

Start with the Child, Stay with the Child
Children and Young People as EXPERT participants
Voice Presentation

10th September 2009

The full and active participation of children and young people in the design, development and evaluation of children's services is essential if services are to both meet the needs of children and young people and support them to achieve their potential.

Services designed with children and young people will have their needs at the heart of the service and long term will lead to children and young people achieving better outcomes, as the appropriate support and resources are in place.

Principles of Participation

Prior to commencing any form of participation work, Voice believes it is important that all participants are aware of and understand the principles that underlie effective participation. This is important to ensure that the participation is not tokenistic.

- **Trust:** Children and young people must feel confident that they can trust others with the information they are sharing about themselves.
- **Respect:** All members of the group need to respect each other to ensure effective communication and sharing of ideas. It is vital that professionals respect the views of children and young people and acknowledge that children and young people with care experience are experts on their own life experiences and this knowledge and experience is valuable when designing, developing and evaluating services.
- **Honesty:** It is important to be clear and honest on the aims of the participation activity and what are the both the desired and likely outcomes. Children and young people have a right to know how the information will be used and what influence and impact it will have. For example, if children and young people are involved in developing a response to a

government consultation, be honest that recommendations produced by the group will not necessarily be adopted by the government, but it is important to use the process to highlight key issues and influence thinking.

- **Commitment:** Be clear on the commitment you expect from the children and young people and what commitment they can expect from the organisation.

What is needed for Participation to Work?

- **Resources:** Resources need to be allocated, both in terms of staff time as well as an appropriate budget. In regards to a budget the following are important costs that need to be considered:
 - Payment for participants, whether this being money or vouchers. It is important to consider impact payment will have on benefits, whether children and young people have bank accounts or need to be paid in cash, tax implications for children and young people, as well as HR implications if they are paid as employees. Other options include vouchers, particularly popular for young people are phone top-up cards.
 - Refreshments. Ask children and young people what refreshments they would like and ensure its age appropriate.
 - Venue that is child and young person friendly and easily accessible by public transport.
 - Transport costs.
 - Access costs – do any of the participants require a translator, interpreter, PA for personal care.
 - Costs of activities: Participation workers use a range of creative techniques to engage with children and young people. This may include making DVD's, art-work, and photography. Costs for the equipment and materials need to be factored into any budget.
- Openness and willingness to listen to a range of views.
- Willingness to share power.

- Willingness to think out of the box.
- Acceptance that children and young people are the experts on being a child or young person.

Why Actively Involve Children and Young People?

- Children and young people with care experience are EXPERTS in being a child or young person with care experience.
- If children and young people are actively involved in the design and development of services, they are far more likely to meet their needs.
- Long-term, will result in better 'outcomes', better lives for children and young people with care experience.

Case Study 1: *Evaluation of Voice Advocacy Service.*

Involving Children and Young People in the Evaluation of a Service.

Aim: young person led evaluation of the Voice advocacy service to:

- Identify key themes that will inform future development of the advocacy service.
- Empower young people that have used the service by ensuring they are part of the future development of the service.
- Empower young people through supporting them to learn new skills in the area of research.

How:

- Young people were trained in research methods and interview techniques.
- In partnership with staff, young people designed a questionnaire then piloted it.
- A sample of young people were contacted and asked if they would like to be involved in research
- Young people conducted telephone interviews with other young people and then transcribed the interviews.
- Young people receiving training on thematic analysis and then used this to identify key themes from the survey results.

Case Study 2: *Children and Young Person Policy Forum*

Aim: to ensure that all of Voice policy and campaigning work is informed by the views and experience of children in care and care leavers.

How:

- The development of a young person's policy forum. The forum currently meets once a month and works in two ways:
 - Reactive: informing responses to government consultations and requested from policy-makers.
 - Pro-active: Identifying key issues for Children in Care and Care -leavers that will direct policy and campaigning work.

Example: Young people informing Voice response to DCFS Health and Well-Being consultation.

Voice worked with its young persons' policy forum to inform our response to this consultation. This was done by:

- Explaining the purpose of the consultation, including where the response would go to and the timetable for the process.
- Summarising the key themes of the consultation.
- In two groups the participants responded to 6 questions that covered the main themes from the consultation document. The questions were written in a child-friendly manner. E.g. *'Did you know whether you had a health plan – did you social worker discuss this with you'*
- Participants were asked if they wanted to include anything else in the response.
- All participants were invited to receive a copy of the response once it was completed.
- When the response from the consultation is published by the government, a further meeting of the participants will be held to discuss the response.

Issues To Consider when Setting up a Participation Group:

- Develop with and agree a Code of Conduct/Charter with participants and include; confidentiality, role of all participants (including staff), equal opportunities, Chairing and dealing with differing views.

- Process is as important as content. If the group is to be effective time must be spent on developing both the group as a whole, as well as the individual members. Having a clear Terms of Reference developed by the group, along with identifying training and support requirements for members of the group and a process for regular evaluation will assist in this.
- Accessibility, including the use of social networks and developing 'virtual' forums.

Advocacy and Independent Services: Children and Young People participating in decisions about their own lives.

Advocacy can support children in care to participate in the decisions about their lives at an individual level.

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is about speaking up for children and young people. Advocacy is about empowering children and young people to make sure that their rights are respected and their views and wishes are heard at all times."

**Definition taken from the National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services, Department of Health 2002.*

- It is about representing the views, wishes and needs of children and young people to decision makers and helping them navigate the system.
- It is about ensuring that children and young people obtain the services they are entitled to.
- It is about making sure that children and young people are actively involved in the decisions about their lives.

Key Advocacy issues

The key issues that children and young people contact Voice advocates about are:

- Transition
- Lack of support
- Access to family and siblings
- Finance
- Stability of placements