of what they could take forward.'*  
(Researcher)

Adults generally have more knowledge or access to knowledge and understanding of structures, processes and ways of working. Based on their position adults sometimes need to offer guidance and steer children and young people in the appropriate direction. In the nursery setting, for example, staff see their role as giving the children the benefit of their greater knowledge:

*'Our job is then to facilitate that to give them the benefit of our much greater knowledge to structure things for them so that they can understand things better... correct things that they've got wrong that are going to hamper them and to keep alive rather than subdue their enthusiasm.'* (Nursery teacher)

Children and young people say that they appreciate this type of intervention and recognise that adults can be resources to them. The important point is this information is imparted in a clear and constructive way. Then the children can take this information and look at alternative ways of working and may choose to do so with adult involvement.

*'Adults do support us quite a lot. They let us get on with it, but when they see we're going off the track a bit, they'll guide us back onto it.'* (Young person)

One group of young people told us that they do not like group facilitators to sit listening quietly, but instead prefer them to engage in discussion:

*Young Person: I think it would help if they came up with some ideas. (Worker B) does.*

*Young Person: (Worker B's) more professional, he has so much more experience. I think it would help more if (Worker A) gave more, not a brick wall.*

*Young Person: I think she's so scared to give her opinions. But I think it would help us. I like arguing, debating.*

*Young Person: Though we are (young), we don't know all the answers. They may think of something that we wouldn't have thought of. No point having them there if just silent. (Young people's discussion)*



Engaging in dialogue also involves being open to views that may be different and thinking how to include varying perspectives, including both older and younger viewpoints. The challenge is how to engage children and young people and adults in discussion, which enables both to feel able to say what they think and to negotiate decisions together. Young people may not feel comfortable saying what they think. Adults may not want to share their views for fear of imposing on young people, but then assert their power later by failing to act on what the young people say:

*'We like adults to be honest with us. Quite a lot of the time we get, like, 'Oh yeah, we can do this for you.' And six months down the line maybe it's not so possible. [We'd] sooner you say, 'Well, it's a bit iffy – maybe go around it in a different way'.'* (Young person)

Or else adults simply may try to push through their perspectives. In one of the case studies, for example, adults in the council disagreed with a viewpoint in a youth-made video about the poor state of local leisure facilities and threatened to pull out of the partnership if the video was not changed. The children did not agree with this ultimatum and the council eventually agreed to the production of the video but on the condition that they could explain their side at the end of the video. By identifying and sharing differences – rather than relying on just one perspective (adult or youth) – new knowledge can be created and new solutions found.

Young people can be supported to engage with adults. Known workers can help prepare them for meetings with others, particularly necessary if these will be held in adult environments. When an adult is meeting a child for the first time, finding out about their likes, and bringing something along that will be of interest to that individual, helps signal interest and respect: 'be interesting rather than just interested' (worker). Adults may also need support to engage with young people. Asking adults, for example, to add breaks to the meeting, provide child-friendly overviews of relevant documents and watch their use of jargon as a starting point. If meetings will be on-going then children can be involved in how to make the interaction more child-friendly.

*'If somebody wants to involve young people in decision-making then they should understand that these young people are not that level of understanding, are not the same as they are because one that they haven't studied and obviously if you are a professional they have studied, they have experience, but we don't have that.'* (Young person)

Adults may also have to be prepared to engage in very different ways. At times, this may mean loosening up and having some fun. The children in the Children's Voice Project ran a conference at which they got senior decision makers (e.g. police commissioner and head of education) to engage in role play and take on children's roles, while the children acted the adult roles.

## Feedback to children and young people

*Interviewer: What are they going to do with the information you gave them?*

*Child: I think they were going to talk to the teachers about it and stuff.*

*Child: I don't know.*

*Child: Neither do I.*

*Child: They just asked us the questions but I think they said that what they gave us today was a kind of thank you.*

*Interviewer: Have you had any information since...or any letters or information?*

*Child: No.*

*Child: We might have because we had that other consulting.*

*Child: It might have had something to do with that but we don't know.  
(Children's focus group)*

A very important part of dialogue is feedback to children and young people. This may be the results from a consultation that they have been involved in, how adults have incorporated their views into the planning of the school grounds or what decisions have been made about their individual care or simply responding to their ideas, suggestions or questions. In every case it is important that the feedback is integral to the work. Too often it is an add-on to a project, almost an afterthought, and happens too late or not at all. Often groups have to chase up external adults to find out what has happened. This breeds cynicism and resentment and potentially an unwillingness to become involved in future projects. Seeing evidence of their work or how their views have affected outcomes, demonstrates their own power to create change.

*'Sometimes when you ask for something to be changed they don't do anything. They don't give you a reply. They don't listen to you. They should at least give us a reply.'* (Children's focus group)

Consultations are an area which particularly breeds cynicism. This sort of participation, can often be seen as solely in the interest of policy makers whereas participation in areas that more directly affect the child's life are in the interest of the child. It is therefore vital that adults help children to understand the link between the topic of consultation and their own lives and to ensure that when the work is over, the children are made aware of how their opinions were considered and how the final product was reached.

*Child: I think we had someone visit us from management from [company]  
We were doing that as a year nine...*

*Interviewer: So what happened have you met the person there?*

*Child: Yes, in our assembly and we put forward our ideas and what we wanted to happen and we haven't heard from them since.  
(Young people)*

Feedback does not just involve telling the children what happened, the children need to know how their views were taken into account in the final decision. For example, in one case study pupils were asked their views on designs for the school grounds but did not know how the final decisions were made and that led to cynicism about the project. Eventually, the school council was shown the young people's questionnaire responses and explained how these had influenced the designs, while this process helped these young people understand the outcome, other students were not informed.

Feedback can be given formally through presentations or meetings or informally through individual or group discussion. It is preferable to do it in such a way that the children and young people can participate and ask questions so that they can come away knowing the rationale behind the final result or the reasons why things are delayed or not happening as planned.

*'It could go through the Exec Group, through the formal side. It might be an agenda item and there'll be some feedback there. It may be brought up at one of the informal young people's meetings. Quite often if they come into the office the general chit-chat that goes on...so again, feedback...'* (Professional)

## Reducing the power imbalance

*'They [workers] don't treat you like kids, they treat us like adults. It's different to other youth clubs who just put on activities and we just do them. Here they listen to us and help us and we get to say what we want to do.'* (Child)

It was clearly demonstrated throughout the case studies, that in order to develop positive relationships with children and young people adults need to address the imbalance in power and establish more equitable relationships. This does not necessarily mean equal power in all situations but it means moving away from structures and practices which seek to control young people, to more flexible environments and practices that young people help to change and improve things.

Young people using some of the case study projects have not had many positive interactions with adults and do not respond well to traditional structures and hierarchies, so for staff in these organisations it is vital that they work in ways that avoid these hierarchies.

This can also be done through everyday behaviour, bringing down some of the barriers that symbolise the power differentiation. Some organisations, for example, write all correspondence to the child, even young children, rather than their parents or carers. To make this meaningful for children, Triangle includes a photograph of the worker who is writing the letter and will be visiting the child. We also observed staff sitting in a circle, on the floor, together with children and taking an equal part (saying no more or less) in discussions and games. Other examples include staff having lunch together with children and staff standing in the queue along with young people. Power can equally be enforced by how workers speak and act (for examples of how language is used to control children see Kirby et al, 2002). We interviewed children for one case study in the headmistress's room at a local school: the researcher invited a young child to sit in the big chair for the interview, but the headmistress insisted the researcher sat in this chair, thus reinforcing power and status over the children.

Adults can also support children to take their own power in areas where traditionally they have little. They can act as a broker between the child and an adult structure, including supporting them in meetings with decision makers and other staff. The adult can help the child make the approach on their own terms, so they feel safe. For example, young people at the Young Carers Project have increased their control of sensitive personal information, by completing a voluntary questionnaire – which young people helped to design – to inform the project of their needs. The young person also decides, in a written agreement, how much information they agree the project can share with their teacher/s.

## Support for children and young people

Making decisions involves a degree of risk, be it a decision about a child or young person's individual care or participation in a group decision. For example, a young carer making a decision about what information she wants to disclose to her school about her home life is taking a risk in sharing her private circumstances. For a child to take that risk she must be informed about what will happen with that information and who will see it. The risk will seem far less if she is supported by someone who she can trust and she knows has her best interest at heart.

Many of the case studies discussed the informal support they give to children and young people, which can be important for increasing understanding and developing positive relationships with young people. This is about making the time to get to know that person and recognising the young person outside the formal contexts, while also maintaining professional boundaries. This may just mean listening to the young person over a cup of tea, or allowing the young person to speak about things that are on their mind without any advice or input from the adult.

*'I think in terms of the support, I think one thing is really important, its not just having these very formal meetings and saying and what's your role in doing all that? I think what has really helped is building this relationship and just having these informal chats. [To] go and have a cup of tea in the morning [and] we have a meal from time to time.'* (Worker)

*'If they are doing something else and you need to meet up with them they like drop it straight away. Yeah you can talk to them and they won't tell another youth worker.'* (Young person)

Some very young, vulnerable or disabled children may not easily be able to verbalise their needs and wishes, so the adult needs to establish dialogue through other means: including spending time alongside the child, observing, communicating through communication systems or other mediums (see next chapter).

The role of an adult mentor is to work with and guide young people; providing information, responding to their concerns, problem solving and offering direction where appropriate. Saying Power offers seven hours a week mentor support to young people to devise and design their own community projects. The mentor support is viewed as crucial to the project's success: if they are too directive, the young person becomes disenchanted; and if the mentor is given inadequate support, the young person would not be able to overcome the numerous challenges faced.

Advocacy is an important form of support to children and young people, both individuals and groups, particularly when they are seeking to influence structures that are not child-friendly. Adults can be dismissive and even hostile towards a group of children or young people who they see as being critical of them or their area of work. The role of the advocate is to reassure the adults and assist the children or young people to raise their issues. The advocate may be needed throughout the process or they may just be needed in the initial approach, this depends very much on the willingness of the adults to engage with the children or young people. The advocacy role is particularly important when the work involves other adults and intimidating situations where the children feel unsafe. For example, young refugees and asylum seekers may feel intimidated to attend Government/Local Authority meetings for fear that it will impact on their refugee status or threaten the care they receive.

*'Other adults – MPs, police officers – they listen to adults, don't they? In the beginning, before the Youth Council was noticed, if one of us went to the police and said, 'Could you come in blahblahblah, do this,' they probably wouldn't have taken us seriously. I think you just need someone over a certain age to go in and say it for you – then they'll come and take it seriously.*  
*(Young person interview)*

Training is used frequently as a form of formal support. Through training, children can learn how to operate in an adult environment (e.g. recruitment and tender panels) and to work alongside adults on an equal basis as they are equipped with similar skills and knowledge.

Training can also be used to support children in taking a leadership role among their peers. At Deptford Green school the young people on the school council are trained to enable them to work effectively and all students are given a preparation lesson about the council. Staff are also trained alongside the young people so the whole school is aware of the structure and function of the school council.

## **Making appropriate choices**

Respecting children's competency to make decisions, with support if necessary, is integral to participation. This means increasing opportunities for children and young people to have a say, where previously they have not, and supporting them to be able to engage in making choices (see example in 'empowerment' sub-section, Chapter 10).

Enabling young people to make decisions does not necessarily mean providing limitless choices. It is not always possible or appropriate for staff to provide all that children and young people say they want or to provide unlimited choice. Instead it is about providing appropriate options, based on what is achievable (and affordable) and sometimes using adults' knowledge of children's abilities, likes and dislikes. When a young child, playing at dressing up, told her nursery teacher, "These shorts are not *me!*", she was told the nursery 'had no other clothes, she'd have to choose from what we had'.

*'If it's like maths, where you have different activities according to what the children can do, I'd say to the children there are three different activities, this is what they are, you select the one that is most appropriate for you, and they do that. They always go for the one that is right for them or a bit more challenging than they can cope with. But they never go for the easy, lets be bored option.'*  
(Teacher)

In Triangle, compulsory induction training on responding positively to challenging behaviour examines ways of intervening that ensure the child has control over the things they can, being clear when they are not in control and how to offer appropriate (not fake) choices.

## Peer support

Many of the case studies demonstrated the importance of the interactions and relationships which develop between children and young people. The opportunity to make new friends and develop a social group is important to them, including those with common life experiences. For example, young carers benefit from having some time away from their caring responsibilities in a safe and supported environment where they can spend time with peers. Peer support encourages children and young people to take responsibility for each other and to actively participate in developing positive relationships and community well-being.

*'The young people support each other with similar issues – self-help. The approach has been developed to focus on developing quality-working relationships with young people – they can then use this as a catalyst.'* (Worker)

The ZONE project formalizes this sort of support through group work which is complemented by one-on-one support for young people in dealing with difficult situations. Circle time is another mechanism where children are able to reflect on their week and discuss issues as a group, with the emphasis being on group co-operation and mutual support, as well as opportunities to make decisions.

*'It's a mixture of structured group support so that the young people feel a sense of belonging and ownership of the project themselves, and there are basic group skills in terms of team building, listening skills, communication skills, decision-making skills, as well as whatever the issue is that you want to put on top of that. So for us it's that combination of one-to-one support for young people...as well as the group support ... the mutual support that comes from that group dynamic is a really powerful one.'* (Project worker)

The development of social skills within peer groups is another important element of the social interaction between peers. Many of the case study agencies provided times when the adult took a very hands-off role and the children had time together as a peer group. Through interaction with a group of equals, rules of behavior need to be negotiated between peers. This may be between young children playing together and negotiating who has what toy or what paint colours to use, or between older young people coming to a group consensus about where to go for a residential. Ground rules may be formally decided with the group, or informally negotiated between young people as they find their roles within the group and learn what behaviour is acceptable.

Adults may enforce the need for group decisions to be made, but then young people make these decisions themselves. A few of the case study organisations promoted groups to resolve their own disputes. In SCAPE, for example, group negotiation plays an important part in helping the young people to develop their social and group work skills. There are often young people who have had problems with behaviour in the past and rather than imposing rules on the young people the workers give them space to sort these out themselves. This is not always the easiest option and it can be a difficult process. The project uses group agreements to manage behaviour and in this way the individuals are responsible to the group and the group then has to find solutions to issues that arise. When a group of girls had vandalized some toilets, the workers told the young people to decide amongst themselves who was going to clear it up:

*'We said, 'If you don't all go and clear it up – I'm not asking who did it – then we're not going on the activity. It probably took 40 minutes to cajole them into doing it, but we left them to it to sort it out. Part of the reason you're here is to accept consequences of what you do.'* (Manager)

A similar model is used in the nursery and primary school case studies, where children are having difficulties playing together, including negotiating turn taking. The teacher facilitates discussion within informal small groups and the pupils must come to a mutual agreement that they are willing to abide by. Younger children may



need more adult intervention, but with practice and over time children learn to take on greater responsibility for resolving conflict. A more formal system, called 'circle of friends', involves Year 6 pupil volunteers supporting children with social and behavioural difficulties in a regular group meeting.

## Parental Support

*'Parents are their children's primary educators: foundation stage staff must protect children's learning and cultural understanding from being disrupted, by establishing a close and respectful partnership with parents. It is not just children who gain; when parents and teachers work well together everyone benefits.'* [Policy for Foundation Stage, Middlestreet School]

There is a danger in working with children and young people to forget that they live in a larger community where their primary carers are often the predominant figures in their lives. Understanding the child or young person's primary environment is an important element of working with them, particularly with younger children. To ensure dialogue can occur between parents and workers a relationship based on the best interests of the child must be established. Adults can then know that issues raised are in relation to concern for the child, rather than criticism of them personally. Building the relationships includes respecting parents' role in their children's lives, providing them with opportunities to visit organisations/projects, making home visits, providing adequate information and answering questions, and one worker gave them an evening telephone number so that parents could phone after work. In a consultative setting the initial contact may be the only meeting with parents and so it is imperative that the way the worker/researcher asks for consent is clear and the parent and child feel that the involvement will be safe and beneficial.

*'It's setting up that relationship so that parents know they are very, very welcome, you have nothing to hide, it's very useful if they come in and see how you work, they can come in at any time, that there is that openness and trust and warmth.'* (Teacher)

A key role for a teacher/worker may be in supporting parents to step back and let their child get involved on their own terms. Parents may initially feel unable to let go and let the child act autonomously.

*'At the beginning parents were saying we have to come to meetings, they wanted to say things through their children. Saying 'I want to tell my child to say that'. I said 'No, you can't do that, the whole set up of the forum is we want to hear from them, not what you say.'* (Senior project worker)

Dealing with these situations may involve being directive with the parents, allowing them some involvement so that they feel comfortable that their child is safe, but then letting the parent know that this is an environment for children and that they must be able to interact on their own terms.

*'[When] parents are here or some other adults, they [children] don't say as much. Parents say 'can we come, can we do this?' I say 'you can come and observe for a few minutes but this is for the children's meeting'.'*  
(Senior project worker)

This may work the other way as well, where the worker needs to dissuade the parents about a child's inappropriate involvement.

*'We've only had one child who was a bit too young. She was 6 – and she really wanted to join in, and I think she came in and saw 30 children it was a bit nerve wracking for her. She said no, her parents wanted her to join but we said to parents we don't want to force her, we don't want to scare her off coz it will affect her.'* (Senior project worker)

## Building relationships with the wider community

Children and young people are part of many communities. Building strong community links between young people and others can be extremely beneficial, and is integral to much participation work. Links are made between young people and community services, peers, older residents, businesses, politicians and other decision makers. In participative initiatives they often visit places and meet people they may not otherwise have easy access to. The knowledge which workers have gained already of the communities they are working amongst helps to forge relationships with young people and partnerships in the community.

Deptford Green School actively pursues linking the school and the community, so that students have the opportunity to participate in community initiatives and get consulted about any planned developments. With dedicated funding for Citizenship work the school employs a community link worker. Examples of how links are developed include:

- The school ensures students are consulted about community projects.
- Students undertaking GCSE in Citizenship have to do 40% course work investigating issues that concern them in the school or community. Students present their recommendations to a panel of decision makers, such as the police or local councillors.

- Students in the school have voted, and been elected, for an initiative involving local people as council advisers, called ‘Council of Champions’.

‘Entrenched’ adult attitudes in communities mean adults can sometimes put up resistance to the location of young people’s amenities because of their anxieties about large numbers of young people in their area. Agencies noted that individual projects had failed when community adults did not listen to young people. It was felt important to actively challenge adults’ attitudes by promoting youth involvement locally and developing inter-generational joint project work.

This chapter has emphasised that participation is about establishing positive relationships. Within participation practice, there is a range of activities that can be used to develop these relationships and provide opportunities for decision-making. The activities are not the end, they are a means to an end: they follow from being clear about purpose, a commitment to establishing positive relationships and developing an organisational culture of participation. These are explored more freely in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7:

### Participation Activities

In this chapter we explore the participation activities used by the case studies to involve children and young people in different types of decisions, within the following sub-sections:

- *Participation activities used within different types of organisations.*
- *Activities for personal decision-making.*
- *Activities for public decision-making.*

As discussed in chapter 1, participation is a multi-layered concept and within this section we explore the relationship between a number of dimensions of participation including the focus and content of decision-making, the level of participation, the nature of the participation activity, the frequency and duration of decision-making, as well as identifying the different groups of children and young people involved.

### Participation Activities within different Organisations

#### Different types of organisations

In the participation literature the emphasis is often on *formal* mechanisms for involving older young people in making public decisions but less on formal and informal methods of involving both children and young people in making decisions about a range of issues – both public and private – that affect their own lives. We found a similar emphasis in many of the organisations in the database sample, although with the case studies we selected organisations that reflect all types of decision-making with different age groups. The focus on highly visible formal activities for involving children and young people in public decision-making ignores the importance of the private realm in which they often have little power.

In this discussion we have separated activities used for personal from public decision-making in order to highlight the importance of personal decision-making within organisations. The distinction is slightly false, as there are overlaps: young people make personal decisions when involved in public decision activities and information from children's personal engagement in services can be used to influence service delivery. Underlying values of children's rights and empowerment,

and the importance of developing positive relationships underpins meaningful participation in both these areas.

Different activities are appropriate in different situations or with differing levels of support and levels of participation. The appropriate level can depend on the type of decision, the age and maturity of the children or young people, a young person's available time and level of interest, the context (including time, location and culture) and so on. Providing a range of activities for children and young people to influence decisions enables them to participate in ways that meet their preferences and needs, and is more inclusive. Taking account of all children and young people's views, and using this to influence service and policy decisions, is for many organisations no less important than involving some young people in making high level decisions.

**Organisations delivering daily services for children/young people** (i.e. education, health, social care, youth advocacy). The case study organisations that provide a service to children and young people on a daily basis often emphasise their work involving service users in both personal and public decisions. A variety of activities is used for involvement in public decision-making: most use some kind of one-off consultation and regular group meetings. Involvement in personal decisions is often stressed in the education and social care organisations. The primary health organisations are just beginning to consider how to involve young patients in decisions about their own treatment, although the community sexual health project emphasises user involvement in personal decisions. A few organisations ensured that children and young people's views made during daily interaction with workers is recorded and used to influence higher-level public decisions about service delivery.

**Youth work/youth voluntary organisations:** The emphasis of the participation work within the youth work and youth voluntary organisation case studies is on influencing public decisions, developing resources (e.g. newsletter, making videos) and delivering services (e.g. training staff, peer support). These organisations support young people within groups, enabling them to make autonomous decisions about their own projects. Sometimes groups are recruited to work on a specific pre-set agenda, for example to develop a youth newsletter. At other times, groups are supported to form social action groups in which they identify, research and campaign around their own chosen issue to influence public decisions. The emphasis is often on supporting young people to make all (or most) decisions and being responsible for taking all (or most) decided action (with support from workers). Most of these groups involve teenage young people rather than children, although there are other similar approaches with children (such as the Child to Child approach; see Gibbs, 2001). Many of these organisations did not stress their work involving young people in making personal decisions within the research interviews,

although it is often felt that integral to supporting young people in public decision-making is the need to offer generic personal support to help develop skills and knowledge and to deal with personal issues or problems, as they arise, through informal discussion and support. However, personal decision-making is 'not intrinsic to the purpose' of many of these groups and one youth organisation said involving young people in personal decisions is 'not appropriate' to their work.

***Strategic bodies that plan, fund and deliver services used by children and young people, and dedicated participatory organisations that promote youth participation:***

The strategic organisations promote and develop youth participation in public decisions within the organisation and across the local area, often in partnership with other voluntary organisations or else through dedicated internal staff, using one of the following approaches:

- voluntary organisations set up and support a group of children and young people (e.g. Children's Voice Project) that various local strategic organisations then access when wanting to consult or involve in specific decisions;
- strategic organisations develop their own youth groups and other participation activities with the support of an external development organisation (e.g. Brighton and Hove Children's Fund) and/or with internal dedicated participation staff support (e.g. YSEG and Lambeth Youth Council).

Within strategic organisations emphasis is placed on participation in service development and policy both within their own and other local organisations. They promote youth participation to others by commissioning projects that demonstrate a commitment to involving young people and tie funding to this commitment.

We found a few examples where strategic and development organisations support others to develop children and young people's greater say in personal decisions. This included: requiring funded agencies to demonstrate on-going dialogue with children and young people and involving them in all decisions affecting their lives; initiating complaints procedures, and involving young people on recruitment panels to ensure they are involved in selecting the staff who they feel would then listen to them in their personal care. The Brighton & Hove Children's Fund agreed to fund a Family Group Conference Project that enables children to make self-referrals – allowing them to decide whether this type of approach would be helpful to them – reportedly the first project of its sort to give children this level of personal responsibility.

Strategic organisations usually rely on one-off consultations and regular group forum meetings to inform their practice and policy. Some support young people to run autonomous youth groups and/or they work together with young people in joint meetings. Older children are involved in strategic decision-making, for example, by sitting on tender panels. While young children are consulted, we did not find examples of them being more involved in governance, although some organisations aim to develop this area of work.

**Research and product development organisations:** These organisations use one-off consultation, research (including evaluation) to find out children and young people's experiences and feelings about services, to help inform service and policy development and to develop products/resources aimed at children and young people (e.g. literature, CD ROMs).

### Different cultures of participation

Organisations with different cultures of participation tend to use different levels of participation, illustrated in the table below. Consultation-focused organisations only use activities that enable children and young people to express their views, which are then taken into account by adults making decisions. Participation-focused organisations use activities that involve children and young people in making decisions, although the level of influence varies (and may be very high or low), but their participation is limited to specific contexts and time-limited areas. Child/youth-focused organisations involve them at all (or most) levels in different contexts across the organisation; they use a range of activities, choosing the most appropriate level for different situations.

## Levels of participation within different organizational cultures of participation

Level of Participation				Culture of Participation
views taken into account	+ involved in making decisions	+ autonomous decisions	+ shared power for decisions	<b>child-focused</b>
views taken into account	+ involved in making decisions	<b>or</b> autonomous decisions	<b>or</b> shared power for decisions	<b>participation-focused</b>
views taken into account				<b>consultation-focused</b>

### Activities for personal decisions

Activities for involving young people in making personal decisions tend to be used on an on-going basis, often providing frequent opportunities to have a say about decisions in their own lives.

Most of the examples we identified were in organisations delivering a daily service to children and young people. Those organisations working with children, rather than teenagers, particularly stressed the work they do involving young clients in making personal decisions. In these settings *all* children and young people using the services tend to be involved in personal decisions on a *daily* or *frequent* basis. One-off involvement is reserved for major life choices – such as legal cases or short-term hospital treatment.

The range of activities that are used to support children and young people to make personal decisions is summarised in the table. Young people have varying levels of decision-making power over personal decisions, depending on the context and content of decisions. The types of decisions identified in the case studies included:



- Consenting to participate
- Choosing which play and leisure activities they want to do
- Deciding own learning, health treatment and care support
- Child protection and family law proceedings.

Participation Activities	Personal or or Public Decisions	Level of participation	Frequency	How many involved?	Formal of informal
'Being with': observation and informal dialogue	Personal & Public	Views taken into account	On-going	All	Informal
Focused dialogue about specific issues	Personal	Various (depending on context)	Varies: on-going, occasional or one-off	All	Informal and formal
Communication systems and tools	Personal & Public	Views taken into account	On-going	All	Informal
Visual and written presentations	Personal & public	Views taken into account	One-off; occasional	All	Formal
Advocacy	Personal	Influence decisions	On-going	All	Formal
Complaints procedures	Personal	Views taken into account	On-going	All	Formal
Group peer support (education, emotional, mini-circle time)	Personal	Autonomous decisions	Regular	All/group	Formal

Most activities for personal decision-making are informal, although formal methods are also sometimes used. The latter includes **advocacy** support and **complaints procedures**, which enable all children to be able to express their views on issues of concern to them, when otherwise they may not feel able to do so or their views would not be taken so seriously: *'I was being bullied at school and RAPP listened to what I had to say'* (young person talking about an advocacy service). School and hospital complaints procedures are often aimed at parents, rather than having a system designed for young people. The research at Collingham Gardens Child & Family Psychiatric Unit highlighted the need to develop 'clear methods of making enquiries, suggestions or complaints' for the children and their complaints procedure is described in a new booklet for children. A school developed a

successful **'bully box'** mechanism for supporting children to write notes to teachers about their concerns. Regular group activities, particularly **peer support** activities, are sometimes used to encourage children and young people to have more responsibility and autonomy, including about their personal care and relationships (see section on 'peer support' in the previous chapter).

The most common approach for meaningfully involving children and young people in personal decisions is informally spending time **'being with'**<sup>1</sup> them – i.e. actively listening and observing child/youth-initiated communication, engaging in informal dialogue and jointly in activities. This is used to develop a greater understanding of children and young people's individual needs, as well as to inform and develop existing and new services. Staff record information (either mentally or in writing) gained through observation and informal interaction and take this into account when planning care for individuals or developing the service. Actively listening to this spontaneous communication is important with all ages, but particularly with younger children or those with communication impairments, for whom formal mechanisms of participation may not always be appropriate. Children spontaneously express views about disputes, being hurt, wishes, their likes and dislikes (including about services and policies) and make requests for help. They may indicate their feelings through their behaviour – for example, rolling around on the ground when the teacher wants them to pay attention or gather round in concern if they feel a child needs their protection from a member of staff – or express their feelings verbally. This informal interaction approach is also appropriate for older young people and underpins what was described in the previous section on establishing dialogue between adults and children/young people. Some older children and young people may not want to participate in formal participation mechanisms – such as on-going group meetings – establishing this type of dialogue enables them to participate informally.

*'You could see it this morning when the buses came in. Nearly every single person just came flying through the door and onto the toys. So that's as good a measure as any.'* (Play worker)

Informal approaches are also used for formal purposes, such as assessments or deciding learning outcomes. Triangle, for example, provides outreach support to children whose behaviour is causing serious concern and in their assessments to identify how to support young people. They feel it is essential to spend time being alongside their clients, in their different settings, in order to build up a picture of how the child experiences their world.

<sup>1</sup>The term 'being with' was first used by Jenny Morris (1998) *Don't Leave Us Out: Involving disabled children and young people with communication impairments* published by York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation/YPS, pp.39-41.

## Observing and spending time 'being with' children (Triangle)

A worker described how she had learned to communicate with one young man who is non-verbal. He bangs his face and pushes things away if he is not happy. The worker observed that the young man pushes others away with his arm if he wants to be alone and moves his arm to people if he wants contact. The worker therefore responded to his communication, leaving him alone when he indicated and making contact in response to his arm signal. In this simple way the worker is engaging in dialogue with the young man and enabling him to direct worker involvement. The parents told the worker that the young man was happy to come back to meet her the next day and this was thought to be because she had not forced activities on him, but had responded to his signals and wishes.

In a number of settings working directly with children and young people, decisions about their own care are often negotiated between the young clients and staff, rather than decided just by adults. Through 'focused dialogue' around specific issues decisions can be made together. This includes decisions around their learning and health care treatment.

In the case study nursery and primary school settings the main purpose of working in a participatory way is to enhance children's learning. The staff emphasise the importance of enabling children to have considerable input so that they can pursue their own interests, by their preferred means of learning and at their own pace. They take a 'collaborative' approach to working with their pupils and the importance of providing a 'rich environment' to ensure individual children can choose activities that meet their needs. This includes choosing learning partners (rather than being grouped by ability), having open-ended tasks to complete as they choose, and the freedom to decide the level of task they do, rather than being given set worksheets (see section on 'making appropriate choices' in the previous chapter), and deciding issues to discuss and debate. In some schools there are few opportunities for students to discuss their views in class. During our research a group of young people told us that they do not get to decide what they learned – not even in citizenship lessons – and they rarely get to express their own views in class and they wanted opportunities to discuss and debate their views.

*'It's one of the strengths of the school . . . 'ok I'll listen to you, what are your views, here are our views, what are your views, let's work together'. It's not the teachers . . . imposing, we've always tried to find out how our teaching affects the children.'* (Teaching professional)

*'[In one lesson] you are not actually allowed to speak . . . we have to work in silence, it is the most boring lesson in the world.'* (Young person)

Only a couple of examples of 'focused dialogue' in secondary school settings were identified, including a national initiative, run by the Youth Sports Trust, involving students in developing their own sports education. Voluntary sector youth projects however often run training that enables young people to direct their own learning. Accredited courses are highly flexible and adaptable, so that different discussions and activities can be used to meet the assessment criteria.

We found a few examples of children being involved in deciding their own health care treatment, including deciding weekly treatment goals. One of the older young people we interviewed stressed that she wanted to be actively involved in her own treatment: 'we should try and get more independence [in our care] and be able to ask doctors more; not to be shy and find easier ways to ask for more information about [our treatment]'. At Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust, moves have been made to give older young people more involvement in taking responsibility for their medication (e.g. being responsible for injecting themselves, ordering their medication from GPs, and deciding when to take their medication). This was in response to user consultation in which young people said they wanted more involvement in the ward-based care.

Focused dialogue is also used to involve children and young people in important life decisions, that may only arise occasionally or one-off, such as care reviews or legal cases. Child protection is still one of the main areas in which children often do not get the opportunity to participate in making decisions. This is particularly the case for children with disabilities and/or communication impairments: *'they're just objects of concern rather than genuinely in the middle of the process'* (voluntary sector worker). Similarly, children are still not being heard in private law proceedings and as a result 'some children are being forced to maintain contact with violent, abusive parents against their wishes' (O'Quigley, 2000, page 8). CAF/CASS and Triangle undertake assessments with children for private and public law cases. They spend time with the child in order to ascertain their feelings about the case, as well as speaking with adults known to the child. There is some evidence that disabled children's views are least represented in court (Welch, 2000). We were told about a court report by a children's guardian that diligently detailed how a disabled non-verbal child could communicate using an electronic communication board, but then stated that 'the child's view is not available'. Triangle's role in undertaking assessments of children with disabilities and communication impairments is partly to demonstrate (to the court) that children can communicate, as well as to assess their feelings.

Children and young people use a variety of media to communicate their views – through their non-verbal behaviour, using visual, written and other creative media, as well as simply saying what they think, and sometimes using formal presentations. A range of **formal communication systems** (e.g. Makaton and Picture Exchange Communication System, PECS) are used by children and young people with communication impairments to express their views and feelings. They also enable children to initiate communication. Ensuring these children have access to appropriate communication methods can make a huge difference to how they experience and participate in their environments. Young children with disabilities often meet many adults who will not all know how to communicate with them. Triangle works with children to develop their own care plan in the form of ‘passports’ which are laminated booklets detailing their communication, behaviour and support requirements. This enables them to communicate to any staff their own needs and preferences quickly and easily, so that these can be taken into account. It is designed to be easily accessible so that it can be used daily by children and staff, rather than sitting in an office unused. Triangle aims to ensure that passports belong to children and families rather than services. Each child’s passport is different and children become involved in developing their passports to varying degrees, depending on their understanding and communication abilities. Even where children may sometimes need physical restraint to keep them and other children safe, they have been involved in developing how this should happen and acted out these scenarios in photos for the passport.

### Communication passport for children with communication impairments (Triangle)

*Extract from the ‘passport’ of a child previously excluded from school:*

- I need to see your face when you talk to me. [Photo of worker clearly in front of child]
- I sometimes need you to repeat things.
- When I’m cross I take my hearing aids out and I put them back in when I’m ready.
- Why I get cross: Sometimes I just wake up like it. Sometimes I just get too excited and I can’t calm down.
- You need to keep me safe, keep other people safe and stop things getting broken.

## Communication passport for children with communication impairments (Triangle) – *continued*

- You need to be clear and not use too many words.
- I get angry I need you to come and help me, and ask me what the problem is.
- I might want to leave the classroom for a while.
- Sometimes I might need two people to hold my hands. [Photo of child illustrating this]
- I might need to go for a walk.
- But if I get really cross I can kick and fight out and I might need two people.
- And if you need to hold me [Photo of workers and the child showing how to appropriately restrain him if necessary]

## Activities for Public Decisions

The case study organisations involve children and young people in many different types of strategic or operational decision making and tasks:

- Planning new and existing service development (strategic)
- Designing new and existing services (operational)
- Developing resources (e.g. videos, leaflets, research tools) (operational)
- Delivering services (e.g. youth employee, training staff, undertaking research) (operational)
- Writing organisational policies (strategic)
- Evaluating services (strategic)

Young people have different levels of participation within these areas. There is generally a trade-off between inclusiveness and the level of control. Group activities offer a smaller number of young people the opportunity to have a large say in decisions (e.g. youth forums, advisory groups, youth representatives on recruitment panels), whereas other methods (e.g. consultations, evaluation) offer larger numbers of young people opportunities to have their views taken into account and to influence decisions, although not to make the final decision.

Participation in public decision-making is currently dominated by formal group activities (either on-going or time-limited) or one-off consultation/research events with many more (occasionally all) individuals. The activities tend to limit involvement to pre-set times, usually regular meetings (weekly, monthly or less frequent). We found fewer, but valuable, examples of where all children and young people are involved in these types of decisions and where informal methods are used.

The different activities are summarised in the table. The rest of the section is divided into activities that involve different numbers of children and young people.

Participation Activities	Personal or or Public Decisions	Level of participation	Frequency	How many involved?	Formal of informal
'Being with' observation and infora; dialogue	Personal & Public	Views taken into account	On-going	All	Informal
Suggestion box	Public	Views taken into account	On-going	All	Formal
Young employees/ award holders	Public	Autonomous	On-going	Few individual/s	Formal
Board, management and governor youth representatives	Public	Share power & responsibility	Regular	Group/few individuals	Formal
Youth forums/councils (area-wide; organisational)	Public	Share power & responsibility; Autonomous	Regular	Group	Formal
Social action groups (including inter-generational groups)	Public	Autonomous (Share power & responsibility)	Regular	Group	Formal
Whole group meetings (e.g. circle time, class councils, Jerry Springer assemblies)	Public & Personal	Share power & responsibility	Regular	Group	Informal
Advisory groups (e.g. organisation, project, research)	Public	Involved in decision-making	Regular (time limited)	Group	Formal
Creative Youth Groups	Public	Views taken into account	Regular	Group	Formal
Conferences and presentations (verbal, written, visual)	Public & Personal	Views taken into account	On-off/ Occasional	Group	Formal

Participation Activities	Personal or or Public Decisions	Level of participation	Frequency	How many involved?	Formal of informal
Recruitment panels and staff training	Public	Involved in decision-making	One-off/ occasional	Few individual/s	Formal
Research and consultation	Public	Views taken into account	On-off/ Occasional	Many	Formal
Evaluation	Public	Views taken into account	On-off/ Occasional/ Regular	Many/All	Formal
Youth researchers/evaluators	Public	Varies	One-off/ Occasional; Regular	Group	Formal

## Involving small groups of young people

Youth groups, forums and councils are common mechanisms for involving young people in public decision-making and these operate in a number of different ways, with different levels of decision-making power and autonomy. Often the focus is on developing autonomous youth groups (supported by adults), in the following ways:

- In some groups, participants are supported to identify their own issues of concern and to take action on these (e.g. Lambeth Youth Council). Often the young people are supported to research their chosen issue and then lobby decision makers to create change (see Investing in Children case study in Appendix 1). Usually young people are supported in their own peer groups, but we identified a social action group in which young and older residents worked together on community issues, sharing responsibility and negotiating decisions (see Middlesbrough YIP case study in Appendix 1).
- Sometimes groups undertake and run their own projects, thus providing a service for their community. The North Huyton NDC Youth Forum, for example, runs an international exchange and project organizing trips for those with special needs and the group is responsible for the recruitment, funding, administration, plus all other aspects of project design and delivery.
- Other youth groups undertake creative projects, using various media (e.g. arts, drama, film and newsletters) to voice their ideas and to collect the views of others. In some locations local newspapers reserve a regular page for children and young people to write their own articles.



- Some groups are set up for direct consultation about adult concerns and agendas. In the North Huyton NDC, a Young People’s Task Group meet together to discuss youth related issues and projects overseen by the NDC, and their views are fed into the different theme task groups within the NDC.

The current emphasis is on autonomous or youth-led groups, which are valuable and have clear advantages for many young people. Meeting alone (and/or with known and trusted workers) enables young people to engage in discussion with peers in an environment they feel comfortable with, without adult control. Sometimes groups are linked into existing structures and the views of young people are passed on to relevant adult decision makers, while others operate at a distance or independently of adult decision-making structures.

We identified only a few examples of adults and young people coming together, to share responsibility, through mutual discussion and negotiating joint decision-making, which recognizes and welcomes differences in perspectives, and identifies ways of incorporating these differences and negotiating solutions and action. The primary example was the Dumfries and Galloway YSEG group (described in Chapter 3).

Several of the case study organisations involve secondary school aged groups or individuals in specific decisions on panels for recruiting staff, selecting tender applicants and allocating grants to youth projects. The degree to which they influence these decisions varies. Informal methods for staff recruitment are sometimes used, including with children, by asking what they think of new or probation staff or asking what they want from new staff.

*‘Three year olds were saying things about [that staff] had to be caring, they had to [be] smiley, and all those kinds of soft things that they would want. [They wanted] a worker similar to a mum or a dad, really.’ (Manager)*

Young people have also helped to train professionals, sharing their personal experiences as young people and often their specific circumstances: including experiences of living in care, having a disability or youth offending. A few organisations have young workers (as employees or award holders), who work both with professionals and their peers. They help to ensure a constant youth presence and perspective within an organisation, although this is limited to just one or a few individuals (e.g. Saying Power).

*‘They listened, they all thought it was really good that we were doing it. They gave us their views and what they thought about it all.’ (Young person involved in training social workers)*

Young people meet and discuss with adults on project or organisation *advisory* groups. They are not responsible for making final decisions, but play an important role in informing and influencing an organisation's work. Triangle, for example, has three consultative groups of disabled children and young people of different ages (including those aged under 7). Their role is seen as a job and they are paid for their time. Triangle benefits from the advice and insight that the children and young people give them, and finding out their views about specific projects; they influence decisions but do not have the final say. Triangle is clear it does not see itself as accountable to these groups, but as accountable to all its young clients.

*'It keeps alive the issues of the reality of a disabled child, young person's life. . . . I think just the process of having to present it, taking something to the [youth] consultative group is in itself quite a discipline, a requirement to think what one's doing, apart from what the group itself throws up . . . It's very easy to fall back into thinking like other people. I'd think what would [consultative group members] say.'* (Triangle worker)

Young people also often meet together with adults on school councils, which are well established in many schools, and the degree to which they have any power over school decisions varies widely (Alderson, 2000).

Youth groups have distinct advantages, as outlined above, and fit an empowerment approach that offers a handful of individuals a significant degree of control and reflect representative democracy structures (this is the case where the young people are voted and accountable, although this rarely happens outside school councils). Groups do not enable all young people to exercise their rights to be involved in decisions affecting their lives. Other approaches also have to be used to ensure the UNCRC is fulfilled for all children.

## Involving all young people

We identified a few methods that enable *all* children and young people using a specific service to have the opportunity to have a greater say in decisions. A couple of formal mechanisms – suggestion boxes and complaints procedures – can be accessed at any time by all children and young people to express their views about services and policies. In some organisations meetings with all children and young people take place regularly or occasionally, as and when a specific issue comes up that needs to be discussed together with everyone affected. For example, a youth organisation rallied its entire young clients to a one-off meeting to decide what to do about a pressing funding issue. These meetings can be informal (i.e. without agendas and minutes) and do not have to last long.

We found some examples of whole group meetings in schools. Class circle time can be used to discuss public issues to do with the school and the wider community. We found one example of whole school involvement in decision-making: weekly mixed-age circle time, facilitated by the Year 6 students and minutes taken by Year 5s (Wheatcroft Primary School). This had replaced the previous school council system as it was seen as more inclusive. A criticism of school councils is that only a handful of individuals get to make decisions and it is often the same individuals who get re-elected.

*Child: Before the school council voted for children in class – to be governors – people tell them what they wanted. It was always the same people, it wasn't all of us, just two people from each class, sitting around the table talking 'blah blah blah'.*

*Child: We decided we didn't like it. In circle time we all have a go, go around the circle. (Pupils at Wheatcroft Primary School)*

Informal methods are also used, although rarely identified by case study organisations, as mechanisms for involving all young people in public decision-making. 'Being with' and informally observing and engaging in dialogue with children and young people is used as much for finding out how they feel and experience services, as it is for identifying personal support issues. On-going observation and communication with children helps staff to understand how the service can be developed or improved for all children, sometimes in very simple yet important ways. One organisation, for example, keeps a record of all informal feedback about the service. Children will tell staff when they are personally happy or unhappy about aspects of the service (e.g. opening hours), if something does not work or if resources need to be ordered or redesigned: *'Can you save your money and buy another Spiderman costume!?' (nursery school aged child).*

While front line staff take into account informal dialogue, we found barely any examples of 'bottom up' consultation in which children and young people's spontaneously expressed ideas and views are fed upwards to those who influence higher-level decisions about services and policies. This is a lost opportunity to use the knowledge that frontline staff gain through daily interaction in service development.

## Feeding Spontaneous Views Up to Decision Makers

RAPP ensures that the themes discussed by young people during case work are tracked and that common issues are acted on. For example, bullying was repeatedly mentioned as a problem by young people using the service so a support group was set up and the information was also passed onto other key professionals and RAPP linked into other local anti-bullying campaigns.

It may not always be possible to involve all young people in public decision-making processes – particularly if it is to affect an area wide population – but methods can be used to involve many of the target group, discussed below.

### Involving Many Young People

One-off or on-going consultations, research and evaluation enable many young people (sometimes all) to be consulted. The case study organisations use a variety of methods, including traditional research methods (interviews, questionnaires, focus groups), as well as more creative mechanisms including drama, the internet and arts.

Sometimes young people are also involved in undertaking research. Their involvement varies depending on whether the research is predominantly:

- youth-led – young people are supported by adults to undertake autonomous research projects
- adult-led – young people advise and influence decisions in adult-led research, either on an advisory group and/or by accompanying researchers on fieldwork, or
- collaborative – young people are involved as ‘co-researchers’ in which adults and young people investigate an issue together (shared power), although this is currently less common.

Children and young people are involved in evaluating services within the case study organisations in a number of different ways – primarily through organisation’s self-evaluation and occasionally using independent evaluations. Sometimes the level of evaluation is still relatively low however and organisations that otherwise have a high degree of youth involvement have not fully considered how to get children and young people to evaluate their own workers and services. This is surprising given that many organisations say they involve young people in order to improve services.

The importance of evaluating practice was highlighted to us during our fieldwork for this research, as young people and staff views sometimes differed.

The level of evaluation varied across sectors:

- Many of the voluntary organisations include some form of self-evaluation, often a questionnaire or discussion at the end of an event to find out what worked and what could be improved. It is a core principle of RAPP, for example, to examine itself through the regular evaluation and reflection and they undertake regular 'snap shot reviews' by asking project users and all professionals involved in the project to complete a questionnaire every three to four months.
- The level of evaluation varied within health sector organisations, from very low to high (see box below).
- There is not an ethos of self-evaluation within education. Teachers can feel threatened by students assessing their teaching, understandably given the high degree of inspection in schools. Some teachers engage in a level of on-going dialogue about what students like or not in lessons but otherwise there appears to be little formal evaluation of teaching practice with input from pupils and students. The few examples found included students evaluating their own work rather than staff input: school council and peer education work and students researching their own learning.

### Young patient hospital evaluation (Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust)

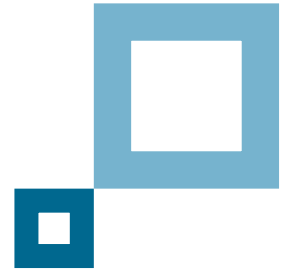
Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust currently has limited involvement for patients in planning services – which it says is difficult to do as people only use their services for a short time and usually do not want to return as hospital is associated with difficult times – but they have instigated a number of evaluation activities to involve parents and young people (although not yet children) in giving feedback on the service they received.

- **Monthly satisfaction surveys** with young people, parents and those attending the Children's Outpatient Department.
- **'Speak Out' Suggestion Slips** available on the ward for patients and parents to complete whenever they want.
- **Collecting Patient 'Stories'** about their whole hospital admission, through taped interviews

## Young patient hospital evaluation (Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust) – *continued*

- **Collated informal comments (monthly):** Staff receive informal feedback from children and family throughout their stay and on discharge and a designated time in team meetings to discuss and record this information.
- **Monthly Parents' Focus Group**
- **User Group Assessment** in which a youth group (comprised of older teenagers, some of whom were over 18) visited the unit, undertaking research and commenting on the broader aspects of the service provision.

Commissioners of services influence how children and young people are involved in project development by requiring that organisations both involve children in developing services and in project evaluations. In one case children are to be involved in selecting which external agency will evaluate an organisation.



# Section Four

Outcomes from Participation

## Section Introduction:

### Outcomes from Participation

In this section of the report we present a case for involving young people in decision-making. Illustrated by case study examples, the findings demonstrate that the participation of young people can become a means to achieving positive outcomes, as well as being a valuable process for participants.

We selected case study organisations that could demonstrate that they listened to and put into action young people's views. When searching for case studies, however, it proved difficult to find more than a small number that had systematic or written evidence of this. There appeared to be some confusion over what constituted an 'outcome'. Many agencies highlighted young people's outputs or '*change actions*' (for example, young people producing a video or making a presentation) as evidence of change, rather than '*change outcomes*'<sup>2</sup> to services (for example, the introduction of a counselling service in schools). While change actions are still regarded as important and desirable, for most organisations the objective of participation is to bring about change outcomes and it is with these that this section is concerned. Outcomes are also of equal importance to the children and young people involved.

The case study organisations that were finally chosen could illustrate change outcomes. Much of this was not formally documented and was based on the perceptions of those involved, but nonetheless it provides convincing support for the benefits of involving young people for services, the community and young people. Only a few could provide rigorous evaluation or other empirical evidence to demonstrate the relationship between participation and the assumed and promoted benefits. This reflects a general current lack of evaluation of participation (Kirby and Bryson, 2002).

There were a number of reasons why case studies did not have more evidence of outcomes:

- Some organisations feel it is too early in the development of participation work to measure outcomes. While it is understood that participation is a recent venture for many agencies, and the process of participation takes time to establish, some organisations have been undertaking participation work for several years and have still not successfully evaluated outcomes.

<sup>2</sup>The terms 'change action' and 'change outcome' are sourced from a teacher at Deptford Green School, one of the case study examples.



- Where evaluations do exist, they are often descriptive accounts of the organisation's work rather than attempts to measure the outcomes that participation has achieved. There is also a tendency for external evaluations to investigate a range of similar agencies in a single report, and thus little specific evidence could be found on individual agencies.
- It is difficult to measure some possible outcomes of participation, such as increased self-esteem and confidence.
- It can be difficult to make causal links between outcomes and participation activities. For example it is hard to assess the extent to which young people have influenced final decisions.

We also speculate that many agencies, having accepted the principles of participation, have viewed this process as an outcome in itself and have, therefore, concentrated efforts on reflection of the processes of participation rather than what may be achieved through this process. While this is valuable for developing meaningful participation, evaluation of outcomes is also important. There must be an element of evaluation if an organisation is to ensure that participatory work succeeds in implementing changes as a result of hearing children's views, to ensure changes are appropriate, and to explore any unintended outcomes of participation activities. Future development in the practice of participation must include appropriate evaluation.

The study has persevered in its objectives of demonstrating evidence-based outcomes. Sometimes this is from evaluations or inspection sources (e.g. Ofsted) or occasionally from other empirical data. More frequently the 'evidence' comes from adult and youth perceptions of outcomes, and in such cases we compare adult and youth views and highlight the differences.

The following chapters explore the evidence of outcomes in 3 areas: practical benefits to services, young people's citizenship and social inclusion; and personal development. This reflects the same themes identified earlier as the benefits that the case study organisations hoped to gain from participation.

## Chapter 8:

### Practical Benefits to Services

Benefits to services from involving children and young people in decisions are perceived to be considerable. Agencies concerned with children and young people's experiences, their likes and dislikes, and their un-met needs are adapting and developing their services to serve children and young people in a more appropriate way. This implies that these organisations are maximising the resources they spend on services by ensuring they better suit and benefit service users.

This chapter examines the following ways in which organisations benefit from listening and acting on what children and young people say:

- *Improved service development*
- *Improved client support*
- *Increased access and use of services*
- *Increased participatory practice*

#### Improved Service Development

There are many ways in which services within the case studies are improved through the participation of children and young people. Outcomes in this category include: the design of services being altered, changed practice, the adaptation of existing services, new services being introduced and the recruitment of appropriate staffing.

The study found evidence of instances where young people had been involved in changing the design of elements of services and resources. The belief – from staff and young people – was that this made them more 'youth friendly'. This could reasonably be assumed to be the case for the young people who participated in the redesign of the service, but it is not clear whether this is so for all other young service users as well

Changes often centred on physical site improvements, particularly play and leisure facilities. Children and young people were consulted to find out what would be more appropriate to meet their needs and interests.

### More appropriate play space (Young People's Participation Project)

Young children worked with architects to design their Home Corner which started as an adult designed space, with inappropriate equipment not found in homes, including two ovens and equal opportunities posters. The children were shown photographs and allowed to move the equipment and created their own preferred space. For example, they wanted a low window, a door that was easily opened and a plant on the porch. Following this, staff felt that the children used this area more often (although no other evidence is available).

Young people often suggested only minor changes to services such as improved food, visiting hours, sanitary or toilet arrangements. It is notable that they rarely suggested more far-reaching changes – for example, how teachers teach them or medical practitioners support them, or changes requiring organisational restructuring. The changes young people suggest are important to them, however apparently minor. Perhaps once they are convinced that their ideas will be listened to and given more opportunities to have a say, they may start to consider broader areas for improvement.

Change in the design of publications, websites or research tools aimed at young people was also common. As a pupil involved in the Sportsearch website remarked *'[We commented on things like] how it's set up, colour schemes, things that we thought would make it better. It's good to see that what you think makes a difference'* (Young person). In another example, at Cheshire and Warrington Connexions young people felt leaflets were inappropriate and so they were redesigned incorporating their suggestions. A young person said: –

*'Because we fed our views back about these leaflets – they sent someone down from head office to talk to the group... and they're actually going to change the leaflets. They're actually going to get rid of these red people [illustrations on leaflets], which is one big move for us.'* (Young person)

In some cases, new services had been introduced by organisations to satisfy the expressed demands and needs of children and young people, in order to fill existing gaps. Examples included youth centres, information centres, and leisure facilities, such as skateboard parks. In the Skye and Lochalsh Young Carers Project, for example, an extra weekly support group was introduced for young carers with additional needs. New resources have also been introduced: a local authority agreed to publish a booklet for newly arrived young refugees on their rights and available support, following a request from the Young Refugee Rights Project (Saying Power).

New services and resources are believed to better serve the needs of young clients. The evaluation of the Children & Neighbourhoods in London Project (CNL) asserted that a number of projects have provided significant outputs for the benefit of many other young people (as well as those consulted). These included a new playground and an environmental website.

There are several examples where young people have identified their own concerns within service provision and have come together as autonomous social action groups to lobby and achieve change on their chosen issues. A common theme identified by these groups is transport. Working together they have managed to convince local authorities of the need to provide assistance with travel for young people to improve access to amenities and social events. One group carried out extensive research, both in England and abroad, to create a report for the local council entitled 'Fare's Fair', as a result of which Durham County Council agreed to spend £100,000 per annum to extend the concessionary fares scheme to young people aged between 14 and 16 years. Another example was a small group of young people in an isolated pit village who successfully gained agreement through local partnership meetings for a bus service to collect young people from surrounding villages and transport them to another village where there is more for them to do. These changes often required ongoing lobbying from young people, and it is doubtful whether the gaps in services would have been identified and filled without their initiative.

Another theme was young people's concern for their safety. Different groups brought to the attention of their local council the need for additional services to make them feel safer. Young women in one area were concerned about the inappropriate use of a local park/play space by drug users and street drinkers. They were frustrated with the difficulty they experienced in locating and contacting the relevant council department to deal with their complaint. Shortly after meeting with a Housing Officer a free-phone number was established by the council to enable children and young people and residents to report the presence of drug needles/paraphernalia free of charge.

Staff and young people felt that by involving children and young people in the recruitment and training of staff, this helps to ensure that those they employ are able to relate to young people and have a greater capacity for meeting their needs.

*'We're actually employing the people that we think should be at the forefront of Connexions' (Young person)*

*‘Within the organisation children and young people have had a direct impact on the recruitment of staff, which has resulted in an excellent staff team who can relate well to children and young people’. (CNL, staff member)*

Staff in many projects believe that they have significantly increased their knowledge about the needs of particular groups of young people. For example, a worker at North Huyton NDC expressed that one of the most important pieces of knowledge gained by staff was what it was like to be a young person in the area. This increases the confidence of some staff members to support young people more effectively. For example, SOVA staff and volunteers who were trained by young people from SCAPE have reportedly benefited by gaining a greater understanding of the issues and needs of young offenders and developing confidence in their work.

*‘The organisation is gaining an invaluable insight into what it is like to be an adolescent in North Huyton. I’ve worked in the area for eight years, and some of the things that I’m now being told completely shock me. I then take that back to our partnership and say, ‘This is what we need to tackle’.’ (Professional)*

*‘People have more of an idea about what it’s like being a young carer.’  
(Young carer).*

## Improved Client Support

Organisations that include a focus on involving children and young people in making personal decisions stressed that only by setting up environments where they could listen to their clients could they ensure staff or other organisations best meet the needs of individuals. For organisations aimed at particular client groups who require intensive support, listening and attempting to understand their perspectives, and mutually agreeing a course of action, are viewed as crucial for addressing their needs internally and to advocate for improved services externally.

There is some evidence from the case studies to suggest that the employment of participatory activities within a learning setting can improve the educational attainment of children (illustrated in the box below). There is no evidence to suggest participation activities have a detrimental effect on attainment.

## Higher educational attainment (Middle Street School Nursery & Wheatcroft Primary School)

Middle Street School Nursery, where children are encouraged to make decisions and participate in their learning, has produced excellent Ofsted results: 'children in Nursery and Reception make very good progress, and most will attain the expected standard when they enter Year 1'. The curriculum is described as 'excellent' and the quality of teaching 'very good' and as 'providing a very stimulating learning environment'.

Wheatcroft Primary School reports good SAT scores (though no causal link can be demonstrated) and also achieves added value between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 results. This confirms that participation activities do not interfere with the level of educational attainment.

Other research has also found positive evidence. A small pilot study for DfES, found a 'positive association' between participation and GCSE attainment, when comparing secondary schools in England which prioritise participatory activities for a large percentage of students, with other similar non-participatory schools (Hannam, 2001). Additionally, although in the early stages of development, research in Norway has shown that there are clear positive relationships between the general well-being of students, their involvement in learning, academic self-esteem and achievement in some subjects (cited in Hannam, 2003). Early years research has found that more participatory settings – nurseries in which teachers respond to children's self-initiated play in a loosely structured but supportive environment (such as Middle Street School Nursery) *and* the High/Scope approach in which children 'plan, do and review' their own activities (such as the Children and Young People's Participation Project) – are associated with more positive long-term outcomes than nursery settings in which teachers directly teach children academic skills (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997). These positive outcomes in participatory settings included a lower percentage (8%) needing treatment for emotional impairment or disturbance during schooling (compared with 47% in directive settings), a higher percentage planning to go to university, increased numbers doing voluntary work, and a reduced risk of offending.

Teachers explained how they feel listening to children improves their teaching practice (see box below). Recent research into students as researchers in school settings demonstrates that this type of participatory activity can give less experienced teachers confidence, and can renew the enthusiasm of those more experienced (Bragg and Fielding, 2003). This research cited other benefits: improved

relationships within a learning environment, greater respect for teachers, increased commitment from pupils and enhanced attitudes to learning, resulting in improved attendance, and homework being carried out.

### Improvements to teaching practice (Wheatcroft Primary School)

Wheatcroft School teachers believe listening and involving children makes classroom teaching more effective. One teacher explained how, because children are used to speaking out and being listened to, they are much more inclined to say when they do not understand something in a lesson. This increases the knowledge the teacher has of the children's level of understanding, and also informs them of how to improve the learning process.

*'If they didn't understand something they wouldn't be afraid to say, most children anyway, because they're used to being heard, and that helps us. That's much more effective. It means we're not just guessing what children want, but the children are getting what they want.'* (Teacher)

Children also made useful contributions to teachers' knowledge through peer-to-peer teaching; highlighting the kinds of activities they find most useful to aid learning:

*'The kinds of activities the children choose to prepare for their peers give us a clue about what they find exhilarating in their own learning. Even if you only take a subliminal message away from that, I think it's valuable.'* (Teacher)

Teachers explained that teaching practice is easier and more effective when children are actively working with them rather than being passive and being pushed to learn. Children's peer-support mechanisms have also been successful in reducing class disruption and conflict, which takes the burden off the teacher.

*'Children are actually solving things themselves. They can go and have a little circle group on their own and try and solve things. When they've had a problem, they've been used to that procedure in my class, and they've said 'Can we have a little circle'? It won't be a giggly group or a chance to get out of something; they'll just have a heart-to-heart and a bit of time to discuss it [the issue] and they calm down.'* (Teacher)

In previous research on involving young patients in health services, the benefits to staff were seen to include 'the intrinsic value of the points young patients make' and 'that staff cannot second-guess what really matters to patients' (Lightfoot and Sloper, 2002, page 2). At Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust it was felt that some doctors on a children's ward had improved their professional capacity in treating young people and were more 'in tune' with young people's needs and meeting their expectations. Within the sample agency providing psychiatric treatment for children, research involving children's views has been extremely valuable in highlighting the importance of involving them in their psychiatric care. The box below illustrates how gaining their views can provide essential information for practitioners to ensure their services achieve improved clinical outcomes for children. The research also helped shift thinking about how to increase children's (and parents') agency in their treatment.

### **Improved knowledge and practice for clinical care of young people (Collingham Gardens Child & Family Psychiatric Unit)**

At the in-patient unit for children with complex mental health needs research was carried out to increase understanding of children's perceptions of the purpose of admission to the in-patient unit, and the factors which enhance or decrease their motivation to engage in therapeutic work.

The findings highlighted that children feel passive in their treatment (illustrated by an extract from a research interview below) and that their role in decision-making is limited. In contrast to their expectations of a passive role in treatment the children were creative in devising strategies for explaining their absence from school and local friends in a way that attempted to deflect bullying and teasing associated with the stigma of being at the unit.

**Researcher:** *Did you know why you came to [Collingham Gardens]?*

**Child:** *Because I had some difficulties going to the toilet and I get angry in some ways.*

**Researcher:** *So why did you have to come here for those problems?*

**Child:** *So they could sort them out.*

**Researcher:** *Do you have to do anything as well?*

**Child:** *Umm . . . No.*



## Improved knowledge and practice for clinical care of young people (Collingham Gardens Child & Family Psychiatric Unit) – *continued*

The findings surprised management. They highlighted how the children's therapeutic engagement can be undermined by their expectation of themselves taking a passive role in the process. This provided valuable learning, which has been translated into practice. It has developed strategies about how to engage children better in the therapeutic process, thereby improving their clinical outcome.

Including children's views in court cases can also help to ensure a decision meets their best interests, as the example in the box below illustrates. CAFCASS also believe that when children are involved in final court judgments that affect them, and understand how and why these decisions are being made, it is much more likely that they will have a greater acceptance of the final decision.

*'It would be a very difficult situation to come to a final proceeding where a plan is presented and ratified by the court which is in total opposition to what the child wanted entirely and for the child to be expected to accept that plan.'*  
(Professional)

## Child assessment for court proceedings (Triangle)

In a complex court case about access, with varying professional and parental views, Triangle was brought in to make an assessment about whether a child wanted to see her father and whether she would become traumatised if she did. A report by a Guardian as Litem had said that the child's views were unobtainable due to her disabilities; she uses an electronic communication aid and communication book and is physically disabled.

Triangle demonstrated that the child can express feelings about her father and other carers, that she had a mixture of feelings, and that her understanding could be checked by asking the same things in different ways. As she was able to be specific about what she wanted, it was possible to hypothesise and explore with her some of the reasons for her feelings. She felt fine spending time with her father for a short time and it was clearly very important that she had contact. But she did not feel very safe over a longer period. Her views were put to the court in a written report and were accepted by the judge.

## Improved Access and Utilisation of Services

The general impression given by projects is that children and young people have a more positive experience of services, are more engaged and feel greater 'ownership' when they are actively involved. Also, they use services more and services reflect their needs better.

There were several examples where children and young people had expressed that the opening hours of services were not convenient for them and so these had been changed, which helped increase access. For example, one evaluation provided evidence that large numbers of local young people who otherwise would not access contraceptive and sexual health services are now being reached.

*'The project increases young people's access to contraception and sexual health services and offers choice, particularly for those who are least likely to access other services and who are highlighted as high-risk target groups by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit.' This resulted in the 'increased uptake of contraceptive use, emergency contraception, and pregnancy testing.'*  
(Evaluation report for KISS – Contraception and Sexual Health Project)

Many projects perceived that an important outcome from participation is that young people have greater feeling of ownership or responsibility for the facilities. For example, following the regeneration of a park by young people and adults working together, a resident made the following comment.

*'See that wall? When it went up I thought 'Uh-oh'. But they haven't touched it because they own it' (Local resident cited in External Evaluation).*

Similar findings in respect of school grounds have been found in research by Titman (1994; cited in Hannam, 2003). Where children thought little effort had been put into making the school grounds appropriate for pupils, they felt the school did not value their environment or them. Further still, this led to children rejecting the ethos of the school and to vandalism. Conversely, where children were encouraged to become involved in caring for their environment alongside adults it was found to have a positive impact on their attitude and behaviour in the school environment as a whole.

Within health care, although only anecdotal evidence exists, staff and young people believe that the involvement of young people in their treatment (such as administering their own medicines) has led to a greater compliance with their treatment, especially by young people who were self-harmers or chronically ill. As a young person said, *'it makes me feel more reassured and confident about my medication and condition rather than a doctor just telling you: 'Take these for two weeks'* (Young patient).

## Increased Participatory Practice

The research has found that many of the case studies have improved their own knowledge of how to involve children and young people, and the value of doing so. Subsequently, they have developed more participatory ways of working with their young service users. This includes listening more to children and young people and involving them more in decision-making. Staff told us of improving their personal skills and practice, including improved listening skills, the ability to read the body language of users, and developing creativity in their ways of engaging children and young people.

A doctor described how she now involves children and young people more in medical consultations. In another organisation a young patient described how, as a result of young people's increased involvement, certain doctors are much more aware of the young patient's ability to be involved in their own care.

*'I try to create more space for children to have their own view, balancing that with not making children responsible for their problems . Children have more knowledge about what is going on and so much more to say about how the problem is affecting them and what they're trying to do about it. That's often overlooked.'* (Doctor)

*'Doctors explain more to young people in simple terms... Young people feel treated as human not ignored by doctors as in the past'* (Young patient).

A young worker described how their local Social Service Department is starting to adopt improved ways of engaging with young people:

*'In my first year, it was really hard just to get in touch. I mean most of them – they were not even ready to talk. But the second year, once we'd started working with them through some of the children's Social Service workers, they were more open to young people. They wanted to really listen to these young people and in practice they did change their ways of dealing with the young people.'* (Young worker)

## Chapter 9:

### Citizenship and Social Inclusion

This chapter examines outcomes which benefit citizenship and the social inclusion of young people, organisations, communities and parents, and which can also have wider political outcomes. It is divided into the following sections:

- *Children's rights*
- *Empowerment*
- *Citizenship and political education*
- *Responsibility*
- *Relationships*

#### Children's Rights

All of the case study agencies fulfilled children's rights under Article 12 of UNCRC, by providing opportunities for them to 'to express an opinion' and ensuring these are 'taken into account' in decisions affecting the child.

Some go further than the standard required by Article 12 (which is a minimum standard that had to be agreed by many countries, see Marshall, 1997), including involving them in making decisions, sharing these with adults and providing children and young people with opportunities to take autonomous decisions and action.

#### Empowerment

Involving children and young people, particularly those who do not often have the opportunity to have a say, (the socially excluded, for example) can lead to a deeper self-belief in their ability to create change and the feeling of having a greater control over their own lives.

Evidence of self-efficacy was also identified by the children and young people in the case studies. Children in one project, for example, asserted that they get to '*have a say about the world*' and that their '*voices are heard*'. Other pupils clearly felt able to express their views to staff and able to influence changes. The CNL external evaluation noted that 'the majority of children regarded their participation to be an empowering experience'(Matthews et al, 2001, page 57).

*Child: 'Teachers understand you more, if you say what you think.'*

*Child: 'Especially in circle time.'*

*Child: 'We run the session . . .'*

*Interviewer: 'What happens if the teachers don't agree with your ideas?'*

*Child: 'If we say something, and they (teachers) don't like it or don't think it's important, we need to take it to another level and show it's important.' [Children's discussion]*

Children and young people can increase their decision-making skills through being given the opportunity to make decisions. In the young carers project the emphasis is on encouraging young carers to value their own care or needs. A worker gave an example of a young carer who was rarely asked what she wanted and therefore found it hard to make choices. When offered a choice of food she would always say 'I'll have whatever's left', but with encouragement she began to recognise her preferences and make choices, and then was able to request certain types of food.

Through being involved in participation young people can develop the ability to make criticisms. They feel better able to lobby complaints and believe that these will be acted upon. Complaints are easier to make to an organisation that a young person knows is listening. RAPP focuses intently on encouraging young people to make complaints about services, both internally and to external agencies. An information leaflet describing the complaints procedure is widely available for young people who attend and the complaints procedure is explained at an introductory meeting:

*'Since we've been complaining and stuff that's helped a lot. When you have reviews, [Social Service Departments] give you more decisions about it and you get to have your say so they listen to you.'* (Young person at RAPP)

## **Citizenship and Political Education**

Involving children and young people provides opportunities for social and political education and this can be incorporated into the school Citizenship agenda. The benefits, amongst others, include increasing children and young people's knowledge and awareness of children's rights, political structures, and existing services. Large-scale international research (including the UK) by the IEA Civic Education Study found schools that have democratic processes in place and thus produce an environment that encourages discussion and influence within the

school are the most successful in the engagement and knowledge of pupils in civic issues (Torney-Purta et al, 2001; cited in Hannam, 2003).

*‘Being able to recognise the process and procedure which we have to go through to change a certain thing’ (student at Student Council Evaluation Day).*

Being involved in decision-making processes has given some young people both an understanding of political structures and, through this understanding, a motivation to take part in different forms of politics. For example, young people at Dumfries and Galloway Youth Strategy Executive Group have developed an understanding and appreciation of the role of the council and the effectiveness of working in an executive group. And, at a youth-led newspaper project, young people have expressed a willingness to express, and enjoyment of expressing, political views. *‘I love writing, especially about issues, as I am interested in politics... This means I can say what I think about government plans’* (Girl, aged 13). The IEA Civic Education Study also concluded that students in these schools are more likely to vote as adults, than other students (Torney-Purta et al, 2001; cited in Hannam, 2003).

Increases in young people’s knowledge of their legal rights and related issues benefits all children, but especially specific groups of more disadvantaged young people such as those ‘at risk’ and young refugees/asylum seekers. For example, participants in the Young Refugee Rights Group stated that they had received a greater knowledge of the rights and issues of asylum seekers and refugees. These young people, through participation activities, can lobby to gain further support from services that are responsible for their care, but who may not be reaching these groups of young people.

## Responsibility

Some agencies stated that they had seen an improvement in young people’s independence and an increase in responsibility for their actions. Deptford Green School’s Ofsted report, for example, provided evidence of high levels of engagement in moral and social development, stating: ‘the school council and the citizenship initiative help them to take on responsibility’ and provided ‘an exciting, developing programme to promote citizenship. This, and the very good course for personal, social and health education support the very good provision for pupils’ moral and social development’.

## Relationships

*'I had not realised how nice the young people could be.'* (Local resident)

The development of positive relationships was seen by case study organisations as a predominant outcome of involving young people in decision-making. Relationship development was found to improve between young people and professionals, but also with parents, as well as between peers. An external evaluation of one case study noted, 'There is plenty of evidence to suggest the involvement of young people in the CNiL programme is encouraging some adults to redefine their perceptions' (Matthews et al, 2000, page 60).

Several projects perceived that relationships and perceptions of young people within their communities were more positive since their involvement in community issues. The example below illustrates this positive effect.

### Improved relationships within the community (Middlesbrough Youth Inclusion Project –YIP)

The regeneration of a local wasteland involved both young people and older residents in planning and developing the area. Middlesbrough YIP brought these groups together to plan the environmental development of the park. Before the environmental work started, the group put together an animated film about all the issues that young people and residents wanted to address. This has helped to change perceptions of young people, and developed inter-generational relationships:

The remarks young people made in a documentary about their experience in making the film demonstrate their feelings about the adults they worked with:

*'The best bit was working with the older people and getting to know them. They're so nice'* (Teenage girl).

*'It's been a pleasure to work with the youngsters.'* (Local resident)

'On arrival there was a big issue that young people were demonised in the area. They were blamed for all the ills in the community . . . We've broken that cycle in terms of lots of residents now really appreciate youngsters, and vice versa.' (Staff member)

Children and young people-worker relations were also viewed as improved as young people became more involved in service provision and this has increased empathy and appreciation for the roles of adults. In particular, peer educators recognise the difficulties staff may experience. The initial outcome is that children and young people will respect the role of the teacher to a greater extent than before. This is backed by recent research on involving students as researchers in school settings, which suggests that young people can 'learn to see school activities from the teacher's point of view' and recognise that successful teaching and learning involves 'mutual responsibilities' (Bragg and Fielding, 2003).

*'I didn't realise what a nightmare it was having boys and girls together until I was on the other side as a mentor!' (Peer mentor)*

Young people in a number of geographical areas have been working to improve relationships between local youths and the police. Within Investing in Children, for example, young people have achieved some success in this area.

*'We were trying to get the police liC membership but the police weren't making good enough changes. Then the police worked with Groundwork and the young people made an initial agreement that if the police come they won't run away. That was a starting point. The outcome from discussion with young people was that the police have made changes to some of the beats where there were police officers that the young people don't like and introduced other police officers.'*  
(Staff member)

Children, young people and staff saw benefits in the development of peer-friendships that grow from participatory groups. Children and young people often join these initiatives to make new friends and for the social opportunities they offer. Relationships between young people are thought to improve as discussed in the sub-section on 'peer support' in Chapter 6. Deptford Green School's Ofsted report, for example, noted that: 'Pupils certainly respect each others' feelings and values, and most have good relationships with others and teachers.'

Benefits were also seen to be improved relationships between parents and children and young people; it was felt that this would positively affect the development of the child/young person and improve their home life. No evidence was provided by the case studies although previous research identified some evidence of improved child-parent relationships in action-research involving parent volunteers in primary schools (Kirby et al, 2002).



## Chapter 10:

### Personal Development

The area of personal development was one which nearly all case studies cited as an outcome for the young people involved in participatory activities. These are extremely valuable outcomes for the development of young people. However, the main focus of this study is on outcomes to services and organisations and therefore the following examples are not a comprehensive list. This chapter is divided as follows:

- *Confidence and self-belief*
- *Group skills*
- *Behaviour*
- *Practical skills*

#### Confidence and Self-belief

An increase in the confidence of young people was commonly cited as an outcome of participation. Saying Power's evaluation demonstrated this increase by asking young people to draw a 'confidence line', which charts confidence against the time of the project. They were asked to explain what had caused the line to dip or peak: for example, a young refugee said her line had dipped when she was not attending meetings and peaked when she went to Parliament and was interviewed by the BBC.

*'We make a difference and it raises our confidence and self-esteem.'*  
(Young person)

*'A particularly good feature is that all pupils feel valued and respected members of the school community, which helps them to develop confidence and self-esteem.'* (Middle Street nursery Ofsted report)

#### Group Skills

Improvements are often seen in group work: including communication, listening and leadership skills. The benefit of building children's autonomy in negotiating their friendships within Middle Street School, for example, is highlighted in their Ofsted report: 'children in both Nursery and Reception classes were observed working together and playing happily together without the need for constant supervision'. An external evaluation of CNIIL found that 'young people especially identify team building skills, communication skills' as a personal outcome.

*'I have learnt to listen better, not to be shy and to speak out loud [and] that it is important to listen.'* (Young person – student council evaluation)

## Behaviour

Involving young people in decision-making and other participatory activities can achieve positive change in the behaviour of those who are seen to be 'at risk'.

The story of one young man illustrates the personal and social benefits of respecting and involving young people. A former young offender was engaged by involvement in participatory activities at SCAPE and this has seen an increase to his levels of responsibility. This change was recognised by his mother: *'Getting involved in participatory activities has given him responsibility and motivation to become a youth worker. No other service worked for him. Our community policeman has noticed it too.'*

The evaluation of Middlesbrough Youth Inclusion Project (YIP) gave insight into how, through active involvement of users in its services, the organisation had met its targets in reducing offending with its 'at risk' group. Young people's enthusiasm for taking part – maintained by fun activities, life skills training, 'Splash' programmes, alternative education and election of young representatives on the Neighbourhood Trust – is seen, to help young people move 'from exclusion to inclusion'.

*'Their [the Young Persons' Research Team] apparent enthusiasm for the scheme and level of engagement suggests [sic] that this may, as part of the YIP programme, be a significant factor in helping to affect positively their patterns of behaviour'* (Evaluation by University of Teesside).

*'If I hadn't joined YIP, I would probably be in a cell now.'* (Young person)

Young people increase their knowledge of issues they identify as important including, for example sexual health and drug education, which can influence their attitudes and behaviour. The evaluation of the KISS sexual health organisation stated: *'Informal education through youth work, health promotion staff, and peer educators impacts upon young people's health-related attitudes and behaviour'*. The benefit of including peer educators was also identified by work in the Lambeth Youth Council on teenage pregnancy. A Peer Inspection Officer perceived that schools in Lambeth have benefited from having a group of young people that pupils can relate to coming into classrooms and discussing sexual health issues and teenage pregnancy as part of the Teenage Pregnancy Project. *'Schools are willing to have young people come in and talk to them about quite a taboo subject really. I think there's been a change there'* (Peer Inspection Officer).

## Practical Skills

One of the most common areas in which staff reported outcomes is gaining skills. Children and young people gain a variety of skills through participation activities. The external evaluation of CNI, for example, found the programme to be 'loaded with transferable and key skills'. The list of skills gained reported by the case study agencies is extensive, and includes the following:

- **Technical skills** – such as: filming, editing, website design, information technology.
- **Organisational skills** – such as: presentations, facilitation, recruitment and selection, minute-taking.
- **Creative skills** – such as: acting and writing newsletters.
- **Workplace skills and experience** – such as: applying oneself in a working environment, adhering to guidelines, attending meetings, working in a large business environment, assertiveness, coping with stress, and time management.
- **Presentation and language skills**
- **Other skills** – such as: decision-making, public speaking and media relations.

In several projects, young people involved with participatory activities, particularly those considered 'at risk', had made career choices as a result of their involvement. In particular, older young people who had taken on further responsibilities and filled such positions as Youth-Link Worker or Peer-Educators had, through their experience, gained paid positions and/or discovered a youth work career path.





# Section Five

Conclusion

## Chapter 11:

### Building a Culture of Participation – Making Participation Meaningful

There is plenty of participation activity across the UK and in a relatively short amount of time organisations have shifted beliefs about the value and need to involve children and young people within their organisations. Much of the focus to date has been on implementing participation activities and discussion has centred on which are the best methods for engaging children and young people in making public decisions. Much less attention has been given to how organisations need to change to ensure children and young people's views have a real and sustainable influence both in their personal care and at the organisational and wider public level. Now seems an apt time to reflect on where we have got to in actively involving children and young people and what are the challenges that lie ahead.

The case study organisations have highlighted a number of important factors that contribute to making children and young people's participation meaningful. The key seems to lie in the culture of the organisation and its commitment to participation. And the case studies have much to tell us about how to develop cultures of participation. This research provides an opportunity to listen to them and the children and young people using their services, and to learn with them. Participation is about sharing ideas and moving forward together in new ways.

**Primarily, undertaking meaningful and sustainable participation requires organisations to change.** This change is about the whole ethos and culture of the organisation. Hence it needs to happen within senior management, as well as within frontline staff, and across all organisational policy and practice. It is about developing new ways of working with children and young people. Change is an on-going process, and it takes more than one-off training events to support staff, children and young people to engage in new and meaningful ways of practice. Developing the infrastructure and building organisational capacity takes time. It also needs dedicated commitment, sufficient staff support and an undertaking to adopt an organisational learning approach: all of which are more likely where there are champions of children's participation. There is still a lot to learn about how organisations can and need to change, and more links with organisational change theory within overseas development and the business sector may be useful here.

**Participation is a multi-layered concept.** There are many ways to involve children and young people in different types of decisions. The appropriate level of involvement and activities are dependent on many factors including: the type

and content of decisions, the context, and the children/young people who are involved. Other considerations include whether to use formal or informal approaches, the frequency of involvement and the numbers of children and young people taking part. Using a variety of activities helps to include all children and young people in ways that suit their needs and different situations.

**Meaningful participation is a process, not simply the application of isolated participation activities or events.** In this mushrooming of participation activity many people are still trying to get to grips with *how* to involve children and young people. However, this requires more than an examination of methods or activities. A greater understanding of the purposes and principles underlying child/youth-focused participation is needed. This includes developing new child/youth-adult relationships – rooted in mutual trust and respect – and embedding the principles of child-adult dialogue into how organisations work. This underpins meaningful participation work, and is a common factor underlying children and young people’s involvement in both personal and public decision-making. Where relationships are positive, then children and young people’s involvement is integral to practice, rather than an after-thought or a tick box exercise. It is part of daily practice, not an occasional activity.

**Strategies designed to address both personal and public decision-making are needed to fulfil children and young people’s right, under the UNCRC, to be involved in all decisions affecting their lives.** There is much focus on involving children and young people in public decisions, but less on involving them in personal decisions, although the reasons for this are unclear. More is needed to encourage and enable their involvement in personal decisions, as well as having a greater say about public decisions. This helps to put *all* children and young people at the centre of organisations; those involving young clients in personal decisions tend to involve all their young clients, whereas those focusing on public decision-making often only include a sample of children and young people.

**Listening needs to influence change.** Meaningful participation is about listening to children and young people *AND* enabling their views and experiences to influence change – both at a personal and public level. While there is plenty of participation activity, there is currently too little focus on ensuring their views influence real changes. Listening is only half the story; acting on what they say is what makes their involvement meaningful. This requires at least as much attention as engaging children and young people within participation activities. It requires organisational change – including senior management backing – so that listening and acting on what they say is considered integral to good practice, rather than an occasional response.

**Acting on children and young people's views has positive outcomes.** There is evidence that child/youth participation has a number of benefits for improving services development: including helping to ensure services meet the needs of children and young people as a group, as well as tailoring appropriate support to individuals. It helps to increase children and young people's citizenship and social inclusion, and also their wider personal development. While many organisations reflect and evaluate the process of participation, and this is important for developing their practice, still too little attention is given to collecting systemic and rigorous evidence of outcomes, and more research is needed in this area.

**There are different cultures of participation and organisations need to be clear about their reasons for undertaking participation and how they want to develop this.** Some organisations are focused on doing consultations to develop their services and products, some undertake isolated participation activities, whilst others develop child/youth-focused organisations which put children's participation at the heart of what they do. All have a place in enhancing children's participation, but it is only the latter that create a culture in which it is automatically assumed that all children and young people will be involved in any decisions affecting their lives.



## References

- Alderson, P. (2000) 'School Students' Views on School Councils and Daily Life at School', *Children & Society*, Vol. 14, pp. 121-134.
- Argyris, C. (1999) *On Organisational Learning*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 2nd Edition.
- Alderson, P. (1993) *Children's Consent to Surgery*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Blackburn, J. (1998) 'Conclusion', in J. Blackburn and J. Holland (eds) *Who changes? Institutionalizing participation in development*. London: Intermediate Technology Publication Ltd.
- Borland, M, Hill, M., Laybourne, A. and Stafford, A. (2001) *Improving Consultation with Children and Young People in Relevant Aspects of Policy Making and Legislation in Scotland* Glasgow: University of Glasgow
- Bragg, S. and Fielding, M. (2003) *Students as Researchers: Making a Difference'*, Cambridge: Pearsons.
- Clark, A. and Moss, P. (2001) *Listening to Young Children: the Mosaic Approach*. London: National Children's Bureau
- Combe, V. (2002) *Up for it: Getting young people involved in local government*. London: IPPR.
- Combe, V. (2002) *Involving Young People in Local Authority Decision-making*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Cutler, D. (2002) *Taking the Initiative: Promoting Young People's Involvement in Public Decision-making in the UK*, Update. London: Carnegie Young People's Initiative.
- Cutler, D. (2003) *Standard! Organisational Standards and Young People's Participation in Public Decision Making*. London: Carnegie Young People's Initiative.
- Danso C, Greaves, H Howell, S Ryan, M, Sinclair R and Tunnard, J , (forthcoming 2003) *The Involvement of children and young people in promoting change and enhancing the quality of social care: a research review*. London: National Children's Bureau.
- Department for Education and Employment (1999) *Social Inclusion: Pupil Support*. London: The Department for Education and Employment.
- Department for Education and Skills (2001) *Special Educational needs Code of Practice*. London: The Department for Education and Employment.
- Development FOCUS UK (2002) *Reflection and Review, Young Voices Heard, Young People Leading Projects in Communities*. London: Save the Children.

Edwards, R. and Alldred, P. (1999) 'Children and young people's views of social research: the case of research on home-school relations', *Childhood: A Global Journal of Child Research*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 261-281.

Gibbs, S., Mann, G. and Mathers, N. (2002) *Child-to-Child: A Practical Guide. Empowering Children as Active Citizens*. London: Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Action Zone.

Green, J. and Brown, L. (2002) 'Exploring the benefits of involving young people in sexual health services', *Youth Action*, No. 75, pp 14-15.

Hannam, D. (2003) *Participation and Achievement. Examples of research that demonstrate associations or connections between student participation and learning, or other outcomes that support it*. Unpublished report/review conducted for the ministerial adviser at the Citizenship Unit, DfES.

Hannam, D. (2001) *A pilot study to evaluate the impact of student participation aspects of the citizenship order on standards of education in secondary schools*. Seminar paper for ESRC Consulting Pupils on Teaching and Learning seminar, Cambridge University. [www.csv.org.uk/csv/hannamreport.pdf](http://www.csv.org.uk/csv/hannamreport.pdf)

Hart, R. (1997) *Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care*. New York: Unicef.

Hock, D. (1999) *Birth of the Chaordic Age*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Lightfoot, J. and Sloper, P. (2002) *Having a say in health: guidelines for involving young patients in health services development*. York: Social Policy Research Unit (SPRU), University of York.

Kilgour, K. (2002) *Circus Skills: A Training, Support and Development Needs Survey of Participation Workers*. London: Carnegie Young People's Initiative.

Kirby, P. and Bryson, S. (2002) *Measuring the Magic: Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision making*. London: Carnegie Young People's Initiative.

Kirby, P., Mann, G., Pettitt, B., and Woodhead, M. (2002) *Child-to-Child in South London: Evaluation Report*. London: Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Action Zone.

Lansdown, G. (1995) *Taking Part. Children's Participation in Decision-Making*. London: IPPR.

Matthews, H., Hedges, K. and Legge, K. (2001) *An Evaluation of the Children and Neighbourhoods in London Programme*. Northampton: Centre for Children and Youth, University College Northampton.

- James, A., Jenks, C. and Prout, A. (1999) *Theorising childhood*. London: Polity Press.
- O'Quigley, A. (2000) *Listening to Children's Views: The findings and recommendations of recent research*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Prout, A, and James, A. (1997) 'A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems', in A. James and A. Prout (1997) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. London: Falmer Press.
- Qvortrup, J. (1997) 'A Voice for Children in Statistical and Social Accounting: A Plea for Children's Right to be Heard', in A. James and A. Prout (1997) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. London: Falmer Press.
- Marshall, K. (1997) *Children's Rights in the balance: the participation-protection debate*. Edinburgh: The Stationary Office.
- McNeish, D. and others, (2002) *What Works for Children? Effective Services for Children and Families*. Buckingham: Open University Press
- Morrow, V. (1998) *Understanding Families: Children's Perspectives*, London: National Children's Bureau.
- Nottingham Health Action Zone (HAZ) (2002). *Final Evaluation Report for – KISS – Knowledge and Information about Sexual Health and Sexuality*.
- Nutbrown, C. (1996) *Respectful Educators – Capable Learners – Children's Rights and Early Education*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Pasteur, K. (2001) *Changing Organisations for Sustainable Livelihoods: a map to guide change*. Lessons for Change in Policy & Organisations, No. 1. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
- RBA Research (2002) *Are young people being heard?* London: British Telecom and Childline.
- Schweinhart, L.J. and Weikart, D.P. (1997) *Lasting Differences: The High/Scope Preschool Curriculum Comparison Study Through Age 23*, Michigan: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.
- Semler, R. (2003) *The Seven-Day Weekend. The Wisdom Revolution: Find the Work/Life Balance*. London: Century.
- Shaw, P. (2002) *Changing Conversations in Organisations: a complexity approach to change*. London: Routledge.
- Shier, H. (2001) 'Pathways to participation: Openings, opportunities and obligations. A new model for enhancing children's participation in decision-making, in line with Article 13.1 of the UNCRC', *Children & Society*, V. 15, pp. 107-117

Sinclair, R and Franklin, A (2000) *A Quality Protects Research Briefing: young people's participation*. London: Department of Health, Research in Practice and Making Research Count.

Sinclair, R (1998), *Involving Children in Planning their Care*, *Child and Family Social Work*, Vol.3 No.2, pp.137-142

Smith, P. R. and Tovey, W. (2002) *Middlesbrough YIP Evaluation Report*. Newcastle: School of Health and Social Care, University of Teesside.

Thomas, N. (2000) *Children, family and the state: decision-making and child participation* London: Macmillian.

Thompson, J. (1998) 'Participatory Approaches in Government Bureaucracies: Facilitating Institutional Change', in J. Blackburn and J. Holland (eds) *Who changes? Institutionalizing participation in development*. London: Intermediate Technology Publication Ltd.

Treseder, P. (1997) *Empowering Children and Young People: Training Manual*, London: Save the Children and Children's Rights Office

Welsh, M. (2000) 'Disabled Children in the Court Setting', *Seen and Heard*, Vol 10, no 4, pp18-23.

Willow, C. (2002) *Participation in Practice: Children and young people as partners in change*. London: Save the Children.

Woods, A. (2002) *Youth Inclusion Project Evaluation Report*. West Midlands New Deal for Communities (WMNDC).

Young People and Politics: A report on the Ynot/Yvote Project (2002) London: CYP.U.

# Appendix 1:

## Case Study Summaries

### All Parliamentary Group for Children and Young People in and Leaving Care; London.

#### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory; National.

#### Characteristics of children/young people involved

Children and young people in care or leaving care in the UK.

#### Purpose of participation

- To ensure that the voices of children and young people with experience of public care are heard throughout Government;
- To ensure that legislation addresses the particular needs of children and young people in and leaving care and to debate key policy and practice issues;
- At a Parliamentary level to ensure liaison with organisations working with children and young people in and leaving care;
- To highlight best practice for children and young people in and leaving care;
- To discuss and, where appropriate, pursue contemporary issues which arise in relation to children and young people in and leaving care;
- To be a powerful voice on behalf of children and young people in and leaving care.

#### Ways young people involved

- Children and young people attend the Group's meetings, input into the agenda of meetings, and showcase their work or particular issues;
- The Group responds to or contributes matters in Parliament that have direct relevance to them.

#### Example of outputs

- The Group played a part, along with others, in successfully lobbying for statutory duties of local authorities to extend to provide for young people up to 21 years. Previously, the Leaving Care Act only supported young people up to 18 years.

#### Contact Details

Yvonne Wood  
Tel: 0207 251 3117  
Email: [yvonne.wood@thewhocarestrust.org.uk](mailto:yvonne.wood@thewhocarestrust.org.uk)

## The Barn Youth & Community Centre (Griffin News Projects and Grassroots); Clevedon, North Somerset.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Non-Statutory; Regional.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

#### Grassroots:

- Young people from 14 to 18 years;
- 12 in group with core group of 4;
- Committed and hard working young people.

#### Griffin News:

- Initially, 10 young people selected from Clevedon Community School (Secondary);
- Now 5 young people – 3 girls and 2 boys who were not doing so well at school.

### Purpose of participation

- To provide information by young people for young people;
- To give young people a voice, to voice their own opinions and to empower them as individuals.

### Ways young people involved

#### Grassroots:

- Young People have full control of the project except for final proof-reading, which is done by youth worker and editor.

#### Griffin News:

- Young people have total control of the project: issues/ideas for the newsreels, interviewing people, organising themselves, negotiating with local businesses for advertisements and payments.

### Example of outputs

- Information service in the local press provided for young people;
- Personal development for young people;
- Improved profile of young people in the area;
- Point of contact for young people in the area.

### Contact Details

Email: [newsteam@thebarnclevedon.com](mailto:newsteam@thebarnclevedon.com) or [youthworkers@thebarnclevedon.com](mailto:youthworkers@thebarnclevedon.com)

## Brighton & Hove Children's Fund; Brighton.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory, working in partnership with Coalition 4 Youth (C4Y); Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

Majority of children 5 to 13 years old, but also some older young people up to 18 years.

### Purpose of participation

- Ensuring appropriate services are funded, and that services are more effective, attractive and accessible;
- To gain the views of normally excluded children;
- To foster a greater sense of self-efficacy, self-worth and self-confidence in participating children.

### Ways young people involved

- One-off consultation to help inform Children's Fund planning;
- Designing and implementing a grants fund for children's projects;
- On selection panels for commissioned organisation;
- Self-referral to a new Family Group Conference project.

### Example of outputs

- Children's views influence which projects are taken forward (e.g. school bullying project, introduction of counselling service);
- Children designed application form and pack for new grant fund.

### Contact Details

Ellen Jones (Children's Fund Manager)  
Tel: 01273 293 441  
Email: ellen.jones@brighton-hove.gov.uk

## Camden Play Service (including Rollercoasters and Fusion Projects); London.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory; Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

#### *Rollercoasters:*

Disabled children aged between 5 and 12 years who live in Camden.

#### *Fusion:*

Children aged 11-14 with mild-to-moderate learning difficulties or physical disabilities.

- Black and ethnic minorities are well represented.

### Purpose of participation

- To create a service that meets the needs of and provides enjoyment for the children;
- To teach children to make decisions that affect them;
- To foster trust between Play Worker and child.

### Ways young people involved

#### *Camden Play Service:*

- Children and young people are involved in surveys/children's forums;
- Children are involved in making financial decisions.

#### *Rollercoasters:*

- Meetings/observation records/communication systems to decide on activities;
- Children go shopping for equipment such as books and dressing-up clothes for the centres;
- Children choose which staff members give them personal support.

#### *Fusion:*

- Meetings/surveys/communication systems to decide on activities;
- Children participate in formulating their personal plans;
- Children from the Fusion project advised a designer in creating the Camden Children's Fund logo;
- The children/young people at Fusion took the initial idea of making a video of their likes and dislikes from the Play Workers and designed the whole format of the video and filmed it themselves. They also made a video about the ways they have been involved;
- The children/young people at Fusion nominated themselves as and voted for members of a Fusion advisory group, which guides the activities of the group;
- The Fusion advisory group meets with staff to discuss the service and give suggestions.

### Example of outputs

- The surveys have effected consistent opening hours across the service;
- The content of the survey has changed in consultation with the children;
- The children's meetings are being changed because the children found them boring.

### Contact Details

Stephanie Allison (Children's Consultation and Participation Officer)

Tel: 0207 974 4166

Email: stephanie.allison@camden.gov.uk



## Cheshire and Warrington Connexions Young People's Reference Group; Northwich, Cheshire.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

Young Person's Reference Group: Core group of up to 20 young people aged 13-19 (including disabled young person).

### Purpose of participation

- The aim is to make the service better and make sure that young people have a say in the governance, design and delivery of services.

### Ways young people involved

- Monthly meetings of Young People's Reference Group to input into design and development of the service;
- Other meetings and residentials on specific tasks;
- Meetings are chaired and minuted by young people;
- Presentations to local, regional and national bodies;
- Young people manage a small budget.

### Example of outputs

- Publications and the design of centres are more in line with young people's needs;
- Production of young people's charter;
- Change to opening hours as a result of surveys carried out with other young people.

### Contact Details

Linda Mottram (Director of External Affairs)  
Tel: 01606 305 202  
Email: Linda.Mottram@connexions-cw.co.uk

## The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS); London.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory; National (England and Wales).

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

Children and young people who are involved with the (family) courts through private or public law. This may be in divorce/separation proceedings or care proceedings.

### Purpose of participation

- To ensure that the voices of the children and young people are heard and that decisions made by the courts take their views and wishes into account;
- Establishment of a User Involvement Group that will involve children and young people in the delivery of the service to ensure that CAFCASS is providing a child-friendly service.

### Ways young people involved

- The child or young person is assigned a Reporter (private law) or a Guardian (public law) who works with the child or young person for the duration of the proceedings. The Reporter or the Guardian ascertains the wishes of the child, assesses their competency to make decisions, works with the solicitors to ensure the child's voice is heard, and reports to the court on what they think is best for the child/young person.

### Example of outputs

- Children's views influence court decisions;
- Children/young people demonstrate a greater acceptance of decisions made by the court.

### Contact Details

Tel: 0161 830 5720  
[www.cafcass.gov.uk](http://www.cafcass.gov.uk)

## Children and Neighbourhoods in London (CNL), The Children's Society; London.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Non-statutory Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) scheme; Regional.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- Children aged 5 to 19;
- High proportion of children and young people from minority ethnic groups;
- Socially excluded/disadvantaged young people;
- Young carers;
- Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and behavioural/emotional problems.

### Purpose of participation

- To enable children and young people's participation in local decision making;
- To increase children and young people's participation in their local neighbourhoods resulting in feedback and positive action being taken by local decision makers;
- To influence the development of the Children and Neighbourhoods in London scheme, in terms of services provided and the development of working procedures/policies;
- To enable children and young people to develop the capacity to participate in their local neighbourhoods through the development of specific skills and through increased confidence.

### Ways young people involved

- 'Listen Up' pan-London group;
- Management of the project;
- Developing involvement in steering group voting rights;
- Planning and evaluations tie-in with partners (for example, housing trust worked with young people in the process of regeneration. They wrote a newsletter and sat on a council);
- Delivering services;
- Wider consultation in national and international events;
- Selection and recruitment process;
- Evaluation of services.

### Example of outputs

- Increased awareness and understanding of the needs of children and young people;
- Improved recruitment and selection processes resulted in better project staff;
- Children and young people develop a wide range of skills (e.g. organisational skills, recruitment and selection, planning cycles, newsletter and web site design, giving presentations, video editing);
- Children and young people have increased knowledge about agencies operating within their neighbourhoods and how they can influence decisions made within those agencies;
- Physical changes to local neighbourhoods (e.g. a playground was refurbished following recommendations from local children and young people);
- More accessible service provision (e.g. extension of opening hours of local library);

### Contact Details

Fiona Side (Scheme Manager) or Natalie Brash (Projects Manager)  
Tel: 0207 613 4107  
Email: cin@childsoc.org.uk  
Website: www.cnl.org.uk

## Children and Young People's Participation Project; Warrington.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Non-statutory; Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

The Project runs services for groups of children divided by age:

- Very young children: pre-school (under 5s, the majority aged 3);
- A children's group (aged 5-8 and 9-11);
- A boys group (aged 11-16);
- A girls group (aged 11-16).
- Children with disabilities and special needs are encouraged to participate by a dedicated Children's Society disability worker.

### Purpose of participation

- The aim of the Project as a whole is to involve very young children in their learning;
- For children to learn the skill of planning and making decisions;
- Through adults intermediaries children can effect changes in policy and practice that will benefit them, their peers, and their successors;
- To increase pride and confidence in children and young people;
- To enable children to become active learners.

### Ways young people involved

- Children choose which activities they wish to take part in;
- Planning and Review Sessions are held with children;
- Young children worked with architects to design their Home Corner, stating that they wanted a low window, a door that was easily opened and other facilities;
- Two children, aged 3 and 4, helped design the under-5s prospectus;
- Children took photographs of what they liked at PALS;
- When new equipment comes the children get to unwrap it and decide where it goes.

### Example of outputs

- Some young people used by other organisations in Warrington as consultants;
- Following consultation with the children in the design of the Home Corner, and after their recommendations had been applied, the children now use the area more often;
- In the Bright Beginnings group, parents are taught by example that their child can and will make decisions. This outcome positively affects the level of involvement the child has in their care at home;
- Greater confidence in very young children.

### Contact Details

Sue Preston (Senior Project Worker)  
Children and Young People's Participation Project  
4 Catterall Avenue, Orford  
Warrington, Cheshire, WA2 0JA

## Children's Voice Project; London.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Non-Statutory; Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- Children aged 5 to 11;
- Mixed ethnicity with high proportion of Bangladeshi children;
- Also targets Somalian young women and children with disabilities.

### Purpose of participation

- To involve children in community regeneration;
- To improve services/anti-poverty strategies;
- To increase children's empowerment;
- To increase children's personal development.

### Ways young people involved

- The Children's Forum makes decisions within its own group;
- One-off consultations;
- Presentations to decision makers on selection panel for consultants;
- Evaluation of the project.

### Example of outputs

- Children involved in designing park gates;
- Children influenced the appointment of consultants to develop local play facilities.

### Contact Details

Parul Begum (Project Manager)

Tel: 0207 247 5689

Email: cvj@chidsoc.org.uk

## Collingham Gardens Child Psychiatric Unit; London.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory (In-patient child psychiatric unit); Serves South East England.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- Children aged 5 to 13 years with complex mental health needs, requiring in-patient assessment.

### Purpose of participation

- In order to discover children's perceptions of the purpose of their admission to an in-patient unit, and factors which enhance or decrease their motivation to engage with therapeutic work.

### Ways young people involved

- Research interviews with children.

### Example of outputs

- Increased staff understanding of children's experiences of their treatment. In particular, the findings highlighted children's expectations of passivity in their own treatment and how this can undermine their therapeutic engagement;
- Increased commitment to involve children more in their own care (more dialogue with children about their treatment, increasing children's role in their own care planning and goal setting) and to consider ways to develop children's role in influencing the service;
- The research provided supporting evidence for staff views about outreach support, which is useful for funding purposes;
- Identification of the need for support for children entering hospital from community services, although this has not yet been disseminated or actioned.

### Contact Details

Gillian Rose (Consultant Child Psychiatrist)

Tel: 0208 846 6644

Email: [gillian.rose@cnwl.nhs.uk](mailto:gillian.rose@cnwl.nhs.uk)

Felicity Hepper (Senior Registrar)

Tel: 0208 354 8779

Email: [felicityhepper@hotmail.com](mailto:felicityhepper@hotmail.com)

## Contraception and Sexual Health Project (including Zone Youth Project, KISS and Club One); Nottingham.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory and non-statutory; Local.

Provides Outreach Contraception and Sexual Health Services which are integrated into three youth clubs, with another becoming operational in summer 2003.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- Between 12-25 years, majority aged between 13 – 19 years;
- Predominantly white young people but also African-Caribbean.

### Purpose of participation

- To reduce rate of teenage conception through innovative ways of engaging with socially excluded young people.

### Ways young people involved

- Young people involved in service development, delivery, decision making, and the monitoring and evaluation of services;
- All projects have accredited peer education and volunteering opportunities.

#### *KISS Project:*

- 700 young people consulted about setting up a new sexual health service in two secondary schools; 15 young people involved in the development of the service;
- A multi-agency steering group (which included young people) oversaw the project.
- Developing resources and publicity materials;
- Involved in discussions around funding and sustainability;
- Interviewing staff;
- Supporting evaluation processes so that they are young people-friendly.

#### *Zone Project:*

- Decisions on which projects are undertaken by young people;
- Setting up events – the World Aids Day party, for example;
- 3 young people are active members of the management committee;
- 6 young people run the Creative Youth Arts Company within Zone;
- Young people plan residential and other trips;
- Young people influenced the drug and alcohol policy;
- Articles and features in the Pulse Newsletter written by young people at Zone.

### Example of outputs

- Increase in young people's access to contraception and sexual health services;
- Greater choice, particularly for those who are least likely to access other services and who are highlighted as high-risk target groups by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit;
- Reduced waiting times, as a result of drop-in facilities;
- Early evaluation indicates that long-term outcomes will demonstrate an overall improvement in the sexual health of the young people within these communities;
- Meeting the needs and priorities of young people more effectively because of better understanding of needs;
- Young people report increased skills, confidence, self-esteem, knowledge, and ability to make positive choices;
- Improvements in the perception of young people in the local community.

### Contact Details

Judith Green (Outreach Co-ordinator)

Tel: 0115 971 5176

Email: [judith.green@nottinghamcity\\_pct.nhs.uk](mailto:judith.green@nottinghamcity_pct.nhs.uk)

## Deptford Green Secondary School; London.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory (Secondary School); Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- Children aged 11 to 19 years;
- A high proportion of ethnic minority groups and students with English as a second language;
- Area of high deprivation.

### Purpose of participation

- Learning and raised achievement;
- Sense of agency/power;
- Emotional literacy.

### Ways young people involved

- School council;
- Citizenship GCSE and citizenship in all curriculum subjects;
- Consultations about school and community environment;
- 'Jerry Springer' style assemblies;
- Students help develop school policies.

### Example of outputs

- Clocks placed in all classrooms;
- Pupils can wear hats in playground;
- Toilets repainted;
- Trial for students to have clear water bottles in lessons;
- Classrooms redecorated;
- New lighting in a local underpass.

### Contact Details

Keith Ajegbo (Principle)  
Tel: 0208 691 3236  
Email: keithajegbo@deptfordgreen.lewisham.sch.ac  
www.deptfordgreen.lewisham.sch.uk



## Dumfries and Galloway Youth Strategy Executive Group; Dumfries.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory; Regional.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- All young people aged 15-24 years;
- Targets under-represented young people such as gay and lesbian young people, young carers, young offenders and those who are unemployed.

### Purpose of participation

- To influence policy development through the Executive Committee;
- To discover the needs of young people and relate those needs to policy formulation;
- The personal development of young people involved through improving skills and experience;
- To create a sense of ownership of services in young people;
- To increase awareness of the role of the council;
- The empowerment of young people, irrespective of their disability, 'criminality', etc.

### Ways young people involved

- Drug policy for schools (local);
- Millennium Volunteer initiative (national);
- Student Council pilot;
- Involvement in the Development Plan, and the writing of the Annual Report and Rough Guide to Services for Young People;
- The YSEG consult with other young people's groups in the planning, design, and implementation of services/facilities;
- Influencing policy within the local council;
- Funding projects/initiatives;
- In the administration of services such as the Youth Festival and conferences;
- Training events facilitated by the young people of the YSEG;
- Young people evaluate achievement annually in view of the Development Plan and adjust aims and objectives accordingly.

### Example of outputs

- Aims and objectives have been tailored to reflect the needs of young people in the area;
- A culture of participation is emerging in the region;
- The council has adopted the recommendations of a document produced in consultation with young people;
- The YSEG has funded and continues to fund various initiatives and projects in the region. They have complete control over the distribution of their £60,500 budget;
- Other organisations have received training from young people on how to treat them, and on the challenges they face;
- Ride 4 Free initiative enabled young people from across the region to access leisure facilities much more easily, and without expense;
- Growth of confidence, self-esteem, communication skills, and experience in young people;
- Young people have developed an understanding and appreciation of the role of the council and the effectiveness of working in an executive group;
- A skate park is in the process of being built following the funding that the YSEG allocated to the project.

### Contact Details

Ian Donaldson (Youth Strategy Co-ordinator)  
Tel: 01387 260 041  
Email: [ianDo2@dumgal.gov.uk](mailto:ianDo2@dumgal.gov.uk)  
Website: <http://www.dumgal.gov.uk>

## Investing In Children (IiC); Durham.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory; Regional.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

Children aged 4 to early 20s.

### Purpose of participation

- Consultation with children, young people and their families about decisions affecting their lives and the development of services;
- To promote partnerships between individuals and agencies to address young people's issues;
- To develop accessible and non-stigmatising services for children and young people;
- To assess potential impact of services on the children and young people.

### Ways young people involved

- IiC Membership scheme;
- Consultation work with external services;
- Control over individual projects' budgets;
- Advisory/action groups, including the IiC Environmental Group, the IiC Transport Group, the Bishop Auckland Diabetes Group and the H.E.A.R Group;
- Involving young people in National Policy;
- International Policy;
- International Learning Exchange: Baltimore, 2002;
- Involved in external evaluation;
- Running conferences;
- Involvement with recruitment and appointment: young people created their own recruitment panel.

### Example of outputs

- Involvement in creating Children's Service Plans;
- Community Support Scheme (for Social Services) practices and resources were changed with further developments of Team's Action Plan and IiC being placed on the agenda of every team meeting;
- Many of The Bishop Auckland Diabetes Group's recommendations have been accepted by professionals who worked closely with the group.

#### *The Membership Scheme:*

- 93 agencies have successfully applied for IiC status, and a further 60 have applied acting on issues raised by young people;
- Nursery school eating system and menus changed, resulting in better diet for children and less waste;
- Police have changed some of the beats where there are police officers who the young people don't like;
- Darlington Council provided 3 buses to transport young people to resources;
- Anti-bullying policy developed by Durham County Council;
- Concessionary bus fare scheme introduced benefiting 17,000 children and young people at the cost of a further £100,000 per annum;
- Attitudes of adults towards children and young people is beginning to change.

### Contact Details

Liam Cairns (Project Manger)  
Tel: 0191 386 7485  
Email: liam.cairns@durham.gov.uk

## Lambeth Youth Council; Lambeth, London.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory; Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- All young people;
- There is a core membership of approximately 20 young people, although as many as 150 can be involved in the Youth Council at any one time;
- Very diverse with relation to ethnic minority groups.

### Purpose of participation

- To highlight areas within the various services that treat/affect young people, the deficiencies or dissatisfactory elements of those services, and to initiate policy/practice change to make those services more attractive to young people;
- To engage young people in their community as active (and thus valued) citizens.

### Ways young people involved

- There are formal monthly meetings for the discussion of current local issues that affect young people, and appropriate actions are taken;
- The Youth Council are acting as consultants in the GEL project and a number of regenerative projects;
- Young people working on the Peer Inspection project have identified problems with local facilities which are to be acted upon by the Senior Youth Council Development Managers;
- Youth Council members are heavily involved in the recruitment process for employees who will be working within or serving the Youth Council;
- Community liaison, such as Stop and Search where young people discuss issues with local police;
- The Teenage Pregnancy project;
- Youth Council members will be training police using the Snakes and Ladders resource;
- Through designing the recruitment pack and fliers, giving presentations about the project, and providing taster days, the Youth Council was involved in the recruitment of young workers for the Teenage Pregnancy project;
- Consultation events;
- Training events.

### Example of outputs

- Partnership building between young people and the police has resulted in greater understanding;
- Schools in Lambeth benefit from having a group of people that pupils can relate to coming into classrooms and discussing sexual health issues and teenage pregnancy as part of the Teenage Pregnancy project;
- Improved youth-related services;
- Personal development;
- Work experience;
- Youth Council members act as exemplary models to other young people, resulting in a more cohesive community.

### Contact Details

Amajit Chanion (Youth Council Development Manager)

Tel: 0207 926 2193

Email: [achanion@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:achanion@lambeth.gov.uk)

## Middle Street Nursery; Brighton.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory Nursery within primary school; Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- Children aged 3 to 4 years.

### Purpose of participation

- Intellectual learning;
- Wellbeing;
- Emotional security and emotional equity.

### Ways young people involved

- Individual decision-making;
- Self-directed learning.

### Example of outputs

Children influence how they learn;  
Educational attainment improved (excellent Ofsted report).

### Contact Details

Polly Dyer (Nursery Teacher)  
Tel: 01273 708 416  
Email: polly\_dyer@hotmail.com

## Middlesbrough Youth Inclusion Project; West Middlesbrough.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory; Local.

Middlesbrough YIP is a part of the South Tees Youth Offending Service. It is a preventative strategy, managed at neighbourhood level by Safe in Tees Valley, a community safety partnership

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- The top 50 most at risk young people in the YIP's geographical area;
- 438 young people are engaged in the programme;
- 300 took part in the Summer Splash in 2002.

### Purpose of participation

- Empowerment;
- To lower youth offending;
- To increase young people's welfare;
- To foster community involvement and the development of personal aspirations.

### Ways young people involved

- Young people formulate their own needs assessment with a Case Worker;
- The Carter Park regeneration initiative involved young people in planning what the site would be used for;
- The West Lane Youth Forum has been actively involved in a project to develop a local church hall to provide facilities for young people in the area;
- Youth Forums, such as the West Middlesbrough Young Voice or the West Lynne and Newport Youth Forum, and young people's involvement in neighbourhood trusts enables them to participate in service planning;
- An ex-offender is on the Young Mayor's Executive Board;
- Young people sit on the board of the Neighbourhood Trust and make decisions which affect the distribution of £52m in the NDC area;
- As part of the Fear of Crime initiative, young people from the West Middlesbrough YIP and a group of older people from across Middlesbrough each created a video that demonstrates the impact of crime on their lives;
- Young people involved with Groundwork constructed 100 bird boxes for the local cemetery;
- The 'Splash' School Holiday programmes are now being partly coordinated by young people;
- The YIP young people and local residents set up a Fishing Club which has its own committee and has successfully applied for funding for the provision of equipment;
- West Middlesbrough Young Voices regeneration project;
- Junior Leaders and Mentors help other young people in the area;
- Young people attend and speak at conferences, and have spoken to many ministers and been invited to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister;
- Surveys and focus groups are conducted with young people;
- The Young Person's Research Team North East is evaluating local YIPs.

### Example of outputs

- Increased staff knowledge on providing a service that will be valued;
- Increased access for young people to other youth services;
- Employment opportunities created;
- Increased cross-generational relationships through regeneration projects and other interventions;
- Positive effect on patterns of behaviour of young people 'at risk';
- Increased personal development.

### Contact Details

Paul Surtees (Youth Inclusion Manager)  
Tel: 01642 816 011

## North Huyton New Deal for Communities Partnership (NDC); North Huyton.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory (limited company by guarantee); Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

### Purpose of participation

- To develop a better sense of community;
- To de-stigmatise young people;
- To create cross-generational links;
- To enable young people to have a say in how the area they live in is run.

### Ways young people involved

- The Youth Forum is running three projects with complete autonomy;
- Recruitment, funding, administration, and all the other aspects of project design and delivery are dealt with by the young people;
- Young people are involved in financial decisions, and have and will have a say as to how the NDC money is distributed and spent;
- Young people are encouraged to have as much say as possible in the youth club and in choosing where to go on trips away;
- Young people were consulted regarding their environment and what could be improved;
- Young people are on the Partnership Board, comprising all local governmental agencies, which is responsible for strategic decisions.

### Example of outputs

- North Huyton NDC has learnt how to consult with young people effectively;
- Young people feel greater ownership of projects which adds to sustainability;
- A greater feeling of citizenship has developed in North Huyton;
- The organisation is gaining an invaluable insight into what it is like to be an adolescent in North Huyton;
- Youth Forum has influenced investment in youth service and youth provision;
- Other organisations are beginning to make services more appropriate for young users;
- The young people have received training to link up with and involve other young people.

### Contact Details

Bridgette Brennan (Youth Engagement Officer)  
Tel: 0151 443 5882  
E-mail: [bridgette.brennan@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:bridgette.brennan@knowsley.gov.uk)

## The Rights and Participation Project (RAPP); Hull.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Partnership with Social Services Department and the Warren Resource Centre for Young People; City-wide across Hull, with support from Connexions and Community Health Services.

RAPP works with children and young people:

- Who are in need or at risk to provide a children and young people's rights service;
- To get their views on issues of importance to them.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- Children aged 9-21 years;
- Children in need (in care, care leavers, young carer's, young and separated refugees, young people with disabilities, young people leading risky lifestyles).

### Purpose of participation

- To give access to independent advice and advocacy and make sure children's views are valued and recognised;
- To fulfil the RAPP's belief in the rights of those it serves to participate in decisions that affect their lives and to be listened to and taken seriously about things that are important to them.

### Ways young people involved

- Young people are involved in individual decision-making on their access to and provision of services;
- Advocacy work is set up to the wishes of the young person;
- Young people are actively encouraged to make decisions with regard to planning and designing services;
- The Snap Shot review is a 3-monthly forum where they can air their views;
- Informal and ongoing evaluation;
- Young people have a say on the budget, an input into publications, are involved in the recruitment process, and in designing and planning services;
- There is a peer-support mechanism within the project;
- Providing training for social workers and teachers;
- SSD inspectorates accompanied by young people;
- Complaints procedure;
- Periodic evaluation forms.

### Example of outputs

- Opening times changed;
- An extra room is now used by the young people;
- Publicity material changed to make it more young people-friendly;
- A new consultation booklet produced to replace the Social Services' 'Young People's Reviews', considered boring by young people;
- Changes to job specifications and questions at interviews;
- All schools now have a designated teacher for young people in care;
- Peer-led research carried out in 1997 has been a catalyst in setting up young people's support services;
- 'One Stop Shop' where all agencies are under one roof has been set up;
- There is now a single advice line for bullied children and young people in the area;
- The 'Bully Beat Crew' established by Rapp, Hull Youth Council and the Warren Support and Campaign group for young people experiencing bullying.

### Contact Details

Craig Clarke (Children's Rights Officer/Manager)  
Tel: 01482 225 855  
Email: rapp.yahoo.co.uk

## Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Hospital Trust; Two Children's Units in inner-city Birmingham.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory NHS Trust; Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- Adolescents aged 11-18 years;
- In-patients, out-patients and external groups of young people.

### Purpose of participation

- To create an environment that meets the needs of young people;
- To make the service more patient-focused and patient-driven.

### Ways young people involved

- Young people involved in admission process (discretionary);
- Young people involved in decisions about their own treatment;
- Satisfaction Surveys on service;
- Focus groups evaluate the service;
- User Group Assessment: On a quarterly basis an appropriate group is invited to the Unit to comment on the broader aspects of service provision, along with parents and staff;
- External young people involved in evaluating the service;
- Meeting with young people to review the quarterly report and validate results;
- Feedback received from child and family on discharge of child.

### Example of outputs

- Professionals more 'in tune' with young people's needs, meeting their expectations;
- Greater compliance with treatment by self-harmers and the chronically ill because they have been involved;
- New design for teenage room;
- Introduction of sanitary towel machines;
- Reassured and confident about medication and condition through being involved in process with medical professionals;
- More control over individual drug use in hospital and at home.

### Contact Details

Jon Needham (Family Support Worker)  
Tel: 0121 507 4848  
Email: jon.needham@swbh.nhs.uk



## Saying Power (Young Refugee Rights Project); West London.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Non-statutory; National Charity (Save the Children).

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

The scheme targeted young people who had experienced social exclusion and discrimination and thus had fewer opportunities available to them.

### Purpose of participation

- The overall goal of the Scheme was to increase the participation of young people in decisions that affect them, thereby promoting citizenship and democracy from an early age, and improving services for young people at local government and community levels.

### Ways young people involved

#### *Saying Power:*

- All projects initiated and planned by Award Holders;
- Individual projects have an effect on policy – around 80% are involved in local policy groups and decisions;
- End of year conference designed and delivered by Award Holders;
- Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation.

#### *YRRP:*

- Young people are directly involved in planning and implementation of the project;
- The group decided on the name, logo and aims of the YRRP;
- Members decide the agenda of meetings and when they take place;
- Young refugees identified local issues, especially those relevant to looked-after refugees, and made contact with them to raise these issues;
- Advise agencies and government in dealing with young asylum seekers and refugees;
- Organises educational and informative events for young people based on Children Rights Convention;
- YRRP invites professionals to talk to young people on issues concerning them;
- YRRP refers young people to other organisations and agencies for getting support and advice;
- Developing networks with other organisations;
- Member of Home Office Unaccompanied Minors Stakeholders Group and the Children and Young People's Unit Advisory Forum;
- Representing young people in Hammersmith and Fulham Borough Partnership;
- Working with media to raise positive image of young refugees and asylum seekers.

### Example of outputs

#### *Save the Children:*

- Save the Children influenced by the Scheme in working in participatory ways with young people;
- Shift to more youth-centred initiatives;
- Challenged host organisations working methods;
- Staff increased their knowledge of specific issues facing young people;
- Personal and pre-professional development for Award Holders.

#### *YRRP:*

- Social Services changed their practice of working with young refugees;
- Specialist Educational worker appointed;
- Bus passes provided;
- Hammersmith and West London College organised events based on children's rights;
- Increased knowledge of the whole refugee and asylum system and their entitlements;
- Replacing the use of local authority vouchers with a cash allowance;
- Publishing a booklet for newly arrived young refugees to help them know their rights and what support is available locally.

### Contact Details

Helen Thompson  
UK Co-ordinator for Saying Power  
tel: 0121 5581344  
h.thompson@scfuk.co.uk

Mustajab Malikzada  
Key worker – Young Refugees Rights Project  
0208 741 4054  
malikzadam@scfuk.org.uk

## SCAPE; Sheffield.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Non-statutory (RPS Rainer, national charity); Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- Young people aged 14 to 16 who are excluded or not attending school and who are at risk of offending, or have received a Final Reparation Order, Referral Order, Action Plan Order, or referred by Educational Services.

### Purpose of participation

- To help young people who are socially excluded and disadvantaged to reach their potential;
- To change the view that people have of young offenders or young people at risk;
- To provide opportunities for those at risk between 14 and 16 years who have less services available to them.

### Ways young people involved

- Young people incorporate individual issues into their ASDAN educational programme;
- Decision-making in relation to budget;
- Basketball teams set up;
- Helping Connexions design this year's summer programme;
- Young people decide on what sessional workers they have and whether they should come again;
- Delivering training to SOVA (Society of Voluntary Association) volunteers;
- Young people involved in recruitment process of YOT officers;
- Young people involved in recruiting other young people for the programme;
- Peer mentoring – young people who have completed the 12-weeks can come back to assist in the running of the next programme;
- One young man worked as an undercover agent to evaluate youth sexual health services;
- Evaluating Connexions Summer programme.

### Example of outputs

- Provision of a relevant service;
- Profile of SCAPE raised by young people's involvement;
- Evaluating Connexions' Summer programme led to extra SCAPE funding;
- Greater understanding and access to client group for SOVA and volunteers after training;
- Skills, experience and personal benefits for young people;
- Young people are establishing new groups of friends away from those that are still involved in crime etc;
- Perceptions of this group of young people improving.

### Contact Details

Kath Jacques (Service Co-ordinator)  
Tel: 0114 275 9291 (Ext 27)  
Email: [scape@newdirections.f9.co.uk](mailto:scape@newdirections.f9.co.uk)

## Skye & Lochalsh Young Carers Project; Isle of Skye.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Non-Statutory; Local.

- Skye and Lochalsh Young Carers is part of Skye and Lochalsh Community Care Forum.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

40 young carers aged 5 to 18 years with caring responsibilities.

### Purpose of participation

- Identification of needs;
- Encourage decision-making.

### Ways young people involved

- Young carers choose the level of involvement which suits them;
- Young carers decide what they want to be involved in;
- Working/challenge games to promote decision-making;
- Young Carers fill in questionnaires which they have asked for and helped to design, and which are used to inform schools of the young carers' situations;
- Respite Outings where individual needs are discussed with young carer;
- Weekly supported group meetings x 3: a primary group, a secondary group and an additional needs group, with flexibility to move between groups as stepping stones to peer level;
- Young Carer Focus Group Meetings;
- Young carers on Skye and Lochalsh Community Care Forum Management Committee;
- Young people involved in creating internal policies;
- Young carers devised guidelines for hospital on how health professionals should approach/support them;
- Young carer's involved in input to the Highland's Children Service Plan and Carer's Bill;
- Young carers involved in the development and training of front line care staff;
- Skills development training is organised and delivered to meet young carer's self identified needs e.g. First Aid, Moving and Handling, Stress and Anger Management and social skills;
- Produced the Young Carers 'Hands On' Information Pack;
- Take part in evaluation report through questionnaires;
- Involved in activity evaluations across the service.

### Example of outputs

- Workers have gained more knowledge from the young carers about working with this client group;
- A higher response to questionnaires for young carers and their families, and therefore more information on the needs of the service users has been gained;
- Young carers have trust and confidence in the project which benefits the development of the project;
- Care attendants felt more able to understand the needs of young carers after training course;
- Young Carer Guidelines distributed and introduced to NHS providers;
- Young carer's influenced the Highland's Children Service Plan and Carer's Bill;
- 'Hand On' Information Pack is being used locally and has now been rolled out across the Highlands;
- Recognition of gaps in service provision for young carers;
- Increased support from guidance counsellors;
- Increased feeling of control.

### Contact Details

Marjory Jagger (Senior Development Worker)

Tel: 01478 613 361

Email: mjagger@slccf.fsnet.co.uk

### **Type of organisation and level of operation**

Non-statutory; Regional (pilots).

- Sportsearch is internet CD-ROM for the use of young people and teachers in finding the most appropriate sport for a young person and their nearest sports facilities.

### **Characteristics of children/young people involved**

- Secondary school-aged children;
- Three age ranges were involved so as to best represent the target of the website.

### **Purpose of participation**

- To tailor the facility to young people's needs;
- The aims of the OLR pilot evaluation, which involved young people, include the assessment of young people's enjoyment and knowledge of, and access to, sport.

### **Ways young people involved**

- Pre-pilot involvement in picking preferred design of the website and influencing content;
- Filmed as models of different sports techniques for the website;
- Undergraduates at the Liverpool John Moores University helped lead tasks with young people;
- In an external evaluation process where young people took part in focus groups and went through the website page-by-page with researchers.

### **Example of outputs**

- Ongoing evaluation with pre-pilot and pilot groups resulted in a website tailored for young people;
- Young people have learnt about the filming process;
- Questionnaires changed because young people found them over-long and boring;
- Greater awareness of certain sensitive areas for children (e.g. weighing themselves).

### **Contact Details**

Mark Ormerod (Sportsearch Manager)  
Tel: 0207 273 1620  
Email: [mark.ormerod@sportengland.org](mailto:mark.ormerod@sportengland.org)

## Step into Sport; Loughborough.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Charitable Trust; National.

- The Step into Sport leadership and volunteering project has been designed to establish a simple framework of co-ordinated opportunities at a local level to enable young people and adults to begin and sustain involvement in leadership and volunteering through sport.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- School-aged children and university students.

### Purpose of participation

- To ensure that the programme is relevant, appropriate, pitched at the right level and that young people are supported.

### Ways young people involved

- Sport Education programme planned in consultation with young people;
- Key Stage 4 students run sports festivals for their local primary school in consultation with teachers, who act in the role of facilitator;
- Festival organising groups are involved in all stages of planning;
- Following training from Mentors, Community Volunteers plan their festival;
- Young people decided what kind of venue the Youth Sport Trust Millennium Volunteers award ceremony should be held in, and that the dress code should be smart;
- Mentors pick which services to offer/issues to cover from a booklet;
- Young people volunteering in primary schools (though as part of the Youth Sports Trust Community Volunteers programme) share decision-making with teachers in the schools;
- The Young Persons' Steering Group attended a meeting to give its opinion on the service;
- The camp is evaluated by young people with questionnaires.

### Example of outputs

- The design of the Youth Sport Trust Community Volunteers programme portfolio was changed on the advice of young people;
- Greater understanding of working with young people.

### Contact Details

Andy Martin (National Programmes Director)  
Tel: 01509 226 600  
E-mail: andy.martin@youthsportstrust.org

## Triangle Services for Children; Brighton.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Non-Statutory; National.

- Provides outreach support and consultations with children, as well as consultancy and training for professionals.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

- Disabled children and young people aged 3 to 16 years (sometimes older/younger);
- Non-disabled children are involved in some projects;
- Outreach support is for children whose behaviour is causing serious concern.

### Purpose of participation

- Empowerment of children and young people facing discrimination due to age and/or disability;
- To ensure services are relevant;
- Fulfils commitment to children's rights and work informed by a social model of disability.

### Ways young people involved

- Triangle focuses on assessing children's own experiences/views/feelings;
- Children have a say about how they are involved in assessments;
- Development of individual 'passports' together with the child, which outline what they like and dislike, how they communicate and what support they need;
- Ascertain and promote children's views in child protection/legal cases;
- 3 young people's consultative groups (3 to 7, 6 to 11 years, 11-plus) advise Triangle and other organisations (e.g. research reference group for Audit Commission);
- Older young people are involved in staff recruitment and in training other professionals;
- Children and young people participate in one-off consultations about other organisations' services (the website respite care, leisure services, schools);
- Children and young people involved in making 2 videos on communication for other organisations and a symbol vocabulary system.

### Example of outputs

- Professionals able to work more effectively with children with challenging behaviour;
- In child protection/court assessment, children's views influence case outcomes;
- Consultative group keeps Triangle informed of differences and complexity of views/values and encourages staff to reflect on their actions/methods;
- Development of a vocabulary system and a series of communication videos;
- In Audit Commission research, the young people's views influenced research methodology and recommendations.

### Contact Details

Ruth Marchant (Director)  
Tel: 01273 413 141  
Email: [info@triangle-services.co.uk](mailto:info@triangle-services.co.uk)

## West of England Connexions; (Four Unitary Authorities) Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory; Sub-regional.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

Young people aged 13-19 years from across the 4 local authority areas.

### Purpose of participation

To actively involve young people in the development, delivery and governance of Connexions West of England.

### Ways young people involved

*Corporately:*

- Young people from the 4 regions take part in local development groups;
- Focus groups that run regularly to discuss different issues such as promotional materials and website development;
- CYPU Listening Tour;
- Training Government Office policy makers;
- All front-line staff are interviewed by young people.

*South Gloucestershire:*

- Consultations with young people by different service providers and Connexions.

*Bath and NE Somerset:*

- The Youth Council are involved in consultations and developing their own ideas and linking in with Connexions and the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP).

*Bristol:*

- Young people involved in developing a personal development model.

### Example of outputs

- Information points will be available in local areas for young people;
- Connexions centre redesigned;
- 'Credit' card design of leaflets used by the Personal Advisors;
- Development of policy on how to involve children and young people in meetings.

### Contact Details

Jo Grant (Community Development Manager)  
Connexions West of England  
Floor 2, 4 Colston Avenue,  
Bristol, BS1 4ST  
Email: [jgrant@connexionxwest.org.uk](mailto:jgrant@connexionxwest.org.uk)

## Wheatcroft Primary School; Hertford.

### Type of organisation and level of operation

Statutory (Primary School); Local.

### Characteristics of children/young people involved

Children aged 4 to 11 years.

### Purpose of participation

- Enhances children's learning;
- Children have increased ownership of decisions made about school.

### Ways young people involved

- Children have a say in how they learn;
- Whole school mixed-age weekly circle time meetings, facilitated by Year 6 pupils and minuted by Year 5 pupils;
- Peer research;
- Bully box and suggestion post-it notes;
- Peer education and peer support;
- Children develop school policies on racism and behaviour.

### Example of outputs

- Influence on decision-making, including about tuck shop and playground equipment;
- Children feel listened to and feel ownership of outputs;
- Teachers learn more about children's competencies;
- Children learn to empathise with teachers.

### Contact Details

Alison Botarelli (Acting Headteacher)  
Tel: 01992 587 899  
Email: head.wheatcroft@thegrid.org.uk



## **Zebedees; Truro, Cornwall.**

### **Type of organisation and level of operation**

Non-Statutory; Local.

- A community organisation which provides drop-in services, training placements and long-term support.

### **Characteristics of children/young people involved**

A wide range of young people from the local area, including young people who are excluded from other more mainstream provision.

### **Purpose of participation**

- To ensure that involvement and young people's influence continues.

### **Ways young people involved**

- Informally, with regard to what activities are offered;
- Group meetings about funding decisions and renovations of the building;
- Members of the board of management.

### **Example of outputs**

- Withdrew from funding due to decision made by the young people.

### **Contact Details**

Kate Smith – (Project co-ordinator)  
Tel: 01872 261 118 / 01872 268 860  
Email: zebedees@ypc.org.uk



## Appendix 2:

### Database and Case Study Organisations

This Appendix provides an overview of the database and case study samples. While not purporting to be representative, nonetheless the database provides a useful summary of a substantial slice of current participation activity with children and young people. Although the sample of case studies was purposively drawn, it too demonstrates the very diverse nature of children and young people’s participation.

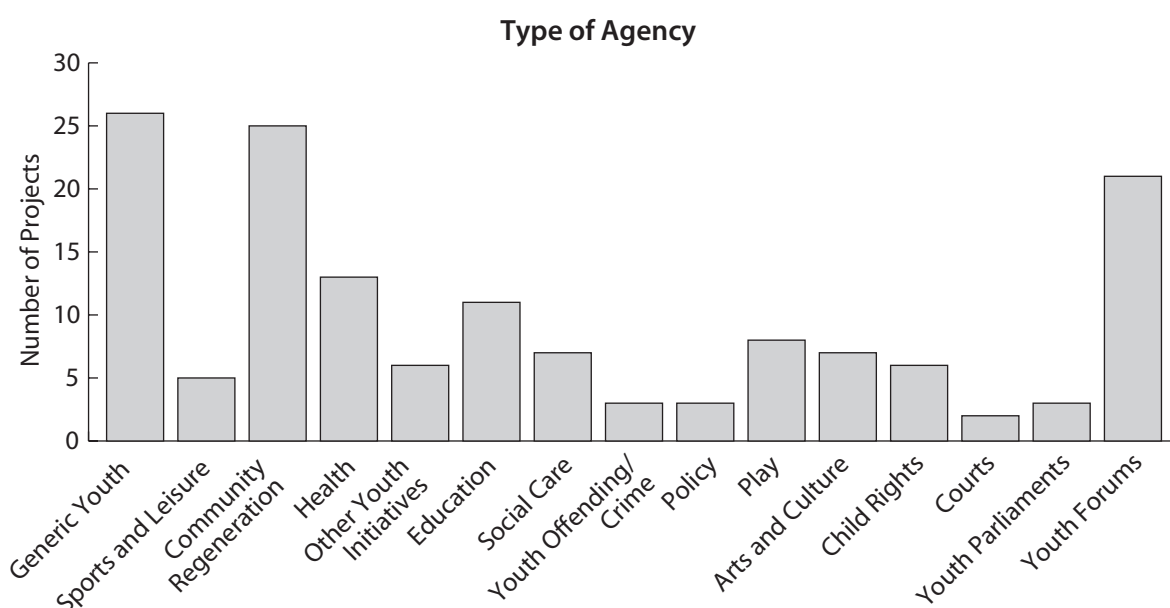
### Database Sample

The database sample comprises 146 agencies. There is considerable variety in the focus of these and in the participation work that they undertake with children and young people. These characteristics are summarised below.

### Service Area

The agencies in the database sample provided a wide range of different services to children and young people. These have been grouped into 15 different categories, shown in Figure A.1, followed by a brief summary of each area. It can be seen that the service areas with the greatest representation in the sample are youth work and regeneration, while those relating to youth justice and the courts are least well represented.

Figure A.1 Service Area



**Generic Youth:** Projects in this category are youth work based, usually working with young people aged 12 to 18, in local catchment areas and doing some targeted work with more vulnerable groups of young people. All the organisations involve children and young people in strategic development and/or service planning with the aim of addressing lack of services and improving existing services. Most of the services also work with the children and young people on an individual level, supporting them in making decisions about their own lives and in accessing services.

**Sports and Leisure:** The agencies fell into two categories: local activities for young people, particularly in rural areas, consulting with children and young people about what type of activities they would like and how to overcome barriers to accessing these; second, young people's involvement in national agencies developing strategic sporting initiatives.

**Community Regeneration:** This work is generally local, involving young people in strategic development and service planning with the aim of either getting children and young people's voices heard in existing adult led regeneration work or children and young people initiating their own projects to improve their communities. There was a relatively even spread in the sample across inner city, urban and rural areas. The age range is broad, involving young people from 5 years old and upwards.

**Health:** Projects in this category range from influencing a specific service locally, research on children as service users, evaluation of services on their responsiveness to children and young people. Those involved range from very young children to 18 and above. Many of the children and young people are users of specific services. Just over half of the agencies are statutory, a large proportion being hospitals.

**Other youth initiatives:** Most of these initiatives, such as Connexions and Early Years Partnerships, operate in urban and rural areas, and involve children and young people in service planning and delivery and individual decisions. The aim is to recognise children and young people as the clients and to ensure the service meets their needs.

**Education:** Most of the work in this category takes place in schools, with the aim of hearing children and young people's voices in the planning and running of the school and for individual students to be more involved in their own learning. A number of projects focus specifically on supporting physically disabled and learning disabled children and young people and a number focus on very young children.

**Youth Offending/Crime:** Projects in this category were either research based, or working with young offenders or those at risk of offending. The aim of the latter category is to empower young people to make positive decisions in their lives. The young people are also involved in the planning and delivery of the service. The young people involved range from eleven to eighteen.

**Policy:** This work, which is either regionally or nationally based and all statutory, aims to involve children and young people in policy development or making policy accessible to children and young people. This work involves the older age range, from twelve upwards.

**Play:** These projects' aims are to involve children and young people in the design and delivery of play provision and facilities. The majority of these projects are non-statutory and work locally. They mainly work in urban or inner city environments with younger children and young people. Many of the projects target marginalized or disabled children and young people.

**Arts and Culture:** All these projects involve children and young people in service delivery and some involve them in planning. The media that the young people work in are varied, ranging from magazines to drama. The ages of the children and young people range from eleven upwards. Most of the agencies are non-statutory and the work is spread across local, regional and national levels of operation.

**Child Rights:** Children and young people's involvement in this category is quite varied, ranging from service planning and delivery, research, policy development and individual decision-making. The aim of involvement is varied, ranging from increasing involvement in decisions about their own care to involvement in raising awareness on child rights. Most of the work is locally based with a range of inner city, urban and rural projects.

**Courts:** The courts mainly involve children and young people in individual decision-making though there is an initiative to involve children and young people in service design and delivery. They represent all children and young people, though a higher proportion of vulnerable children and young people.

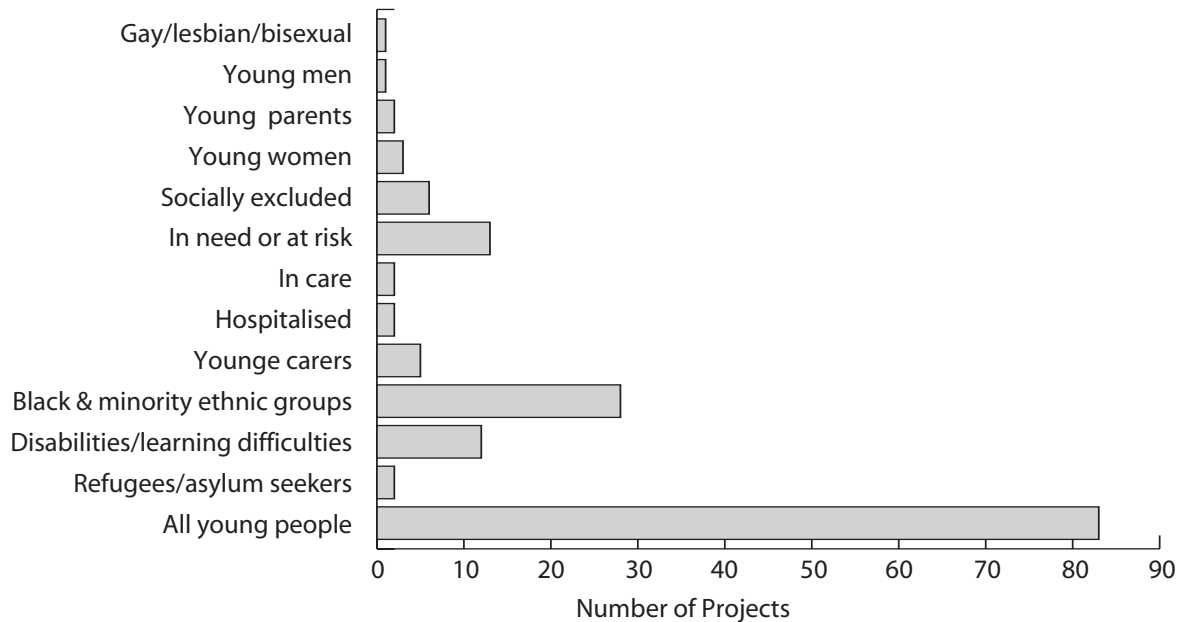
**Youth Parliaments:** Projects in this category work across a local area or region to influence strategic development, service planning and delivery, research, evaluation and policy and are a mix of statutory and non-statutory. Young people are involved in the running of the parliaments themselves. The age range is from 11 upwards.

**Forums:** This category has the largest number of projects. Most are statutory and operate locally or regionally. They work in a range of settings – inner city, urban and rural – and some work across all three. Generally the age range is 11 upwards with some focusing on those 15 and above. The general aim of youth forums is to ensure young people play a role in the strategic development, service planning and delivery, research and evaluation of services for children and young people in the locality.

- **Diverse groups of children and young people**

While services are most often open to all children and young people, agencies may target specific groups of children and young people and many work with several specific groups, as shown in the figure below.

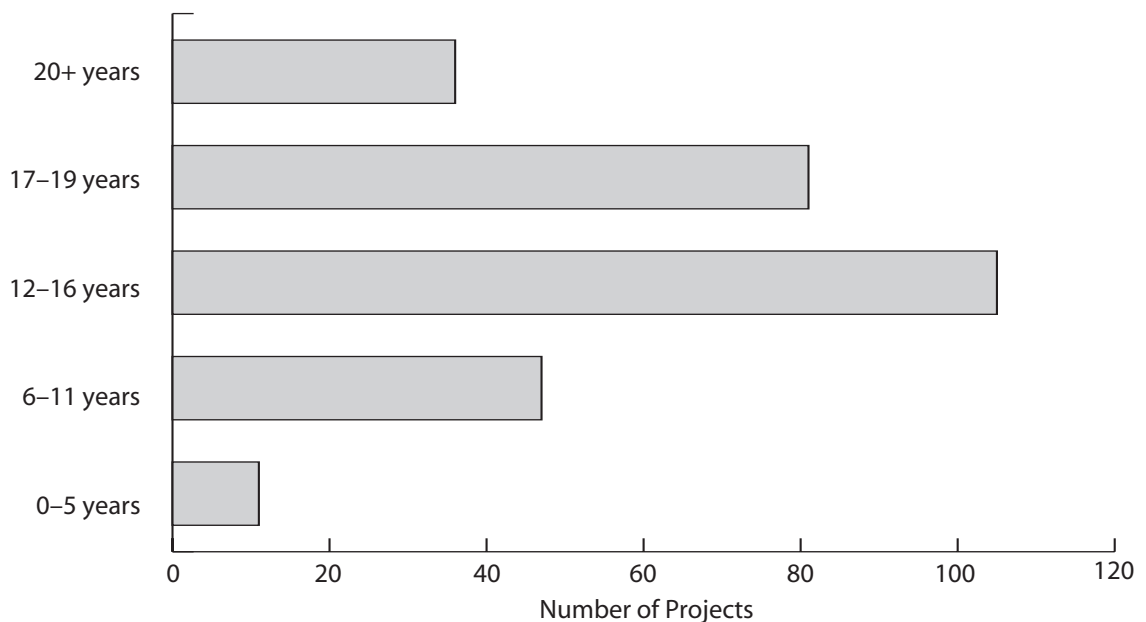
**Figure A.2 Groups of Young People**



- **Ages of children and young people involved.**

The most common age range for agencies to work with is 12 – 16, but all ages are included in participation work and many work across a number of the age groups.

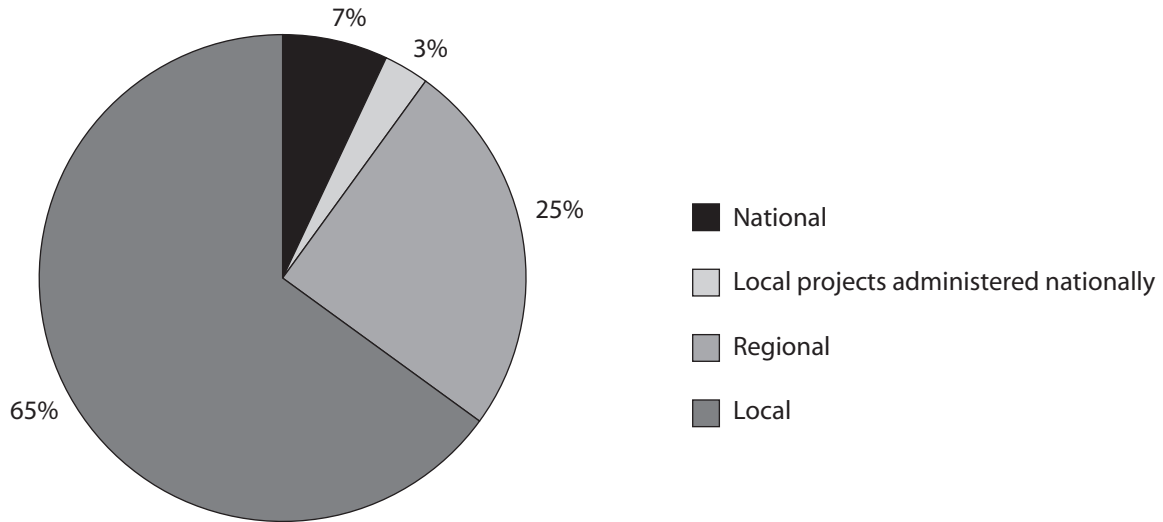
**Figure A. 3 Ages of young people involved**



### • Working nationally, regionally and locally

Two thirds of the agencies in the sample work at a local level, with a further quarter operating regionally, as shown below.

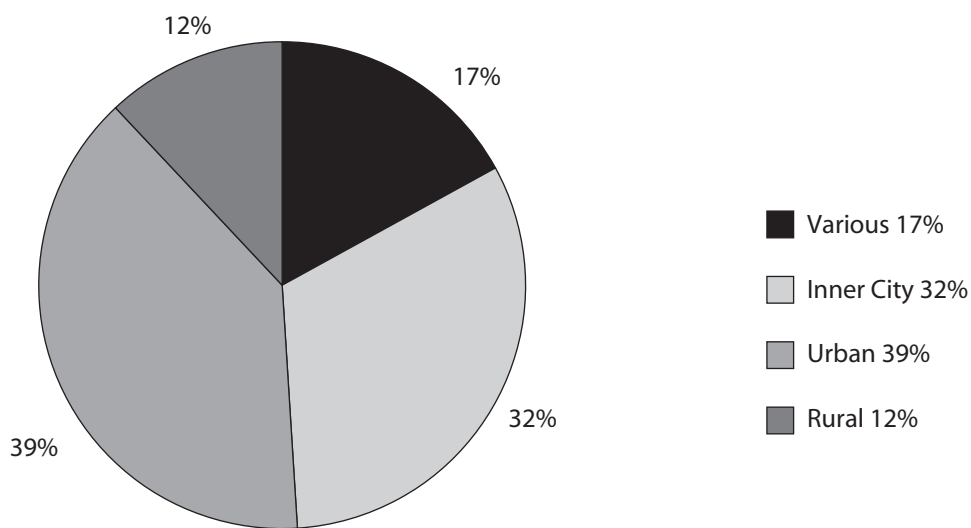
**Figure A. 4 National, regional and local agencies**



### • Working in rural, inner-city and urban areas

Provision is spread across different contexts usually within just one area. Some regional and national provision encompasses inner city, urban and rural, hence the 'various' category.

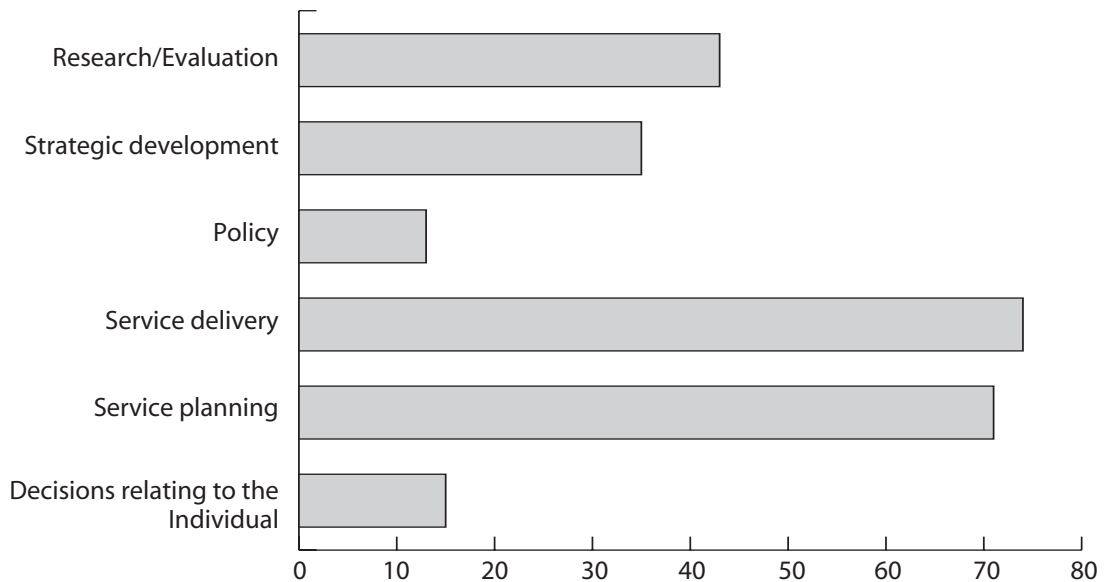
**Figure A.5 Location**



## ● Focus of Participation

While service delivery and planning is the most common focus for participation activity, all the agencies in the sample involved children and young people in more than one area.

**Figure A.6 Focus of Participation**



## Case Study Agencies

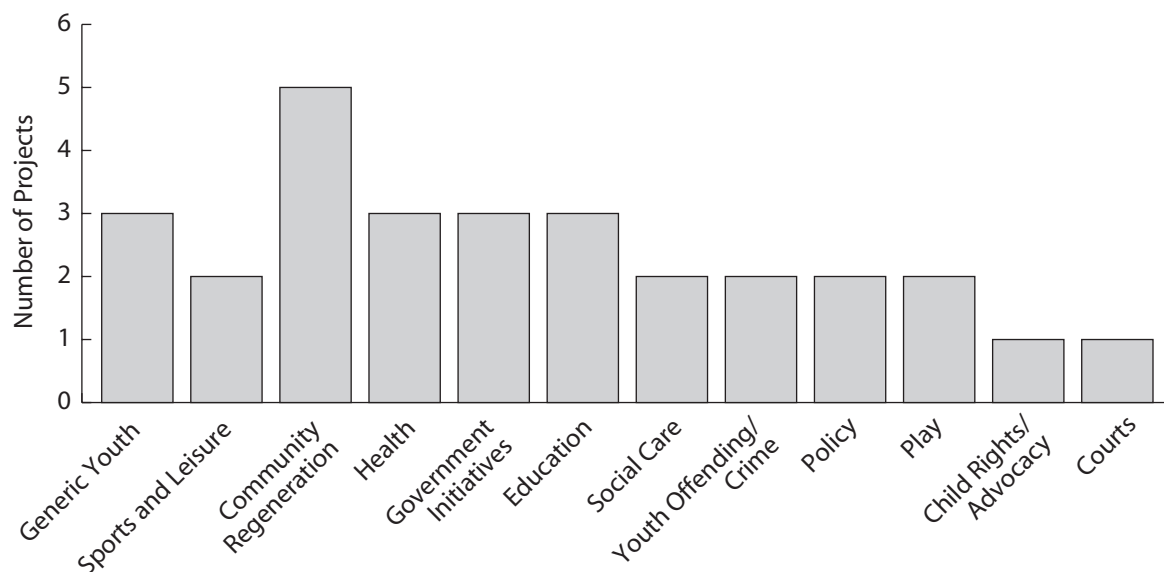
An overview of the selected case studies is presented below, with reference to the selection criteria set out in Chapter 2.

### ***Criteria 1a: 'To reflect a wide range of agencies which provided services for children and young people.'***

The scope of the agencies selected was broad and included the widest possible spread across a range of services for young people. Government departments were included to help inform their future policy making.



**Figure A.7 Service Area.**



**Generic youth:** Three generic youth projects were selected to investigate how participation can work alongside a more traditional youth work setting. These were:

- Zebedees – a project that young people initiated through request;
- Saying Power – a scheme to engage socially excluded young people in setting up their own projects for other children and young people.
- The Barn Youth & Community Centre (Grassroots/Griffin News) – Arts and culture which was represented by a youth club where young people had written a page in the local newspaper and produced newsreels which were featured in the local cinema as a preview to the main film.

**Sport & leisure:** Again, two agencies were chosen. These were:

- Sportsearch – a website for young people to help access and find new sports.
- Step into Sport – an initiative to encourage young people to become sports leaders and contribute to their community sports.

**Community regeneration:** Six of the twenty-nine case studies were community regeneration projects. This reflects the large amount of community/environment-based work currently being undertaken nationally to engage young people in their communities, make communities safer and cleaner places to live, and reduce instances and fear of youth crime. While these may be seen as predominantly adult-instigated and adult-orientated, young people also see their communities as a cause for concern and have opted to redress this. The projects selected were:

- Investing in Children – a regional agency working with large numbers of young people to involve them in improving services through active input;
- Communities and Neighbourhoods in London – an agency working city-wide with diverse groups of young people to improve communities;
- Children’s Voice – a project which aims to make regeneration more meaningful to young people;
- Lambeth Youth Council – a youth council which has established its own teenage pregnancy programme in schools and a peer inspection project;
- North Huyton New Deal for Communities – an initiative which aims to give young people a say in how community services are administered.

**Health:** All three health projects are successfully involving young people in shaping and accessing their services. There are:

- Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust – children’s and adolescents’ ward;
- Paediatric research at Collingham Gardens Child & Family Psychiatric Unit
- Contraception and Sexual Health Project – an outreach sexual health project.

**Government Initiatives:** This included two local Connexions services, West of England and Cheshire and Warrington, and Brighton and Hove Children’s Fund which had accomplished a high degree of participation from service users.

**Education:** The three case studies representing participation in education cover the three core stages of education and offer a view of similarities and differences of approach in working participatively with children and young people from birth to leaving school.

- Middle Street School nursery (part of a primary school)
- Wheatcroft Primary School
- Deptford Green Secondary School.

**Social care:** In the social care field, we examined two projects.

- Skye and Lochalsh Young Carers – an agency where services for young carers had been shaped and extended by the involvement of this group.
- Triangle – a project for young people with disabilities and challenging behaviour who contribute extensively to their service provision.

**Youth offending/crime:** Youth offending and youth crime was deemed an important area to examine. Two agencies represented this area.

- SCAPE – provides short courses for young people offending, at risk of offending or excluded from school, aimed to give them experience of making decisions and involved them in training volunteers.
- Middlesbrough Youth Inclusion Project worked with the top fifty most ‘at risk of offending’ young people in the local area and were involved in a wide range of community projects.

**Policy:** Policy development featured two projects, one regional, one national.

- Associate Parliamentary Group for Children and Young People in Care – a parliamentary group which advised government ministers on a range of policies.
- Dumfries & Galloway Youth Strategy Executive Group – a young people’s working group of the council’s executive committee which advised the council on the development of policy and service delivery.

**Play services:** Two agencies which focused on involving children in designing and developing play were included:

- Children and Young People’s Participation Project – service providing for very young children which involved them in decision-making within service provision and their own activities.
- Camden Play Service (Fusion/Rollercoasters) – a local authority with a well established play service in which children and young people are consulted about their own care and the wider play services.

**Child rights/advocacy and the courts:** there was one project in each of these groups;

- The Rights and Participation Project (RAPP) – an advocacy and participation project for ‘at risk’ young people which helps them to negotiate better treatment and service from statutory providers.
- CAFCASS – participation work in the courts system featured a public body which makes provision for the views of children and young people to be represented within court proceedings.

## Case Study Criteria 1b: 'To reflect a wide range of agencies which provided services for children and young people.'

Although the size of the agency was not part of the criteria, this information gives a sense of the variation of those represented. Nearly half of the agencies were described as small, employing less than 10 members of staff. This probably reflects the way in which participation is developed with a few key staff supporting young people in decision-making. A few agencies were in the mid-range, and nine had between twenty and one hundred staff. These tended to be statutory services. The very large organisations were government initiatives such as Connexions.

## Criteria 2: 'To include both statutory and non-statutory agencies.'

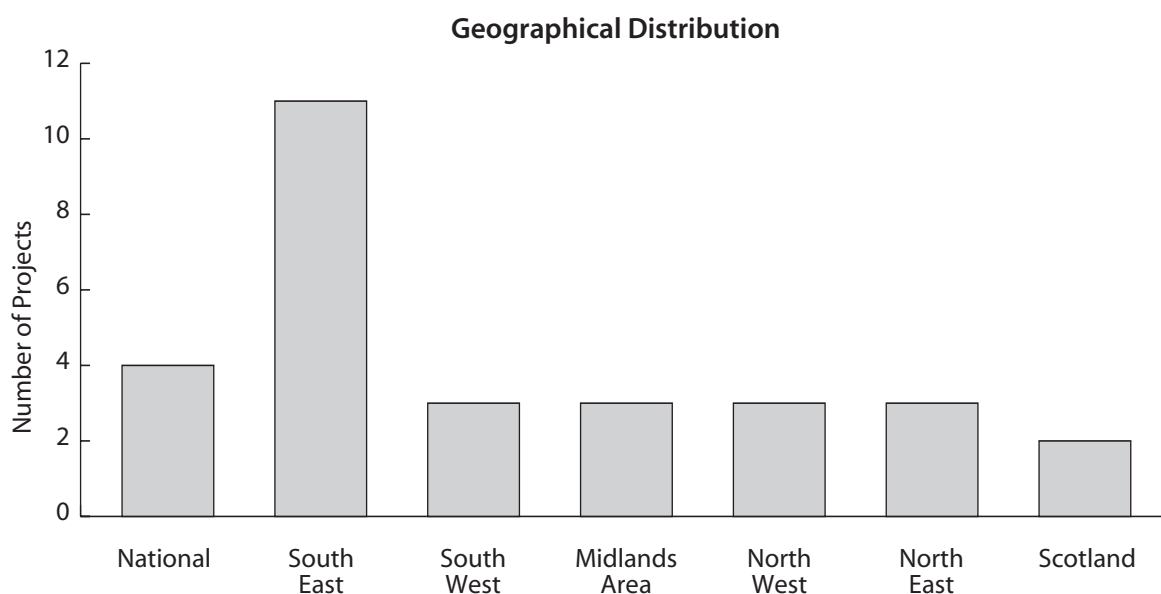
The majority of case studies were statutory organisations or included a statutory partner. This weighting reflects the aims of the study – to inform government agencies – and also the predominance of statutory services in the 'young people' sector. The others were voluntary organisations.

Organisational Relationships	Number of Projects
<p><b>Statutory and non-statutory partnership – voluntary led</b> A partnership where the lead or accountable body is a non-statutory agency.</p>	4
<p><b>Statutory and non- statutory partnership – statutory led</b> A partnership where the lead or accountable body is a statutory agency.</p>	3
<p><b>Statutory partnership</b> A purely statutory agency partnership.</p>	6
<p><b>Voluntary partnership</b> Partnership between non-statutory agencies, although funding is from the statutory sector so there is statutory accountability.</p>	1
<p><b>Voluntary – trust funded</b> No statutory accountability.</p>	3
<p><b>Voluntary – statutory funded</b> Non statutory agencies but with statutory funding and accountability</p>	3
<p><b>Statutory – schools, hospitals etc.</b></p>	8

### Criteria 3: 'To have a wide-spread geographical distribution.'

The case study agencies demonstrated a wide spread of geographical locations within England, with the addition of 2 projects from Scotland. The South-East has the highest representation, reflecting its larger population.

Figure A.8 Location



### Criteria 4: 'To cover agencies working nationally, regionally and locally.'

Over half of the selected agencies were projects that worked locally; five agencies worked nationally and five regionally. In three instances, the regional agency provided a series of local projects within a particular region. The remaining case study was a national project that delivered local projects.

### Criteria 5: 'To include agencies working in rural, inner-city and urban areas.'

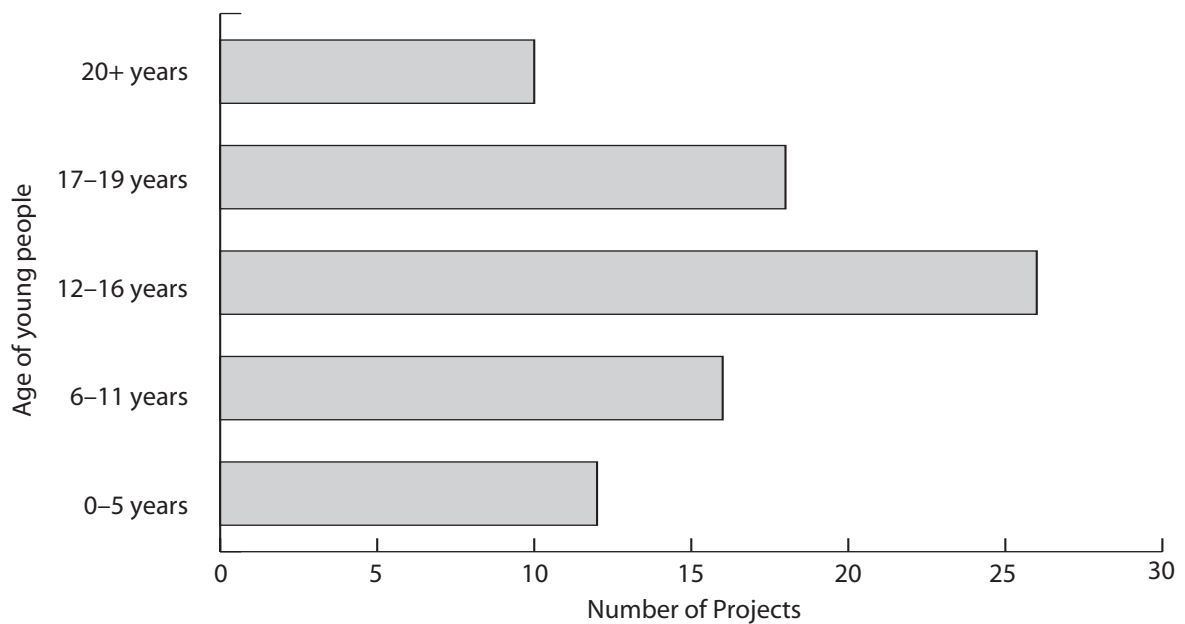
Agency examples worked in a variety of settings. While inner city projects were well represented (31%), urban areas also featured (21%). A sixth of the projects (17%) provided services for children and young people in rural areas. Others worked in mixed settings. This sample gives greater representation to rural and mixed settings than the overall database.

### Criteria 6: 'To reflect a broad range of ages of children and young people.'

Figure A.9 below shows the number of agencies undertaking participation work with particular age groups. Many of these agencies concentrated on a particular age group but also accommodated other young people. Some agencies are thus

represented on the chart several times. As with the database sample, teenagers (aged 12-16) were most often involved (25 projects); children aged 6 to 11 were also well represented (17 projects). Ten projects in total included the younger 0-5 age group in some way, and a number exclusively. Older teenagers (aged 17 to 19) were service users in 14 agencies, and young people aged 20+ in twelve projects. These older young people were often in low numbers by comparison and worked in formal roles or positions for projects, as youth link workers or peer mentors, for example.

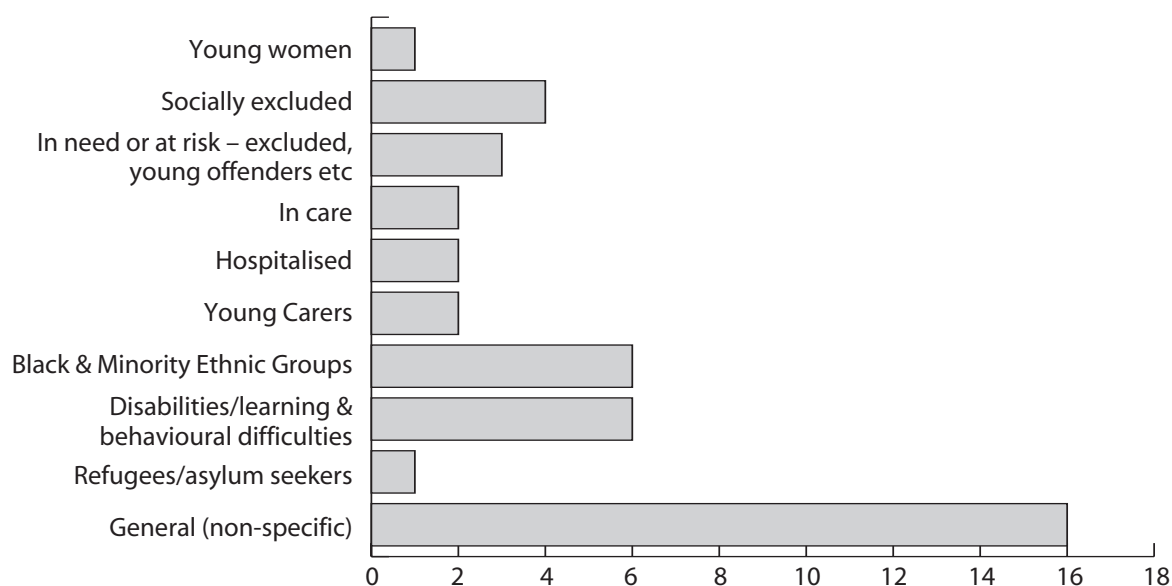
**Figure A.9** Ages of young people



**Criteria 7: ‘To encompass diverse groups of children and young people’.**

The kind of children and young people involved in the services was diverse, as shown in Figure A.11. Over half of the projects provided for all young people, although they may target groups of children and young people that are under-represented. Agencies working with Black and minority ethnic groups made up 21%, as did those providing for children and young people with disabilities and learning or behavioural difficulties.

**Figure A.10 Groups of young people involved**



**Criteria 8: ‘To cover a broad focus of participation.’**

Service planning was the most common focus of young people’s involvement with nearly 90% of projects focusing participation on this aspect of their service and nearly 80% on delivery of services. It should be noted that in many projects young people were involved in many or all of the above and in some just one.

**Criteria 9: ‘To include varying levels of involvement.’**

The most common form of involvement was regular/ongoing activities, which was true for almost half the projects. This was often a group that met regularly. A number of projects (22%) often schools or play projects, consulted with young people on a daily basis. Other children were involved in one-off or intermittent consultation (29% of projects). It should be noted that some projects provided more than one of the above levels of involvement.

Copies of this publication can be obtained from:

DfES Publications  
PO Box 5050  
Sherwood Park  
Annesley  
Nottingham NG15 0DJ  
Tel: 0845 6022260  
Fax: 0845 6033360  
email: [dfes@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dfes@prolog.uk.com)

Please quote ref: DfES/0827/2003

© Crown copyright 2003

5146/comms162/0.5k/12/03/rp

Produced by the Department for Education and Skills

Extracts from this document may be reproduced for non-commercial education or training purposes on the condition that the source is acknowledged.

ISBN: 0-9546695-0-9