



***Practice
Guide #16***

**Participation of Children and Young
People in Service Development**

DECEMBER 2011



Participation of Children and Young People in Service Development.

This Practice Guide is for front line workers and managers with the aim of highlighting the benefits that can be achieved from the active participation and consultation of children and young people in service delivery and development.

The definition of participation is “be involved; take part” but when we talk about making a meaningful change we need to consult, listen and act alongside the children and young people for whom we provide services.

About the Author

Tracy Richards is a Lead Consultant at Tri.x, before joining us, she worked a strategic level focusing on teenage pregnancy and before this had 22 years local authority service working at operational and then management level within the Children’s Social Care field. In the latter days of her Social Care career, she led on participation of children and families within Social Care.

Links to publications and websites referred to in this guide are located on our website, go to www.trixonline.co.uk and follow links to Practice Guides/Practice Guide #16

Introduction

Services have begun to acknowledge and to see the benefits that, when listened to, children and young people can play a vital role in the planning, evaluation and delivery of services that have an impact on their lives.

If services are developed by children and young people they are more likely to meet their needs and be accessed appropriately.

As a result of this growing acknowledgement, participation has become a key target for many services and organisations - both voluntary and statutory. The danger with this is sometimes the participation box is ticked. Services may be able to demonstrate that children and young people have been involved in a specific activity but may not be able to show what has changed as a result of this.

It may be a helpful starting point to consider where your service is with regards to a participation strategy and whether you should develop a strategy or review an existing arrangement. You should also consider alongside this training support and resources needed to ensure you have the framework needed to take you forward. Services will be challenged to release some power and control and work with children and young people as partners.

It is essential that when you are thinking about children and young people’s participation you consider what evidence is already there as often the evidence may have been gathered. Messages tend not to change but many services are poor in ensuring young people are clear on what their information influenced and where their information was not used. Look at any other areas where you gather feedback such as comments, compliments or complaints.

Whilst services are directed towards ensuring participation takes place the benefits for young people should not be forgotten.

The benefits are:

- Confidence and self esteem
- Assertiveness
- Communication development
- Skill building
- Social skills
- Sense of ownership
- Active citizenship

Benefits for Services are:

- Children and young people will buy-in to the service because they have helped shape it
- Children and young-people friendly service
- Better use of resources
- Meet identified needs

Barriers to Participation

Professionals may be reluctant to engage children and young people in developing their services due to a number of reasons

- Professional's assumption that children may not be competent or are too young.
- Professionals limited experience in this area.
- Limited toolkit of how to involve children and young people in participation.
- Participation fatigue by children and young people who have given their views and they have been discounted without any explanation.
- Service struggles to re-engage children and young people.
- Negative perception of young people in today's society.
- Relinquishing power and control to children and young people.
- Inadequate resources.

Planning Successful Participation

When you are considering how to involve children and young people, you should consider whether you or your workforce have the knowledge, skills attitude and commitment and whether your framework/strategy is in place and underpinned by time and appropriate resources.

Listed below are examples of participation frameworks that you may find useful to start to look at a whole systems approach to this work. These may need tailoring depending on what your service is but the basic elements of access, staff induction and training, your environment and evaluation of service delivery usually apply to all.

If you want to ensure that your service is meeting the needs of children and young people are you asking them the key questions that could make a difference to you and to them. What has their journey been like as they have moved through your service, what would have made a real difference to them, what are you doing well, and where do you need to improve. Be prepared for some honest feedback, it can also be a useful for tool for staff to acknowledge good practice.

When you are considering involving children and young people we need to think about the many ways in which young people communicate. It may be useful to establish an advisory board or group of children and young people who access your service or if this is not appropriate, or alongside this you could consider:

- Texting.
- Social media.
- Web questionnaires.
- Focus Groups – run by young people?
- Leaflets.
- Targeted events.

If you decide to develop questionnaires or leaflets or even an event, you should endeavour to get children and young people's involvement in the design and delivery of these methods. You could organize an event to launch your participation strategy organised and lead by young people. You may want to consult with children and young people who have gone through the service as they may feel it's easier to comment, some areas undertake exit interviews. These could be conducted by young people.

Alongside general service evaluation and development children and young people can play a role in other ways such as being part of interview panels are as part of staff training and induction processes.

Approaches which claim to be participatory can sometimes have the opposite affect and the same method for one group may not work for others.

You will need to establish clear boundaries and expectations of all those involved in the process including children and young people. This includes informing them of what the objectives of their participation are and how and when they will be informed about the outcome and if changes are not made due to their participation why. These are essential elements to ensure on-going meaningful participation or young people will lose faith and value in what they are doing.

The subject of payment for participation can be sometimes controversial. If payment or vouchers are to be given then a consistent policy should be agreed. Some professionals consider it as part of citizenship and developing a sense of community.

It is vital that children and young people know they can influence services, a robust framework for the service is not enough, this helps them to be aware of their rights as active citizens.

If we truly believe we are delivering services that should benefit children and young people then we should ensure they are part of shaping them or we risk delivering services that we assume are wanted. This in the longer term creates active participants in the community.

Participation Frameworks

There are a number of frameworks you can look at for guidance including:

Hear By Right

The National Youth Agency developed 'Hear by Right'. This framework offers a tried and tested process that can assist organisations to assess and improve on their practice and policy around involving children, young people and parents/carers.

The Hear by Right Framework* is a based on seven standards with which organisation can self assess themselves.

The standards look at area's such as:

- Shared values.
- Structures.
- Strategy.
- Systems.
- Staff, elected members or trustees.
- Skills and knowledge.
- Style of leadership.

*To access the Hear By Right self assessment toolkit, go to our website and follow links to Practice Guides/Practice Guide #16

You're Welcome

The Department of Health 'Quality criteria for young people friendly health services', which is referred to as 'You're Welcome', sets out principles to help commissioners and service providers to improve the suitability of NHS and non-NHS health services for young people.

The first eight themes focus on topics relevant to all health services in general practice, primary, community and acute settings; while themes 9 and 10 focus on specialist and targeted provision. These general principles can be applied to other services not just health.

1. Access
2. Publicity
3. Confidentiality and consent
4. Environment
5. Staff training, skills, attitudes and values
6. Joined up working
7. Involvement in monitoring and evaluation of patient experience
8. Health Issues for young people
9. Sexual and Reproductive Health Services
10. Targeted and Specialist CAMHS

Useful websites

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Participation works: <http://www.participationworks.org.uk>

An online gateway for a partnership of six national children and young people's agencies that enables organisations to effectively involve children and young people in the development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their lives.

Child and Maternal Health Observatory: <http://www.chimat.org.uk/camhs/participation/decision>

The national Child and Maternal Health Observatory (ChiMat) provides information and intelligence to improve decision-making for high quality, cost effective services. It supports policy makers, commissioners, managers, regulators, and other health stakeholders working on children's, young people and maternal health.