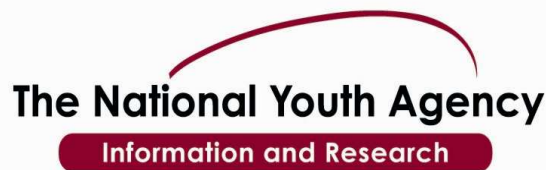




University of the
West of England



Evaluating the development of young people's participation in two Children's Trusts

Year 2 Evaluation Report

This report has been produced for the National Youth Agency
by

Barry Percy-Smith

The SOLAR Action Research Centre, University of the West
of England, Bristol, UK

www.uwe.ac.uk/solar/

barry.percy-smith@uwe.ac.uk

Glossary of Abbreviations

NYA	National Youth Agency
HBR	Hear by Right.
CRAE	Children's Rights Alliance for England
CT	Children's Trust
PCT	Primary Care Trust
YPP	Young People's Parliament
YPSC	Young People's Scrutiny Committee
YPSF	Young People's Scrutiny Forum
YOF	Youth Opportunities Fund
YCF	Youth Capital Fund
CAMHs	Child and Adolescent Mental Health services
UKYP	UK Youth Parliament
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
SEN	Special Educational Needs
ECM	Every Child Matters
OCN	Open College Network
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
MYPP	Member of the Young People's Parliament
PW	Participation Worker
MYPP	Member of the Young People's Parliament

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This work has been undertaken for the National Youth Agency. The views in this report are the product of this research and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Youth Agency or the author. The author, however, takes full responsibility for the accuracy of the contents of this report.

Executive Summary

1. This report documents the findings from the second and final year of a two year evaluation examining the process and effectiveness of developing young people's participation across two Children's Trusts in England. The focus for the second year of the evaluation was on monitoring progress since year one with a particular emphasis on participation in **commissioning of services** and young people taking on **leadership roles**
2. Local authorities in each Trust area have achieved the **advanced level of the Hear by Right participation** standard and both Trusts continue to demonstrate **high levels of commitment** to hearing the voice of young people and involving them in decision making within the Trusts.
3. Since year one of the evaluation, there has been an expansion of participation activities beyond the Young People's Parliament and Shadow Scrutiny Committees to encompass a **wider range of participation 'modes,'** for example through **campaigns and use of web based media** such as participation and social networking sites through which young people can communicate and have their say.
4. In one Trust development of young people's participation has embraced the Children's Trust structure and ethos by developing a **network of Hear by Right Participation Champions** involving all Trust partner agencies, coordinated by a lead participation officer and backed by a participation team of five staff providing support and training. In the second Trust there are participation workers who work within individual agencies, with the youth service participation worker also undertaking the wider role of promoting participation throughout the whole local authority but without the structure of the Children's Trust and without official status for this role. In this case the Children's Trust appears to only have significance at a strategic level, with little resonance and meaning at a practitioner level.
5. Generally young people are **more likely to participate in everyday life contexts** such as youth projects and youth services. Some young people have experiences participating in schools although there is a strong feeling that school staff are not interested in young people's views. Few young people were aware of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. There is considerable **scope for developing participation in schools.**
6. **Young people are involved in a range of different ways throughout the commissioning cycle** that directly and indirectly influence decisions taken and the way services are provided. Direct

involvement tends to happen through projects initiated by young people. Indirect involvement tends to occur through consultations, area forums, youth councils and increasing information and awareness about services.

7. In both Trusts progress has been made to involved young people in the commissioning process. On the whole this tends to involve **consultation with young people on plans** drawn up by adult decision makers rather than through joint decision making. Young people often relate experiences of **being consulted but not being informed about the decision** taken or fed back about what happened as a result of the decision.
8. **Key strategic decisions about services remain predominantly led by adults.** Young people are more likely to lead or initiate decisions through activities and campaigns as a result of quality youth work and within youth projects.
9. The Youth Opportunity Fund, Youth Capital Fund and YouthBank have provided good opportunities for young people to take a **lead in decisions about funding for projects** and will provide a sound basis for achieving the objectives set out in Aiming High¹ of having young people deciding on 5% of youth service funding by 2011 and 25% by 2018.
10. In one Trust, ideas about **participation and empowerment are being translated into practices which promote entrepreneurialism** in young people to develop skills and open up life chance opportunities, for example through apprenticeships, volunteering and youth schemes such as Duke of Edinburgh awards.
11. Young people clearly effect decisions about services even though they may not be directly involved in the final decisions. However, it is **difficult to find clear examples where young people's participation has had a direct impact on outcomes in terms of benefits for young people themselves.** Where impact has been noted this is more likely to come from youth initiated activity such as 'independent' young people-led campaigns. Young people have had an impact on services through the role of youth inspectors.
12. Young people continue to relate the **importance of personal benefits from participation** which develop confidence, provide learning and new experiences and wherein young people feel valued and respected for their contributions.

¹ Aiming High for Young People: A ten year strategy for positive activities, Implementation Plan. March 2008.DCSF. www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

13. This evaluation has provided further evidence of the **critical role of the participation coordinator** in developing positive relationships with young people, providing opportunities and encouraging leadership and initiative.
14. The focus for much of this study has been on young people rather than younger children. **More work is needed to develop opportunities for younger children to participate.**

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² All names of young people have been changed.

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims of the evaluation

This evaluation has been commissioned by The National Youth Agency to examine critical success factors in developing and embedding children³ and young people's participation across the Children's Trusts. The evaluation has been set up as a two-stage process over two years. The main focus of the evaluation is to examine:

"The process and effectiveness of mapping, planning and implementing arrangements for children's and young people's active involvement across the Trust using Hear by Right standards"

The research has 4 specific objectives. To explore:

1. The degree of organisational changes across the Children's Trusts as a result of participation
2. Outcomes for children and young people as a result of active involvement
3. The role of Participation Workers/practitioners in participation and change processes
4. The experiences and impact on those young people who participate as part of the process

The first phase focused more generally on evaluating how participation was being planned and implemented across the Trusts with a focus on the extent to which the Hear by Right standards were being put into operation. The executive summary of findings from the first year of the evaluation can be found in Section 2.1.⁴

As a result of findings from the first phase evaluation decisions were made by the project steering group for the second phase to track progress since the previous year, but more specifically to focus on two key themes:

How young people are involved in the **Commissioning** of services?

To what extent are young people able to exercise **Leadership** when they participate?

³ For sake of ease this report will refer to children and young people both as young people. This is in part also due to the fact that much of the work in developing participation has centred more on young people than younger children.

⁴ A copy of the full report for year one of this evaluation can be accessed at http://www.nya.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=110393

As a starting point, the working definition of commissioning for the purposes of this research was identified as: decision making about what services are provided and how. Likewise, Leadership was taken to mean actions or decisions which young people have taken a lead role in and/or which have been initiated by young people according to their own agenda. However, this evaluation has also sought to understand how these concepts are being understood in practice by young people and adults.

1.2 Background

The Children Act 2004 requires that local authorities and their relevant partners develop Children's Trusts by 2008, to be responsible for joint working to achieve children and young people's wellbeing.

The 'relevant partners' include key statutory agencies. But to achieve their full potential, the co-operation arrangements must encompass a much wider group of partners working and caring for children and young people.

'Making arrangements' is not just about agreeing a set of processes; it includes the continuous joint working needed to make co-operation a reality. And it is not limited to work at a strategic level; it covers multi-agency front-line teams as well as high level inter-agency governance.

A set of effective local arrangements, operating at every level, will be a children's trust in action. These arrangements will involve:

- *front-line staff providing integrated delivery to the child and family;*
- *the shared processes used to support their work;*
- *joint assessments of need, plans and commissioning arrangements with pooled budgets – setting priorities and delivering the necessary resources; and*
- *the inter-agency governance arrangements needed to agree the overall vision and drive through change.*

The voice of children, young people and their families should be heard at all levels in order to inform local design and delivery of the arrangements⁵.

This research is concerned with the effectiveness of arrangements for actively involving children and young people as Children's Trusts develop.

Legislation, guidance and inspection expect Children's Trusts to engage with children and young people in such a way that facilitates their influence on the design, delivery and evaluation of services. Developing plans for the active

⁵ DfES 2005 Statutory guidance on inter-agency cooperation to improve the wellbeing of children: children's trusts, Sections 1.4-1.6. © Crown Copyright

involvement of children and young people is therefore an integral part of the emerging Children's Trust arrangements.

The National Youth Agency (NYA) have a brief to work with Children's Trusts to embed 'Hear by Right' (HBR), a set of standards for the active involvement of children and young people. The Trusts are expected to have mapped their existing pattern of engaging with young people, and to have had a plan for future developments, in place by March 2007.

This comes at a time when the picture looks positive for young people's participation in the UK. Following on from the main legislative driver of the Children Act, *"Aiming high: ten year strategy for young people"*⁶ includes a section on 'empowerment', including the extension of the Youth Opportunity and Capital Funds, the intention of giving young people influence over 25% of spending on youth activities by 2018, and an expectation that local authorities will adopt good practice in engaging young people.

However there is still some way to go before young people are granted their full participatory rights. The participation agenda sits within a wider context of negative representations and poor provision for young people in the UK. Media research carried out by TNS Media Intelligence between 19 and 25 May 2007 revealed that 87.5 per cent of broadcast items about young people were negative. "Young people in the media were closely associated with negative issues such as crime, violence and antisocial behaviour."⁷ The UNICEF report card issued earlier this year suggests that the UK ranks bottom out of 21 nations in the industrialised world in an assessment of the lives and wellbeing of children and young people.⁸ The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE)⁹ has recently condemned the government's failure to make significant progress on children's rights recommendations issued by the United Nations in 2002. Research findings and developing plans for young people's participation should be interpreted against this background.

1.3 Evaluation approach

This evaluation is a two phase process and has been conducted with South Tyneside and Devon Children's Trusts¹⁰. The first phase of this evaluation which began in early 2007 was set up as an action research process engaging stakeholders in a participatory process of action inquiry to support organisational learning and development within Children's Trusts as well as generating evaluation outcomes in terms of generic findings. The first phase

⁶ Op cit. footnote 1

⁷ http://www.ypnmagazine.com/news/index.cfm?fuseaction=full_news&ID=14696

⁸ Unicef 2007. Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries. http://www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/pdf/rc7_eng.pdf

⁹ http://www.crae.org.uk/cms/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1.

¹⁰ In South Tyneside the Children's Trust is known as the Children's Alliance.

of the evaluation involved research workshops, youth-led interviews, focus groups with workers and young people.

This second phase of the evaluation in **Devon** involved:

1. Using a **game to capture young people's views and experiences of participation**. Most of these were undertaken at the Devon Youth residential in July 2008. Follow up consultation was undertaken with young people in youth club settings.



Plate 1: Capturing young people's views and experiences of participation

A total of 34 young people aged between 11- 20 (approximately 50% were aged 14-15) were reached in this way.

2. **Interviews with 6 key staff:** Chair of the Children's Trust, Head of Commissioning, Assistant Director of Integrated Children's Services, Head of Student Services at an F.E. college, Policy Officer with the Police Authority and Lead Participation Worker
3. **Observation** of HBR champions meeting involving 11 Hear by Right Champions and the Children's Trust Chair
4. Follow up case study **interviews** with 4 young people
5. **Research workshop** involving 8 professionals (from Youth Offending, Fire Service, Children's Trust, PCT, Youth Service, Police) and 5 young people.



Plate 2: Research workshop with young people and professionals

Due to a heavy timetable of inspections and reviews during this project, it was only possible to undertake 'light touch' evaluation in ***South Tyneside***. This involved:

1. **Interviews with 5 key staff:** Chair of the Alliance, Head of Transition and Wellbeing, Policy Officer (Commissioning), Asst Head of Youth Service, Youth Service Participation Worker
2. **Research workshop** with 7 young people using participatory activities.



Plate 3: Research workshop with young people exploring experiences of participation

3. **Follow up case study interviews** with 2 young people – one of these was undertaken face-to-face; the other was undertaken through email.

Numbers involved in this second phase of the evaluation are as follows:

	Devon	South Tyneside
Heads of service/ Practitioners (Including Chair of Trust and Lead Participation Workers)	6	5
Young people	38	7

1.4 Structure of the report

The report begins with a brief summary of the situation last year for both Trusts, before providing a review of progress in developing participation since last year, including a review of opportunities young people are using to participate. Key developments are identified and trends in young people's participation are discussed.

Section three then explores how young people are being involved in commissioning services and section four focuses on the second theme: the extent to which young people take on leadership roles when they participate.

Section five draws together some summary discussions about the impacts and outcomes from young people's participation in commissioning and as leaders. Section six provides further insights into the role of the Participation Worker. Section 7 then considers next steps for the future in developing participation.

2. Progress in developing participation

"It is now quite shocking when people challenge young people's involvement" (Participation Worker)

2.1 Executive Summary of situation in year one

1. This executive summary is taken from the report from year one of this **2 year action research project** examining the process and effectiveness of developing and embedding young people's participation across two Children's Trusts in England. The summary provides a point of reference against which to assess the developments reported in the remainder of the document based on the second year's evaluation.

2. Development of participation in both Trusts is lead by a Participation Worker backed by a Participation Team located in the Youth Service, but working across all departments and agencies to a Children's Trust Partnership, with whom **responsibility for developing participation** is understood to lie.

3. A high level of **commitment** to developing effective arrangements for participation is evident across both Trusts and at a high level. However, this commitment is variable for different sectors. Some argued that commitment needed to be matched by resources to support young people's participation.

4. **Participation workers** are seen as crucial to developing participation, but the role of '**champions**', such as lead member for Children's Services, are seen as key. Participation workers have multiple roles supporting young people but also influencing strategy and change within the local service system.

5. Both Trusts demonstrate significant **progress** in developing participation by embedding plans and opportunities for young people's participation within local service structures. In both cases opportunities have been created to effectively involve young people such as the Young People's Parliament and Shadow Scrutiny Committee. In this respect young people's participation is firmly located within local decision making structures. The challenge for both Trusts is to widen and connect **opportunities and networks** for young people to participate, beyond centralised decision making structures and to work to change organisational cultures so that participation becomes routinely embedded in everyday practices.

6. Most people were aware of the **mapping and planning process** for participation, although some partner agencies had not become significantly involved in the process. Progress in developing participation arrangements is **variable across the Trusts**, with some sectors much more advanced in their understanding and development of participation than others. Youth Offending, Schools and Police are seen as not being sufficiently on board yet. There is recognition of the need to develop a **common set of values, standards, structures and practices** across all agencies under the Children's Trust umbrella. Development of participation within the Trust arrangements is seen as a learning process as new systems and practices are evolved.

7. The **Hear by Right (HBR) Mapping and Planning** tool is embraced as a useful framework for supporting and monitoring progress in developing and implementing participation. A challenge exists in how to implement HBR across all Children's Trust partner agencies. HBR tends to be embraced at a strategic level but with limited impact for practitioners.

8. **Understanding of participation** and what it involves varies across the Trust. For a majority, participation is understood as consultation, rather than a wider process involving learning, reflection, dialogue, and action. Quality of relationships, meaningful dialogue and sharing of power are, however, seen as key to effective participation.

9. **Training for adults and young people** alike is needed to acquire **skills and knowledge to participate effectively**. For adults this requires challenging negative assumptions about young people, training in participatory practice and working with young people. For young people this involves learning how systems work and gaining confidence and experience.

10. Developing **cultures and practices of learning** and communication are essential for effective participation. This needs to involve managers and decision makers listening and learning more effectively from practice; joint working and collaboration across partner agencies; and dialogue and inquiry between adults and young people.

11. The need to invest in the **capacity** (in terms of time and resources) **and agency of workers** (in terms of being the link between young people's realities and policy) is key to sustainable arrangement for participation.

12. Attention needs to be directed to **'contexts' of participation** in terms of accessibility (timing and location) of settings; that young people can participate in things that are meaningful and relevant; ensuring young people are supported in feeling comfortable about the information and language used; that adults are honest, realistic and transparent about what is possible and that opportunities for participation are available for all young people.

13. **Young people's experiences of participation** showed that they value having a range of opportunities to get involved, having support from workers and structures to work in, being able to learn new things, gain experience and be respected for their contribution. Young people did not want to be involved if they were not respected, not listened to, blocked in their initiative or if nothing happened as a result.

14. The **benefits of participation** are seen by adults largely in terms of clear messages for more effective services. For young people the benefits of participation are seen more in terms of their own personal achievement, learning and development, confidence building, being involved and feeling valued for their contribution.

2.2 Overview of progress since last year

The local authorities in both Trusts have achieved advanced level of The NYA's Hear by Right standards, indicating a high level of progress in developing participation. In both Trusts, a majority of adult staff feel that young people are normally involved at level 6 on the ladder of participation. In both Trusts, the Young People's Parliament continues to provide the pivot around which much participation happens in relation to the Trusts; whilst School councils, Youth Town councils and Area based forums provide the main localised structures. These are the more formal channels for participation and were in existence during the first year of this research. Whilst young people's experiences of these were very positive overall, some identified the Youth Town Council as being disorganised because of the lack of experience and training of the leaders. In spite of school councils many young people still feel they are not listened to or respected in school. Some felt that school councils "just involved boffins." Young people continue to be customarily involved in recruitment of staff in partner agencies.

A key development since year one of this research is the growth in campaign activity and direct action by young people. In Devon, young people are increasingly influencing and driving policy and projects through self-initiated campaigns and initiatives (see for example the Don't Judge Us Campaign below in section 4.3.2). Evidence from this research reveals that young people can more easily reap rewards from participating in this way whilst also allowing young people to get involved according to their own agenda, motivations and interests and around issues of concern. Opportunities have also opened up for young people to get involved in directly providing services themselves (see section 3.2.3).

Since year one of this evaluation the development of internet media to support young people in having their say and share experiences has been significant, particularly in one of the Trusts where a dedicated website - www.geturvoiceheard.co.uk - has been developed providing information and feedback for young people as well as an opportunity to have a say. Social

networking sites - such as Bebo and Facebook – have been increasingly used to try and engage with young people who are harder to reach. There is now a diverse spectrum of young people who participate with Children’s Trust partners.

A further significant development since last year is the increased activity of young people in funding decisions. The key role that young people play on the panel deciding on project funding for the Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) and Youth Capital Fund (YCF) programmes provides significant influence on allocation of external funding and has been well established, as found elsewhere (Willis et al 2008)¹¹. However, since last year there has been a concerted effort in one of the Trusts to develop new structures and processes for involving young people in the commissioning process in relation to core funding to the extent that the participation of young people is now tied in centrally with commissioning. Young people are hence now taking an active role in making decisions about what services are needed. In the second Trust there is also a commitment to involve young people in the commissioning process, but this appears to be based on consultation rather than the development of new processes and structures for involving young people more proactively as partners in final decision making. This complements an ongoing developing culture and commitment (that exists in both Trusts) of listening to young people and have their views taken account of in decisions that effect them. Young people’s growing influence over funding allocation is also mirrored by the growing role of young people in service inspections and strategic reviews in Partner services. Young people’s role in commissioning and funding will be discussed further in section 3.

Specific youth forums have continued to emerge e.g. Forum for Children in Care, to further extend the developing networks of forums, student councils and structures for participation. In both Trusts these are further augmented by emerging County/Borough wide and area based structures e.g. Borough-wide School Council and Community Area Forums.

In both Trusts, children and young people have informed the development of the Children and Young People’s Plan largely through consultations, but also through debates in schools and direct work with staff. Both Trusts undertake many pieces of consultation with children and young people that have a profound influence on major strategic decisions within Children’s Services. In Devon, the annual youth residential attracts partners from across the Trust who engage and consult with young people in a variety of ways on different issues which have significantly altered the way in which the Trust operates.

¹¹ Willis, M. et al (2008) *Commissioning Positive Activities for Young People*. Leicester: The National Youth Agency. <http://www.nya.org.uk/information/119123/commissioningpositiveactivitiesforyoungpeople/>



Plate 4: Dialogue between agencies and young people at a youth residential

Young people in Devon have been involved in a Strategic Partnership event to plan Devon's future as well as through the Children's Commissioner's 11 Million Takeover Day. In South Tyneside, through different forms of consultation and engagement children and young people are understood to "affect everything we do." (Head of Service)

2.3 Organisational arrangements for participation

Beyond specific structures and opportunities for participation, progress has been noted in the development of what can be called ancillary or organisational arrangements to promote, facilitate and support children and young people's participation across the Trusts.

2.3.1 Structure and governance of the Children's Trusts

In Devon, the principle of the Children's Trust is being actively embraced in the governance of children's services right down to practitioner level. To this extent cooperation in the development of participation arrangements is evident across all Children's Trust partners. In South Tyneside, the Children's Alliance, as the embodiment of the Children's Trust, has a different structure, centred more clearly on the senior management teams within the Metropolitan Council and with the lead member for Children's Services as Chair. There is support from the highest level in both Trusts – e.g. Council Chief Executive, and Corporate Management Board for local authority and other partner agencies - for the increasing influence of young people on policy and service provision. However, in both cases there are some elected members who still struggle to embrace a culture of young people's participation.

2.3.2 Lead Participation Officer

The first year's report highlighted the multifaceted role of the Participation Worker. In both Trusts there is a Participation Worker who takes on a leadership role in coordinating the promotion and development of youth participation across the Trust. These roles are simultaneously rooted in quality youth work whilst advocating for youth participation across the whole Trust and up to the most senior levels. There is a clear structure for the role of the lead participation worker in Devon – employed by the Youth Service but physically located within the Children's Trust office and with a clear mandate for overseeing development of participation across the whole Trust through the HBR champions and with the support of a participation team. In South Tyneside, the lead Participation Worker has a similar remit but is structurally located within the Youth service rather than the Children's Trust. This is partly the result of the Children's Trust having limited impact on the work of practitioners on the ground. Indeed many workers and managers express a lack of knowledge about the Alliance. Nonetheless there is cooperation between Participation Workers across the different parts of the Alliance but not in a formal way facilitated by structures. This appeared as a major issue for the Alliance and the comprehensive development of participation across the Trust which is being addressed.

2.3.3 Expansion of the participation team

In Devon there has been an expansion in the Participation team with 6 workers now working with remits which include specific support for Children in care, Parenting, Connexions, Vulnerable young people and CAMHs. In South Tyneside Participation workers are more clearly aligned to specific services rather than working cross Trust, but there are plans to create a participation team to work across the Trust.

2.3.4 Children's Trust Partners / Participation Champions

In Devon there is an evident spirit of joint working to develop and promote the participation of young people across the Trust right down to practitioner level. All partners now have Hear by Right champions to promote and develop participation, each of whom have responsibility for undertaking a map and plan for their service, which young people have been involved with. Devon PCT in turn now has a group of Hear by Right champions across the county and an Involving Young People policy in consultation with young people. The Hear by Right Champions meet as a coherent group chaired by the Chair of the Children's Trust and supported by the Lead Participation worker, to review and plan subsequent work across the Trust.

In South Tyneside, the Children's Alliance is more pronounced at a strategic level. For practitioners the Children's Alliance has more limited significance with the result that there is less of a sense of collaboration in developing

participation work across different partner agencies as an Alliance. At the same time, different agencies and departments have their own participation workers.

2.3.5 Values and attitudes

There is a clear commitment to young people's participation across both Trusts with a shift from an emphasis on just consultation to more active involvement. This shift is more evident in Devon where young people's involvement in key planning, funding and commissioning decisions reveals young people are able to exercise greater levels of power and influence in shaping decisions rather than just being consulted to inform decisions. Whereas some partners a year ago in Devon were still grappling with the idea of youth participation, they are now making good progress in putting participation into practice in their own organisations.

2.3.6 Workforce development

In Devon it is now widely accepted that Participation is part of staff's jobs rather than an extra thing to do. Workforce development has been provided (both in-house and externally) through a range of ongoing participation training programmes to an increasingly wider spectrum of workers and through the establishment of a Participation Workers Network. This has spawned a variety of further initiatives such as the development of Trust-wide consultation proforma and information, including a participation leaflet. A rolling programme of training and accreditation is also being developed for young people with Children's Trust partners.

2.4 Opportunities for participation

"It's becoming an accepted thing that children and young people (as well as their parents and carers) are asked to comment on services as a matter of course and that this is acted upon".
(Adult workshop participant)

There have been significant advances in developing and implementing plans for participation. These are not simply defined in terms of new structures, but often involve project work or initiatives which seek to engage young people as the basis for more active future involvement. The process of developing and implementing plans for participation is therefore not a linear process whereby the creation of particular structures leads directly to increased participation. Instead, it is clear that different measures, initiatives and actions create new situations in which the desired outcome of young people's participation is realised in different ways for different young people and in different social and organisational contexts. For example, providing worker support for a young person can provide a sense of acknowledgement

and value that their views matter and a chance to talk about their experiences with others in ways that increases confidence and activates an interest in participation. This may not involve participation directly in decision making about services, but may involve equally important roles such as making information about services more readily available for young people. Good quality youth work is key to providing a basis for participation.

In addition to involvement in decision making therefore, there are numerous examples where young people play a significant role in matching services with needs, for example through awareness raising, providing information, developing young people friendly versions of local authority service plans, challenging attitudes about young people and campaigning around specific issues.

Listed below are some of the key ways young people across both Trusts are participating. This is not a definitive list, rather is a snapshot based solely on what is apparent from the responses of those young people and adults involved in the second phase of this research. Those in bold are opportunities which have been newly developed since the first year of the research during the last 18 months. However, opportunities and structures which were already in place have continued to develop in terms of the recognition, scope and impact of their activities. For example, in one Trust a youth inspection team '*Check it Out*' has developed out of the Young People's Parliament.

Young People's Parliaments and Regional Youth Assemblies
School and Borough-wide Youth Councils, Shadow (executive and scrutiny)
Committees Advisory boards

Young Commissioners initiatives – making decisions about what services are provided

Assembly of European Regions Entrepreneurship project

Community Area Forums

Deciding on allocation of external as well as core funding

Campaigns, lobbying, direct action, events and projects

Specific youth forums eg. Children's Voice - Children in Care Forum

Youth Participation Teams

School debating in the council chamber for Children and Young People

Recruitment and selection of staff

Consultations through residentials as well as surveys

Websites eg. www.geturvoiceheard.co.uk & social networking sites (Bebo & Facebook) /use of blogs

Use of the local news media/writing to elected members

Improving/making available information for young people about services and plans

Deciding activities in local youth projects

Monitoring and inspection of services/Strategic reviews

Providing training and mentoring

Volunteering

2.5 Trends in young people's participation in services, school and community across the Children's Trusts.

This section draws largely on data generated out of consultation with a total of 34 young people at a youth residential and two schools in Devon. It is important to note that there were a significant minority of young people who did not readily understand the concept of involvement in the context of young people's participation in local decision making. The data in this section also needs to be considered in conjunction with the rest of the findings in this report.

2.5.1 Trends in participation in services, school and community

When asked to think of an example where they had been involved with making a decision that made a difference, most frequently young people mentioned school or youth/leisure contexts. One in four young people said they had been involved with decision making in school. Most of these were via the school council, with one response concerning recruitment of a new head teacher and one as interviewee as a learning mentor.

When asked about involvement in decision making in their community, only a small minority mentioned community activities such as organising a fund raising stall. The majority of responses concerned involvement in choosing activities in local youth or leisure groups, involvement in the UKYP or with Connexions.

When asked about experiences of being involved with decision making in services, responses included being consulted on youth issues with one example provided where young people acted as consultants for Connexions. Two responses concerned involvement in the youth parliament and 5 responses concerned decisions about activities in youth/leisure settings.

2.5.2 Young people's influence in making serious or big decisions

When asked about examples where young people had been involved in 'serious' decision making, young people most frequently mentioned decisions taken in youth clubs. Significantly young people also mentioned key life-changing' decisions they took themselves within the context of family and moving to live elsewhere. The remainder of the responses concerned decisions in youth participation structures (such as the YPP and youth councils), decisions about funding and projects and initiatives within services such as Connexions projects, Review of Housing Associations and help with a family centre. Only one young person mentioned they had been involved in serious decisions within school.

2.5.3 What effects young people's participation?

Reasons given for why young people weren't involved included: bullying, young people not knowing that they can be involved, not being asked and, specifically at school, because of a perception that people don't care what young people think. Young people also felt that adults have a negative view of young people and are not interested in talking and listening to young people and instead just like to make decisions themselves.

2.5.4 Where do young people want to be involved more?

Of the 26 responses to this question, 13 responses mentioned school with an apparent dissatisfaction with the operation of the school council and general opportunities for having their say, being listened to and involved in school decisions.

Other areas where young people expressed a desire to be more involved included:

- What the council's money gets spent on;
- Working with the police and helping to find solutions to young people getting into trouble;
- Responding to the bad press about young people.

2.5.5 Reflections on young people's participation in school, community and services

These findings are the result of consultation with young people mainly in one setting and as such should not be seen as representative of the views of young people. They do however provide some insights into how young people understand and respond to opportunities to participate. Significantly, beyond the more formal channels of participation such as the Young People's Parliament, the responses do indicate that young people readily articulate their understanding and experience of participation in terms of choices and contributions they make within everyday life contexts such as school, youth clubs and organisations they are involved in.

When asked if they could name any rights they had, out of 24 responses, only four mentioned the Convention on the Rights of the Child, five mentioned the right to have your voice heard, four mentioned the right to education and two mentioned the right to be safe and protected.

More telling perhaps were the comments young people gave about their human rights:

"We may have rights but we don't get heard."
"We don't have many."
"They look down their nose at you – you are not valued as a young person."
"No, we're judged."
"Young people don't get rights."

Most significantly, given the amount of time young people spend in schools, opportunities for positive experiences of participation seem particularly limited.

3. Young people's participation in the commissioning of services

3.1 Introduction

A major concern with children and young people's participation is the extent to which their views and perspectives are taken seriously, impact on decision making and bring about change. In local authority settings one of the most significant ways in which young people can participate in local decision making is by influencing the process by which services are commissioned. In this research we interpret participation in commissioning in terms of opportunities for young people to be involved in decision making about what services are provided and how. By implication, this definition also includes young people's awareness, take up and evaluation of their experiences of services provided. Many young people in this research did not understand the term 'commissioning'. Nonetheless, it is clear that in both Trusts progress is being made in having young people influencing key decisions about what services are provided, how funding is allocated and in monitoring of services.

Both Trusts adopt similar 'commissioning cycle' models to inform their involvement of local stakeholders in decisions about services. A key feature of this commissioning cycle is that it is a cyclical process allowing for involvement at different stages in the cycle.

Assess – Plan – Do – Review

A recent report on commissioning positive activities for young people (Willis et al 2008) identified three ways in which young people are involved in the commissioning process: in planning and decision making about commissioning and service procurement; in stimulating the demand side by enabling young people to make informed choices to access services; and

monitoring and evaluating the quality and outcomes of service provision. This report identified that authorities had more to do to involve young people in commissioning. In this research we found that young people participate at varying points in the commissioning process for example through:

- Consultations, surveys and innovation days
- Alerting decision makers to key priorities by identifying new issues which can inform service provision.
- Undertaking inspections of services
- Scrutiny roles where plans are 'checked' with young people.
- Raising awareness about services through development of information materials and producing child friendly versions of key policy documents.
- Providing services directly themselves

Participation in commissioning does not solely imply direct involvement in decision making processes, but is more likely to involve young people participating in more indirect ways which inform the final decisions in the commissioning process. Indeed in many cases the commissioning process involves needs analysis through consultation rather than participation in the final decision making process.

During this research one of the respondents suggested that there are two elements to participation: *Engagement* (being involved) and *Influencing* and shaping. The latter suggests that power is being exercised to change something. The former by contrast suggests a more passive role where young people may be involved but without necessarily having the power to influence decisions or actions. This distinction is important for appreciating the extent to which young people have the power to *influence* the final decision or action, rather than just be *involved*.

In the sections that follow evidence is provided of the different ways in which young people are involved in the commissioning process according to two levels of involvement: direct and indirect involvement. Direct involvement refers to situations where young people are directly involved in influencing final decision making or actions. In contrast, indirect involvement refers to situations where young people may be centrally involved but without direct influence over final decisions or actions. These are of course not clear distinctions. For example, young people may be centrally involved in influencing, or commenting on, strategic plans, but plans which have been put together by adults; albeit informed by prior evidence from young people. Similarly, young people may be directly involved in service inspections but do not have power to make final strategic commissioning decisions in response to those inspections. However, in the hard reality of local government, with multiple lines of accountability and complex decision making processes, these situations might be as much as is realistically achievable. Nonetheless, the distinction between direct and indirect forms of participation used here, whilst not seeking to be definitive, does serve to provoke some critical

reflection on how power is exercised by young people and adults in the commissioning of services.

3.2 Direct involvement in the commissioning of services

In this section evidence is considered as to young people's direct influence on the planning and delivery of services. These approximate to the 'plan' (decision making) and 'do' (action/delivery) phases of the commissioning cycle.

3.2.1 Decision making about services

In both Trusts young people are clearly involved in influencing what services are provided and how. Young people have been involved in decision making at a project level – for example in youth work – for some time. Yet, it is during the previous year that involvement in the commissioning cycle has progressed in both Trusts. For one Trust 'tying in with commissioning has been key to developing participation work'. Whilst the second Trust proudly asserts that:

"... young people influence everything we do ... I don't think there is anything we do ... that doesn't have a young person's contribution made to how we are doing it." Head of Service)

Young people are clearly involved in decision making about services provided and there is no doubt that their involvement is taken seriously in decision making. What is less clear is the extent to which young people really influence key strategic decision making. Whereas, at a project level young people may have the power to make the final decision, at a strategic level young people tend to have some influence in informing decisions but are less likely to be directly involved in the final planning decisions. To this extent the tendency is to rely on consultation and deliberative mechanisms to capture young people's views whilst adults retain the power to make the final decisions. However, given that local authorities have statutory duties which inform their agenda, having young people's views taken account of in decision making (as stated in article 12 of the UNCRC), could be considered progress in itself.

All the same one of the Trusts has put significant emphasis on developing ways of involving young people in the commissioning process. A game was used to explore with young people how to foster their involvement in commissioning. In the process the concept of commissioning was simplified and reframed and since has further developed into an 'interactive commissioning walk' which explored how young people can be involved at different stages of the commissioning cycle. The interactive commissioning walk is a cartoon based, web enabled game which uses a young person icon

to track through the commissioning cycle providing young people with opportunities to get involved at different stages.

In this Trust the Children and Young People's Plan is driven by key messages and priorities from young people. For example, Transport and Bullying are key priorities that have come out of universal consultation, and, as one officer stated: "Bullying never comes out as a strategic priority from any needs analysis because it doesn't need to get recorded, and because often teachers feel that bullying isn't a problem in their school." Younger children have also influenced the Children and Young People's Plan as a result of debates in primary schools looking at key issues for children.

In the same Trust, a second example involved 250 testimonies being received back from parents and carers about experiences of SEN services. Six follow up conversation events were held with parents and carers to develop a mandate for change with the result that there is now a £42m commissioning strategy being driven by user voice. However, young people themselves were not part of this process; indeed the officer concerned identified young people with SEN as an area for improvement.

Other ways in which young people have been involved in ways that inform the commissioning process include:

Theatre groups supporting young people in putting on a play about what services are needed for **homeless young people**.

Young people have been involved in **reviewing care leaving services** and presenting findings to a providers forum across the county to inform their leaving care strategy

Option appraisal process where young people are asked to provide their needs for a **foster placement** which is then circulated to providers who compete for the business.

Commissioning board of young mums to oversee **commissioning for sexual health**, parenting, family support and extended schools

Evaluating bids for new services and projects for the preventative partnerships fund under the youth inclusion programme. Young people's role is to influence decisions regarding the award of contract to provider of services. Young people received training and were supported in preparation for the session. In terms of impact, this involvement helped to identify the most suitable provider for the service and how the service is delivered. And in the process young people learned more about the commissioning process and benefited from being able to influence service delivery.

The last three cases above represent a significant shift towards young people having key influence on commissioning decisions, beyond just securing young people's voice through consultation. To this extent these reflect a shift in culture and ethos towards young people's participation.

In the second Trust the approach to young people's participation in commissioning appears to be based on a 'consultation on adult plans' model. The process of commissioning for the current year in this Trust can be simplified as follows:

Strategic core planning team undertakes a needs analysis based on evidence from surveys, reviews and inspections

Key (must shift) objectives are identified according to ECM outcomes and statutory duties

Children's Trust board decide on priorities

Themed sessions with Trust partners to identify strategic activity (formerly partners were simply invited to submit actions without any collaboration)

Draft action plan produced

Consultation with children and families

Strategic activity finalised by executive team and approved by Children's Trust board

As this sequence illustrates, although prior surveys and consultations are taken into account in identifying strategic priorities, children and families are not directly involved until later on in the process. As one of the officers states:

"Children and young people would have participated indirectly .. we didn't sit around the table and speak to children about the priorities, but the messages that were coming from all of these consultations and participation work were all fed into the pot. The Alliance board then have a big discussion about which of these need to be priorities."

What this suggests is that although young people are seen as being involved in commenting on strategic plans they are not involved in developing those plans. All the same this constitutes a significant advance in terms of young people influencing the commissioning process. As one young person stated:

"This now means that more young people's views are submitted

and heard and are taken into consideration before any big decision is made. The council have great respect for young people's views now which means that young people can start to relate to the council and a mutual respect is starting to grow. It is great to be a part of it." (Young person)

Another young person adopts a more pragmatic stance in relation to young people influencing strategic decisions.

"I can't see young people influencing big decisions because of a lack of trust ... and there is a limit to what young people can be involved in."

In this Trust the young people were consulted on their views about what should go into the Children and Young People's Plan. Whilst being seen as symbolic involvement at a strategic level, only a small number of young people from the YPP were consulted and impact is perceived to be minimal. An under 13s group - Participate - were also involved though only in terms of creating a children friendly version of the plan. However, one young person argued that the Plan was 'too corporate' to understand and then they never heard what happened after the Plan was drawn up. Nonetheless there are plans to publicize the now finished plan to young people across the borough.

In spite of young people's consultation in the commissioning process it was difficult to find evidence for where young people have been 'directly' involved in strategic decision making in both Trusts. It is unclear the extent to which young people have the power to significantly influence key strategic decisions about services. In both cases, the rhetoric is of commissioning being 'driven by young people,' yet in reality this amounts to young people having a say on strategies developed within statutory obligations framed by Every Child Matters outcomes. In this respect young people's views are genuinely taken into account, but as informants rather than participants in the shaping of plans and decisions. This is reflected in the following statement from one officer:

"There are examples where we are successful in making sure young people are influencing and shaping decisions at the top end. The weakness in our approach is we are almost bound to be going with what our priorities are and then going to seek young people to fit that category. The holy grail is how to take a more universal approach and those priorities come up."

At a project level however, young people are readily involved in how services are provided. The Cave youth project in Tyneside for example is run by and for young people, within which decisions about what is provided are taken by young people.

"... we have a say in how the budget is used in the services and what things will appeal to young people which will encourage them to use that service, for example, extra staff training, the way things looks, equipment and resources etc".

This quote illustrates how young people may be involved in decisions about how plans and services are delivered, but less so in decisions about what those services and plans are in the first place. However, one area where young people do have some influence directly is in funding allocation.

3.2.2 Funding decisions about services provided

In this section examples are provided where young people are involved directly in financial decision making. By directly influencing decisions about budget allocation young people are, by implication, directly influencing services provided. This evaluation found an encouraging growth in young people's involvement in funding decisions, largely in relation to external funding.

In both Devon and South Tyneside young people have had (for the most part) controlling decisions on funding allocation through **Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF)/Youth Capital Fund (YCF) and YouthBanks**¹². YCF and YCF are funds provided through the government Youth Matters initiative¹³, launched in 2006. Funding was extended in 2007 through Aiming High¹⁴ to help Local Authorities meet their statutory duties in securing young people's access to positive activities. The funds give young people more choice and influence over provision by putting funds directly into the hands of young people to make collective decisions about spending priorities for activities in their local area. In Tyneside young people recounted generally positive stories of sitting on the YOF/YCF panel to decide on which projects received funding. Although monitored by the regional Government Office, the process is controlled 100% by young people.

In Devon, several examples were mentioned where young people influence spend such as the **young carers** grant spend, evaluating bids for the youth inclusion programme and involvement in **area budgets** across Devon. In these cases young people are involved together with adults in deciding on funding rather than retaining complete power themselves.

¹² YouthBank UK is an innovative grant making initiative run by and for young people, providing small grants to fund young people's projects in their communities: www.YouthBankuk.org.uk

¹³ Youth Matters: Next Steps. 2006 DCSF www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

¹⁴ Op cit. footnote 1

Case Study 1: Steve¹⁵ (15) and Michael (16) recount their experience of the Young Peoples Scrutiny Forum:

At the end of last year we were involved in deciding on budgets, using a game to give our views about how the budget should be spent in each different area. Youth parliament, shadow exec and scrutiny forum were all involved as the Get UR voice heard team. We were actually scrutinising how much certain areas got in comparison to others and moved figures round and quite a lot of good feedback came from that as how we had gone through with it, changes were made to the budgeting done by Devon finance service as to what amount people get.

A further example concerns young people influencing spending of the young carers grant. Consultation was undertaken with young carers involved in projects, young people then had a role in influencing spending to increase monies for respite activities. The young people were supported by the young carers project worker. The outcomes of this were to provide more breaks from caring by increasing respite activities for young carers. On a personal level young people felt listened to and were aware of changes that happened as a result of their involvement.

The examples of involvement in funding decisions appear to be amongst the most significant and unambiguous ways in which young people can directly influence service provision. This is especially the case with *external funding* such as YOF/YCF where young people exercise 100% control over the decisions made. However, young people have less power with core funding. This is largely due to authorities needing to ensure their statutory duties in provision are properly resourced. To this extent, young people's views are not the only criteria. The result is that young people's involvement in core funded service provision is developed in conjunction with existing commissioning decision making processes. Whilst significant progress has been made in involving young people in the commissioning process, on the whole strategic decisions are largely taken by adults, albeit informed through young people's contributions.

3.2.3 Youth-led service provision

In most cases young people's participation tends to involve integrating young people's views and perspectives into mainstream decision making processes. Yet there is evidence that, once young people are engaged, new ideas for different sorts of participation become possible. In this section examples are provided where young people themselves have led in the provision, rather than planning, of a service. In Section 4 further examples of youth-led activity are provided. Case study 2 below provides an example of where a young mother Juliette came up with an idea for how she can provide services

¹⁵ These are not the young people's real names

directly herself, which was then taken forward as one strand of sexual health promotion work.

Case study 2: Sexual health promotion

(Juliette's story: young mum age 19)

It started when the youth worker came to the baby group to see if any young people want to participate in doing interviews for the Teenage Pregnancy coordinator post because we know what that's about. So I came along. I then had a really good idea to help with this work ... The idea is to have virtual babies in place for people in Social Services care and schools. It is now more sexual health ... but I hope they are interested, hope it will give them insights into life choices, so young people don't go into it without thinking. I want young people to make informed decisions on sexual health. I went to Head of Commissioning he said yes, he thought this was a good idea and got someone to help, with me project managing it. I need to do training first - ICT training and introduction to youth work and sexual health which will be OCN accredited. I hope to improve what is provided so that young people get better services to help them make better decisions and to help young people in my situation. I feel really good about it.. I've had a lot on in my life so I'm a bit nervous, but I've got more support than I thought I would get, I have met with a Social Worker and Connexions ... and I'm gaining a work placement and eventually want to go to university. I went in thinking just about helping others but have got so much for me. It is great for my future – decisions about what to do. I had nothing before but now I have a goal and more confidence. The participation worker has helped by giving me positive encouragement and puts in the work to help.. she wants it to happen as much as me.

This case study illustrates how young people can be involved in ways other than as informants to adult professionals. Whilst Juliette's story is an isolated case, there are other examples (see section 4) where young people have taken the initiative with ideas and projects they have come up with and taken them forward themselves. What is increasingly evident is that engaging with young people at a basic level can open up other possibilities for participation. In this way, there is not one format or model for young people's participation, instead what is important is that opportunities are made available for young people to talk about and develop ideas and have support available to take those ideas forward.

3.2.4 Campaigns and lobbying about services provided

There seems to be nothing more motivating for a young person, than the opportunity to develop their own ideas. Since year one of the evaluation there has been a growth in campaign work around issues which young people

feel strongly about but which may not be on, or may be in conflict with, the agenda of local authorities. The following case study provides one such example where, as a result of young people's concerns, self-initiated action followed in the form of producing a DVD to argue against the cuts to a much-needed project.

Case study 3: Ricky and Nathalie's campaign against the termination of Youth Choice

The Youth Choice programme helps disadvantaged young people gain employment. In April 2008 the programme was cut. Two of the young people involved in the Young People's Parliament worked with the council to try and re-establish the project. Ricky and Nathalie produced a DVD about young people's experiences living in South Tyneside which they then presented to the CEO of the local authority. The DVD was well received and their message was communicated and heard. Within 24 hours funding for the Youth Choice programme had been extended, although the intake was halved. For Ricky this was the biggest thing he had influenced. The action taken by Ricky and Nathalie was totally youth-led, although support was provided by the Participation Worker and a Video Technician, and had a direct impact on the continuation of the service.

The case above provides a classic example where young people have directly informed a decision about service provision through their own action. Whilst this involved young people who were already involved in the YPP, young people's influence did not come through conventional decision-making channels, rather through an ad hoc initiative using their own choice of media to communicate their message. This example shows that young people can be involved in influencing *what* services are provided, however, young people tend to have more impact influencing *how* services are delivered.

Other examples where young people have undertaken campaigns to try and get something changed concerns the 'Bus project' and the 'Black bin liner' project. **The Black bin liner kid project** came about as a result of children in care feeling disrespected when they are just given a black bin liner to put their belongings in when they move. Children in care went to see the head of service and explained what the problem was and how it affected them. As a result of their initiative, the service now has a supply of holdalls to provide for young people when they move.

These case studies above provide examples of where young people's energies are channelled through the local authority decision making structures to influence whether and how services are provided. Yet there are other examples of campaign activities which young people have driven which are less aligned to service provision, but have a broader aim of challenging and changing social attitudes. In Devon, **The Don't Judge Us Till You**

Know Us campaign came about as a result of young people talking about how media representations and social attitudes towards young people is a major issue affecting them. It is also an issue which cannot be addressed through service provision alone. In this case young people have developed a social action campaign to try and challenge negative stereotypes of young people. This campaign is discussed in more detail in case study 7 in section 4.3.2. Similarly in South Tyneside young people initiated intergenerational dialogue with Forum 50 (for older citizens) as a way of confronting perceived misinterpretations and negative attitudes towards young people and their values.

3.3 Indirect involvement in commissioning of services

This section is concerned with situations where young people's perspectives are considered in decisions about service planning and delivery, though young people are not directly involved further in developing plans themselves in response to issues raised. Hence this section reviews young people's involvement through consultations, forums and councils, inspections, reviews as well as producing young person-friendly information to improve awareness and access to services.

3.3.1 Consultations and surveys about service provision

In both Trusts, consultations and surveys provide a key set of evidence for informing the commissioning decision making process. In one of the Trusts, the draft plans for the yearly commissioning cycle are developed on the back of survey evidence. Section 3.2.1 above discussed how consultations and events with young people are seen as a way for young people to directly influence planning and decision making, whilst arguing that in reality this does not constitute direct influence since young people do not get to shape the plans themselves. All the same different forms of consultation with young people are important for ensuring young people's views and experiences inform and are taken into account in the commissioning decisions.

In Devon, many partner agencies use the annual youth residential (Kongomana) to undertake pieces of consultation with young people.

"Many pieces of consultation at Kongomana are undertaken from lots of colleagues – it has significantly altered the way in which the organisation is working. The participation element of Kongomana is seen as significant and valuable."

(Participation Worker)



Plate 5: Consulting with young people at a youth residential

To ensure consultation is of high quality and acknowledges the needs of those being consulted as well as those consulting, a consultation proforma has been developed to be adopted by partners and DCC.

Similarly, in South Tyneside, current plans for services for children and young people as well as many current projects, have come out of a consultation around Every Child Matters undertaken across the borough with 144 young people.

Participatory practice is widely acknowledged in theory as having a 'learning' or 'inquiry' element, wherein traditional assumptions can be suspended and creative visioning used to collaboratively develop new ideas in response to issues and problems. It is hence encouraging to find evidence of innovation workshops where the creative potential of young people has been tapped into to inform decisions rather than just to identify issues. One particular example of an innovation event brought young people together with adults to find ways of encouraging more recycling. Young people came up with an idea which was then taken on by the council who have progressed towards commissioning a company to produce the materials to take round schools.

Innovation days provide an opportunity for young people to work alongside adults to explore creative responses to problems. Another context in which young people have the space to raise issues and come up with ideas in response to local issues is through youth specific forums and councils.

3.3.2 Forums and youth councils

Apart from specific task-focused consultations and surveys, there are permanent structures in which young people can attend to voice their

concerns. These are important as they provide opportunities for young people to participate more proactively rather than just in response to the local authority agenda. On the one hand, these include those democratic structures which all people have access to such as Local Area or District Forums. In South Tyneside the timing of the 6 area forums have now been changed to accommodate young people and it is now accepted that young people make an active contribution to these. On the other hand these include youth specific structures such as the Young People's Parliament, the Young People's Scrutiny Forum and the Young People's Shadow Executive.

In addition to customary democratic structures such as area forums, there is an increasing network of different forums specific for young people. Some of these mirror existing adult structures such as youth town councils, although young people's experience of these was not good due to the perceived lack of training of those running the council and because they are too formal.

"The [town] youth council is quite formal so we don't get a lot done, because it's formal and ... it's often little projects like holding a Halloween party.. it isn't big issues ... we're not dealing with issues that young people have. The clerk is going on how the adult town council is run and trying to make us to be like them and act in the same way and the thing is we're not really adults ... "

In South Tyneside there is a Borough-wide school council which brings together representatives from all the schools. Young people spoke favourably of this as a structure to get involved, but it is not currently running due to a lack of funding.

In addition to generic fora such as those above, there are a growing number of fora for particular groups of young people such as Lesbian, Gay Bisexual forum and Children in Care Forum.

Case study 4: 'Children's Voice' Children in Care Forum, Devon, (Michael age 16)

The Children in Care forum is a non elected group launched in Jan 2008 representing children in care across Devon. Michael lives in foster care after leaving home and is representative for North Devon. He is also active in other groups such as the YPP and YPSF. As a representative of the Children in Care forum Michael has been active in many ways in improving services for young people in care. He has addressed the teachers at his school in a staff meeting to raise awareness of what it's like being a child in care by relating his own experiences of the care system. He gained a lot of respect from the teachers following that presentation with a noticeable shift in the way teachers related to him. There are currently 9 children in care in this school and as a result of his talk he feels teachers are

now more aware of who they are. He saw this opportunity as a way of teaching the teachers and to make them aware that they may be going through certain problems and therefore need some leeway, as foster placement can be a stressful time.

In addition, Michael and colleagues are putting together a young person friendly version of the government White Paper pledge for children in care. He has also contributed to the corporate parenting forum training for foster carers. Through the corporate parenting forum the children in care council have been able to talk with key staff in Children's Services to put their views forward to the council and they have gained the backing of elected members. They are currently producing a booklet for children in care – so they know exactly who different people are who are working for them.

These ways in which Michael and colleagues in the Children in Care council have participated are important ways of influencing how services are provided for children and young people in care, but also influence how others services (such as education) are delivered to children in care.

Impact 17 and the Devon Young People's Scrutiny Forum are other structures which are important in providing a space for young people to generate ideas and projects for further participation projects.

3.3.3 Inspections and reviews

Inspections and reviews are a key phase in the commissioning cycle. As such young people undertaking the role of inspectors of services can inform the future commissioning of services. However, this form of participation is recorded as an indirect form of involvement since young people do not have the power to make decisions for the services they are inspecting nor do they have the power to change what services are provided as a result of their inspections.

In South Tyneside the youth inspection team *Check it Out* have undertaken three inspections of youth service projects.

Case Study 5: The Youth Inspection Team 'Check It Out'

The youth inspection team in South Tyneside consists of 12 young people. In a joint initiative with neighbouring authorities inspections are undertaken of youth service projects. Young people decide which inspections they are going to carry out and give the projects one weeks notice. Young people provide a grading according to five levels of award (bronze to platinum) and write a report based on their inspection. The report goes to

the centre manager who has two weeks to respond. The inspection team then go back two months later and go back through what they have looked at. As soon as the report is done a meeting is arranged with the youth service management. Young people present their findings about what is good and bad and the youth service manager has two weeks to reply. Any strategic issues can be taken up by the youth service manager and if necessary can be taken further to the level of the Children's Trust. The inspection team is recognised by the Children's Trust but most action is taken by the youth service.

Young people have been similarly involved in sections of services such as Leaving Care in Devon.

3.3.4 Improving information and awareness of services amongst young people

In the report of Commissioning positive activities with young people¹⁶ one of the three ways in which young people were involved in commissioning was in 'activating the demand side of service'. Whilst this does not involve planning or decision making on the part of service providers, it is important in ensuring information and accessibility of service for young people. For example in Devon the Young People's Scrutiny Forum has worked with the PCT to rewrite the booklet of the PCT plan in a child-friendly version. Other work in this vein has concerned writing a child-friendly version of the Children in Care pledge.

3.4 Reflections on how young people can be more involved in commissioning

This section has presented some insights into the extent to which young people have been involved in the commissioning process. The evidence here highlights that young people are able to participate effectively in influencing service provision. However, it is also clear that there is still a considerable way to go for young people to exercise significant influence as a matter of course. Many decision makers in local authorities are still reticent about ceding power to young people. The result is that in spite of high levels of commitment to ensure services meet young people's needs, decisions are on the whole taken by adults with little direct involvement of young people. Instead there is a reliance on surveys and consultation with young people, for example in developing priorities for the Children and Young People's Plan, but not the plan itself.

¹⁶ Op. cite footnote 1

The culture shift necessary for local decision making to become more participatory is not an easy one or one that is likely to happen quickly. In the interim report at the end of the first year of this evaluation a key challenge was to help staff make the shift from consultation to understanding participation as a whole process of inquiry, decision making and evaluation. This is still pertinent and involves creating a participatory culture across the whole institution so that staff too have a voice in the system.

Yet, it appears that both young people and adult professionals are mindful that there are some things that young people should not, or are not able to, be involved in. Nonetheless, whilst young people do not have the power to have the ultimate say, the obligation provided by legislation for young people to have their views taken into account in local decision making provides a substantial opportunity to influence the decisions that are finally taken.

The case above in section 3.2.4 shows that young people can, all the same, exert considerable influence on decisions about services, in this case pressing for the reversal of a decision to cut what was seen as an essential service. Indeed it may be that young people's role in lobbying and campaigning (as set out in section 3.2.4) could be a more effective way for young people to influence decision making than being co-opted into more formalised structures. Although it should be noted that many of the campaigns have developed out of prior relationships with young people especially in the YPP.

However, policy prescriptions outlined in the governments ten year strategy for young people Aiming High¹⁷ stating that 5% of youth service budgets should be allocated by young people by 2011 and 25% by 2018, provides a new challenge for local authorities and children's trusts to make their decision making structures and processes democratically more accountable. There is already evidence through this project that young people are able to take leadership roles in decisions about funding and service provision. This evidence will be considered in the following section.

The commissioning cycle outlined at the beginning of this section provides a framework for identifying how young people are involved in the commissioning process. This report provides examples of participation at each stage. It is important to note that a well developed participatory system would involve young people throughout all phases of the commissioning cycle. The reality however is that not everyone wants to be involved at all stages. Some young people are happy to simply turn up and get involved by communicating their views, experiences or priorities. Others may be more inclined to direct their energies to directly influencing change for example as leaders or by initiating actions with others.

¹⁷ Op cit. Footnote 1

4. Children and young people as leaders in participation

4.1 Introduction

The extent to which young people are able to take on leadership roles is an indicator of how well power is being redistributed from adults to young people. The idea of young people as leaders in participation can be understood in three ways. First, it suggests that young people can take a lead by *initiating an idea* and acting on it. Second, we can understand it in terms of young people taking a *leadership role* in a project or initiative regardless of who has initiated the idea. Third, leadership can mean having a *lead or controlling influence over decisions*.

In this section we explore adult and young people's interpretations of leadership. We then consider how young people are taking a lead according to the three interpretations above before concluding with some reflections from participants on young people leading when they participate and the extent to which participation overall is led by the Trusts or by young people.

4.2 Perspectives on what 'taking a lead in participation' means

For adult professionals, taking a lead in participation is commonly understood in terms of a 'felt sense of agency'; that is, young people feeling they are able to influence and be involved in decisions in a variety of ways. One view suggests that leadership is about young people having the power and autonomy to make their own decisions. This resonated with some of the views from young people, for example one young person who felt that leadership was about "being able to take control over something that you want to get done."

Others articulate leadership in terms of 'empowerment' of young people as social actors, involving developing confidence, resilience and ability to cope. This resonates with young people's interpretations of what it means to take a lead, involving a process of learning and self development through self-education, as articulated in the following words from young people used to signify what leadership means to them:

More pride - Feeling responsible (positively) - Confidence builder
- Role reversal/taking a lead where others don't - Experience -
Learning curve - Role models - Language they understand - Trust
from adults - Confidence in decisions made - Get at the same level

These comments are a reflection of the sense of self and sense of agency young people feel when they lead, through feeling a sense of value, confidence, responsibility and equality with others.

These interpretations of leadership in terms of agency and empowerment suggest an emphasis on participation as self determination and, which involves the nurturing of individual qualities and ability to take the initiative; or, as one adult suggested, being able to demonstrate *entrepreneurial qualities*.

"... it is about confidence but also about resilience and how to cope. So we would say we want young people to become leaders, but it is more than that. It is about young people becoming entrepreneurial. It is about 'have you got an idea and can you make that idea happen.' " (Adult)

Indeed in one Trust, alongside seeking to foster young people's influence on what services are provided, there is an emphasis on helping young people develop skills and qualities so that they become competitive in the labour market. This reveals a perspective on participation which involves more than having an influence in local decision making, but instead which views participation as a more sustainable condition in which young people can be proactive leaders in their own lives. In many ways this view is more resonant with concerns that participation should have a real impact in improving young people's lives and life chances.

This sentiment was echoed in year one of this evaluation in the way young people tended to see the benefits of participation primarily in terms of their own personal development and again further reiterated in this current year's evaluation. The case study of Nathalie in section 4.3.1 provides an illustration of how this process of participation as personal empowerment can lead to positive benefits in terms of enhanced life chances.

4.3 How are young people taking a leadership role in participation?

"There are plenty of opportunities for young people to take a lead but they don't always know of them ... instead youth workers have to go and find them ... you need to get information to young people" (Young woman, age 20)

Opportunities for young people to take a lead depend as much on the culture of the Trust and its staff in welcoming, valuing and supporting young people when they initiate something, as it does on specific structures. Stories of young people taking a lead suggest that in most cases this happens through workers – mainly Participation or Youth Workers, though sometimes teachers. This could involve an idea or campaign they want to embark on or

an issue they want to address. It is clear from this research that in both Trusts, there is for the most part a genuine culture to listen and support young people when they have an idea through an emerging network of structures and systems. However, it was noted that there are still some officers and elected members who do not recognise and value young people's participation.

It is not unsurprising that examples where young people have taken a lead have tended to come out of prior youth work. In this sense youth work (in its various forms) appears to be a pre-requisite for providing a context for encouraging young people to take a lead in participation. Even for those already involved with the YPP or other established structures, the first port of call for young people who want to lead with a new idea, is the Participation Worker. The following three subsections provide evidence of the different ways in which young people take a lead in participation.

4.3.1 Taking a lead through self-initiated activity

Hart's famous 'ladder of participation' talks of adult and child-initiated decision making. Self-initiated activity is about individuals articulating a sense of 'agency'; that is, having a motivation or idea for doing something and following through that idea. Ultimately, this form of participation is about the sense of empowerment a person feels they have with which they can act. It is also a way in which young people can participate according to their own agenda without the constraints of an official agenda or procedures, since not all change happens through local authorities. Issues or ideas initiated by young people may be carried through by young people, normally with support from adults, as the example in Case study 6 below illustrates. Alternatively, young people may take forward issues they have raised themselves and seek to get these addressed within formal adult decision making structures. In this evaluation examples of both of these types of youth-led initiatives are evident. The key with both of these types of participation is that the agenda is driven by young people.

Case study 6: The South Tyneside Youth International Team – Impact 17. Nathalie's Story (Age 20)

The South Tyneside Youth International Team – Impact 17 was formed out of the South Tyneside Young People's Parliament (STYPP) with the aim of bringing town twinning back to life and to make connections with other youth projects around the world. This also involved volunteer work which we are aiming to do next year by helping to build a health centre. This group was thought up by young people and run totally by young people with support from one of the Participation Workers. My role in STYI was as Project Coordinator along with two other young people. We have been on youth encounters in France. Being involved with STYPP and STYI I found that I grew personally in confidence

and understanding of the very diverse issues that young people can face that I may not have come across myself.

When STYPP first started, we found that we were not taken seriously as a group and that we didn't have much influence within the council. Therefore we worked hard to get ourselves noticed by organising events and going to our councillors, our CAF meetings and other events organised by the council. We soon found that we were very much respected by the council and soon the council wanted to know our views about what young people needed or wanted within their areas. It was a great achievement to see the turn around! Now that our group has a widely recognised name and reputation, a lot of the services provided by the council want to speak with us to find out young people views before they go ahead and finalise a decision.

I had a great time meeting new people and learning about the different services that are available across South Tyneside. I believe I've grown in confidence and have been able to put my stamp on a little bit of South Tyneside by helping out with different projects throughout South Tyneside.

Other examples where young people have both initiated and acted on an idea include the case study in section 3.2.4 where members of the YPP made a DVD as a way of lobbying the council to keep open a youth support service. A further DVD was put together by young people relating what it is like for young people growing up in South Tyneside, to be used for training for elected members. The DVD idea came from young people in the YPP who didn't want Councillors talking down to them, instead to treat them as equals.

A further example is that of Juliette, a young mum who approached the commissioning team (through a participation worker) because she wanted to provide a sexual health promotion service to young people to help prevent early pregnancies. The idea was then agreed and support was put in place to take it forward (see section 3.2.3).

As with these latter two cases much of this type of activity emerges out of prior relationships, contacts and opportunities established through youth work. In this way youth work provides a conduit for supporting young people's energy and creativity around interests and issues of concern.

4.3.2 Leadership roles

Young people who are involved in the YPP readily take up leadership roles by virtue of their position representing the views of young people. Some young people also see structures such as the YPP, youth and school councils as

being important conduits for progressing ideas and issues young people may raise. For example, an issue raised in an area forum can be considered within the YPP and if necessary communicated to the LSP to be considered for action. In both Trusts there is a clear commitment to providing 'spaces' for young people to identify and take forward projects and initiatives themselves. Most frequently this originates out of youth work at a project level from which young people are then supported in taking these issues forward either as campaigns or to lobby and inform ongoing decision making. One such case concerns the **Don't Judge Us** campaign. This is not about influencing decisions about services, but about challenging negative attitudes and stereotypes which affect young people.

Case study 7: The "Don't Judge Us Until You Know Us" campaign. (Alex's Story)

The Don't Judge Us till you Know Us campaign originated from the Chair of the Trust asking young people what the big issue was for them. Young people identified the issue of how young people are portrayed in the media as a major concern. This became a Children's Trust priority with funding commitment from all partners (£20K), but young people have taken on a leadership role in developing the campaign. Young people lead on this campaign by making the decisions about how the budget is used, as members of a steering group, deciding on the campaign and engaging with other young people.

"I got involved with the Don't Judge Us campaign in October. The campaign intends to challenge people's stereotypes about young people - by highlighting the stories of young people who have contributed to their local community / gone through a difficult time etc. Young people have been prejudiced against for a long time and recent research [identified by young people] has shown that the stereotype threat can have detrimental self confirming affects on young people [a ...] people are likely to conform to these stereotypes attributed to them".

With funding, the campaign will be in the form of posters distributed around Devon featuring a real young person's story that is counter-stereotypical. It shows a picture of a boy in a hoodie, with the caption: "I help raise funds for a leukaemia charity". The posters are seen as an effective medium to distribute this message, they are eye catching, interesting and to the point. Talk has also been made of producing a short film, including interviews of young people's stories, and on commonly held stereotypes of young people.

"I'm very glad to be involved in this campaign, and have concluded it is another example of the government/ Devon County Council's

commitment to its young people. The campaign is about young people so it makes sense that they are involved."

The campaign is facilitated and supported by adults but driven by young people. The meeting held on the 28/10/08 was chaired by a young person, and both adults are keen to get our opinions on what is being presented. The poster idea and design came from young people, as well as the captions. We will be sending out application forms that will be sent to young people to see if they want to tell their story to us, the forms were designed by an adult - but edited by myself and other young people. Overall this campaign is very much driven by young people, and I would say it is their involvement that will make this most affective at engaging both adults and young people in our message.

Alex hopes that this campaign will challenge stereotypes of young people and that young people will feel listened to and valued enough to respond in a Devon wide campaign around a major issue of concern. On a personal level Alex has had his own stereotypes challenges and changed.

In a similar vein in Tyneside the My Space project has involved young people taking a lead in preparing and submitting a bid for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding to develop a brand new multi agency youth centre. A large group of young people were consulted on what they would like; some of the young people went on visits to see other facilities and on that basis put the bid together. Although the ultimate decision of where the centre should be located was taken by adults, not young people.

4.3.3 Having a lead or controlling influence over decisions

This report provides substantial evidence of young people's involvement at different stages in local decision making processes. However, there is limited evidence where young people have a leading or controlling influence over decision making. Young people's role in deciding on YOF/YCF and YouthBank funding outlined in section 3.2.2 is one of a few exceptions. A second example is highlighted below as an exemplar of how young people can take on a leading and self-determining role within an organisational context.

Case study 8: Running a College student union

In one of the Devon colleges, the student union (SU) is run autonomously by students. They have their own constitution and receive a block grant of £20,000 per year. The union is run by a student executive with a president who has to be a student taking a sabbatical year. Support is provided by the Head of Student Services. In addition to day to day running of the student union, they make decisions on what events they will support, such as women's day and aid's day. Decisions are

sounded out with the Head of Student Services before being taken to the SU committee, which includes the principle, Head of Student Services, the SU president, Student Liaison Officer and Finance Manager. The SU committee meets twice a term. The adults committee members sit on the SU committee in a monitoring and advisory capacity and to ensure the SU keeps solvent. The SU President also sits on the board of governors for the college and is trained and instituted into the governing body to serve as a governor. In this way the student body is directly represented in college wide decision making.

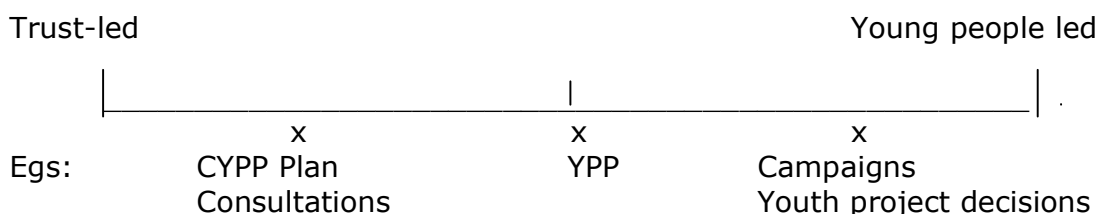
The role of the SU in college governance is paralleled by a learner voice strategy, whereby students can bring up issues from the ground, through a system of tutor groups and faculty groups culminating in a college wide cross faculty group where student reps have an open discussion with college staff around key issues.

4.4 Is participation more youth-led or Trust-led?

To explore further the ethos of youth leadership, we asked whether participants felt participation is more youth-led or Trust-led. There were similar responses for both Trusts, with a clear recognition that different types of activities happen at different points along the continuum. Hence whilst consultations on the Children’s Plan would be more Trust-led, campaigns and decision making within youth projects are more young person led. The Young People’s Parliament (YPP) is seen as operating in the middle.

In spite of these examples of good practice, there was a general feeling that participation still tends to be Trust-led, with more youth-led participation being the exception. However, there was a clearly stated aspiration to work towards the ideal of achieving more of a balance of shared responsibility between young people and Trust. As one adult participant stated:

"... Young people are within the CT now. They are part of the CT ... with ... consultants and other types of practitioner. So the balance when we talk about CT arrangements is... they will be part of it, and decisions therefore involve consensus across all of those partners, so we make a decision or recommendation as a commissioning team – a strategy gets written and it’s a balance of all stakeholder views"



In one Trust, despite strategic plans being drawn up by adults based on prior consultations and surveys, the view from one officer was that overall participation is more young person-led because "the *work done on needs analysis is very much young people-led and that dictates a lot of the work programme of the Trust*". However, other adult participants and young people in this Trust felt that overall participation tended to be more Trust-led. Some respondents felt that even with activities and roles such as the Young People's Scrutiny Forum where young people have a meaningful influence, these were still led by the Trust from plans.

Whilst it is possible to get a general sense about youth-led participation across the Trust as a whole, in individual partner agencies there are variations across the Trust. Some services, such as youth work, are more amenable to young people taking the lead, for example youth work has traditionally sought to empower young people in making decisions within particularly projects as part of their social education remit. Yet in others, such as the Health Service, the situation is still very much provider-led in spite of a wider move towards Patient and Public Involvement.

"We are at a low rung ... very provider-led service and me as a provider, even commissioners, haven't yet done major redesign based on what young people are telling them - which is a test. As a provider ... sitting at a commissioner table ... I am not yet getting a conversation along the lines of 'and based on what young people are saying they have raised these issues.' But I am getting some conversations which say '... and based on our discussion with young people..' which is pretty much about the status quo and how it's working.. so we're getting some of that.. but I'm not getting 'young people told us this and we're reshaping our spec around it'."

(Head of Service)

Where young people take the lead more, this tends to occur within project settings rather than in council settings. A typical pattern is for issues to be raised through the Participation Worker or Youth Worker who then supports this issue being taken up by the YPP who then can take it further into Trust structures and fora such as the LSP. Alternatively, as the examples above highlight, young people may act on their ideas themselves. Whilst young person-led participation rooted in projects might appear to be less ideal given the separation from the strategic decision making arena, at the same time one could argue that young people taking a lead in participation at the project level could be seen as more meaningful for young people rooted in their everyday settings.

4.5 How important is it that young people lead rather than just be involved?

Most young people agreed it is important that young people get to lead initiatives rather than just be involved. Although this response again varied according to how people interpreted the idea of leadership. One young person argued that young people leading is very important because "they have been there and know the situation instead of adults reading from text books." Others suggested that the importance of young people taking a lead was so that they could do something for themselves and could acquire new skills. But whilst on average young people rated the importance of young people taking the lead at seven out of ten on a scale of importance, they also stated clearly that the extent to which they take the lead also depends on support being available from adults.

In Hart's ladder of participation, the top two rungs concerned child-initiated participation. Accordingly many aspire to the top of the ladder. Year one of this evaluation revealed that both Trusts were operating at rung six 'adult initiated, shared decisions with children'. This situation seems to be the same now except that there is now more of a spread of both adult-initiated and young people-initiated participation. The evidence does however raise questions about whether it is realistic to aspire to a situation where all decisions are initiated by young people. Indeed the evidence emerging is that a more desirable situation is where both adults and young people have shared responsibility for initiating decisions. Both adults and young people acknowledge that there are some cases where adults need to lead for example because of the obligation local authorities have for implementing legislation and managing budgets.

" ... there are things they can't participate in because they are coming down from above, for example, how many hours you give to a course, how many courses students can do, that is a financial issue we can't do anything about ...because it is down to what we get per student ... we get a certain amount of money per student and guidance on how you can spend that money. And the Learner Support fund to help support students but there are strict criteria from government about who we can give that to and how we can spend that money." (Head of Service)

Some young people also argued that there are some things they don't know enough about so inevitably will need to defer leadership to adults.

"... they have the money and they have more knowledge of the issues .. so at the moment if we talk to Transport they would have more knowledge about that issue of school buses than we do ... then decisions are made and we can be involved in a monitoring role" (Young person)

Some of the adults also acknowledged that the goal is not to have young people as initiators of all decisions rather that there are a number of different drivers for initiatives.

"The grail is to have young people as one of the initiators ... there are other initiating trends ... also parents ... and government policy we have to take into account. To be fair, if the national policy makers are listening closely then the discontinuity at our level is less. Overall the ECM has had ... not much discontinuity between national and local. But if that converts to the achievement /attainment stuff in education that is where it starts to part company." (Local authority officer)

Further reflection on the conundrum of young people taking a lead revealed a more mature perspective from both young people and adults.

"It's important that young people have the opportunity to lead and can lead if they wish to and have appropriate support, but are not expected to ... We should work with young people to decide what the right mix of leading and/or involvement is. ... Leadership takes many forms!! Influence is just as important" (Adult)

Equally young people are clear that there are some things they want to lead on but others they are happy to not be involved in.

"It depends on the project being worked on, sometimes there is lots of adult influence, sometimes it's ok for adults to lead ... is about accepting sometimes that there are things you can't do as a young person" (Young person)

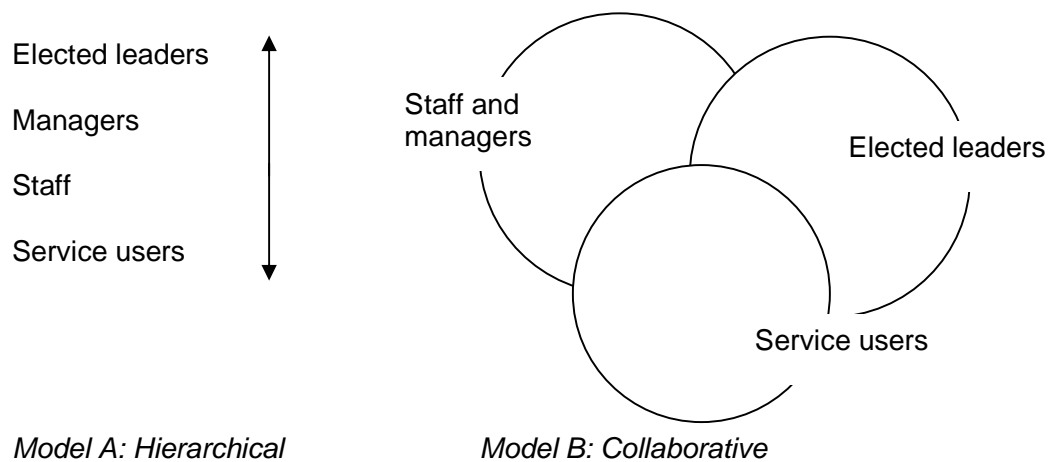
Yet as the adult below noted, the level of involvement and leadership needs to vary for different young people according to how they want to be involved. It also depends on adult support.

"I feel that in some cases it is important for a young person just to be involved and take part rather than to lead – depending on the young person involved." (Local authority officer)

Indeed, for the Fire Service Education Officer, maintaining continuity of contact and intervention to divert young people from criminal activity is a major achievement. What is clear is that there is a need to ensure that opportunities for young people to take a lead sit alongside a range of other opportunities to participate in different ways including just being involved.

4.6 Reflections on young people taking leadership roles in participation

Davies and Badham¹⁸ (2007) writing about transformative leadership in participation argue that for participation to be effective it is not sufficient to simply provide structures for participation, instead there needs to be a change in dynamics of leadership from the dominant norm of hierarchical leadership (model A below) to a more collaborative model (model B) in which power is shared between stakeholders.



This evaluation has been undertaken with this challenge in mind. The data provided in this section provides evidence where this shift has started to happen and where young people have found the 'spaces' and opportunities to realise their own agency as leaders.

There is a clear shift in understanding from recognising the importance of young people's participation in terms of having a say via consultations towards 'empowerment' in which young people have the opportunity to take a lead and demonstrate initiative or enterprise. This shift is crucial for the development of young people's participation in moving beyond the relatively benign and passive, though important, act of expressing a view, to becoming active participants in decisions and actions in response to issues at hand. This shift also ensures that power and decision making is not controlled by adults for the purposes of adult agenda, instead acknowledges that young people themselves can initiate and act on decisions according to their own agenda.

¹⁸ Badham, B. and Davies, T. (2007) The active involvement of young people, in Harrison, R. Benjamin, C. Curran, S. and Hunter, R. (eds) *Leading Work with Young People*. Milton Keynes: OU and Sage

Giving young people more opportunities to act, speak out and participate in key decision making does have implications for professional roles. Increased leadership of young people does not undermine the integrity of the professional role, it simply realigns the role. As one young person stated:

"... participation is on equal terms, as equal partners ... it is a process of negotiation about how things develop."

This quote and the evidence throughout this report highlight the importance of partnership when young people participate. Young people readily acknowledge they need support sometimes and value the guidance and expertise that a professional can bring, which they are unlikely to have themselves. At the same time young people also bring something to the table in terms of creativity, ideas, experience of their own condition and the energy and dynamism of youth. As the author has argued elsewhere (Percy-Smith and Weil 2003¹⁹; Percy-Smith²⁰ 2006) to facilitate the participation of young people professionals need to reanimate their role as 'interpretive' rather than 'expert' professionals, in which experience, knowledge and ideas are negotiated along with power in contexts of equality.

Throughout this evaluation it has become apparent that young people value more than anything the process of being involved, the personal development benefits they accrue and feeling valued for their contribution. However, ultimately individuals and groups mobilise and act because they desire change. To that end it is important to consider the impacts that are derived from young people being involved in commissioning and /or taking a lead.

5. Impacts and outcomes from young people's leadership and participation in commissioning

5.1 Introduction

This research has revealed that young people can play a significant role by participating in local decision making. To a large extent there is a genuine commitment to hear young people's voice and to take these into account in decision making about local services. The research evidence documented in this report provides a range of examples where young people have

¹⁹ Percy-Smith, B. and Weil, S. (2003) Practice based research as development: Innovation and empowerment in Youth intervention initiatives using collaborative action inquiry, in Bennett, A, Cieslik, M. and Miles, S. (eds) *Researching youth*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁰ Percy-Smith, B. (2006) From consultation to social learning in community participation with young people *Children Youth and Environments*, 16 (2), 153-179

participated in local decisions and initiatives. Some instances have had clear and unambiguous direct impact on decisions and outcomes. In many cases young people have been involved with a genuine commitment to have their perspectives inform commissioning decisions, if not the final delivery of services. In other cases the impact participation has had is less clear, for example where young people have been involved, but their perspectives are not reflected in the final decision. And worse, where young people were not even informed what the final decision was.

Yet, whilst there is an intrinsic rationale for having effective services, ultimately what is important is that young people derive benefits from these services. Impacts of participation therefore also need to be understood in terms of the extent to which young people experience benefits in their lives and life chances. Yet, benefits in terms of change do not only arise through changes in service provision, but importantly also through participating in learning, dialogue and action with others. As one young person argued, it is about creating a better understanding of how young people can make a difference and for young people to have a voice in the democratic process. These are also outcomes in their own right.

Finally, a key objective in this research is to gain insights into the personal benefits acquire by those young people who participate. In the first year's report a key finding was that young people were more likely to evaluate the benefits of participation in terms of their own personal development. These three areas of impact will be discussed in turn.

5.2 Impact on decisions about service provision

As discussed at the beginning of section three, young people's participation does not necessarily influence outcomes in a direct linear way. Indeed there are few examples where young people have directly influenced a change in services through conventional decision making channels. However, there are numerous examples whereby young people have informed or influenced services indirectly, for example by lobbying on one off issues, influencing allocation of funding or having their views inform the decision making process. This section discusses the different impacts young people's involvement in commissioning or through taking a lead has had on service provided.

5.2.1 Direct impacts

It has been difficult in this research to find evidence of young people's participation having a direct influence on final services provided through formal decision making channels. However there are some examples which can be provided of the ways in which direct impact has been achieved.

The case of Ricky and Nathalie in section 3.2.4 above provides an excellent example whereby through self initiated action, young people can directly effect service provision. In this case the decision to cut funding to the Youth Choice programme was reversed and the funding reinstated, albeit with fewer places.

Elsewhere we see young people with a defining influence over service provision though their role on the panel for YOF/YCF and YouthBank applications. Whilst this concerns external rather than core funding it does nonetheless demonstrate how young people can directly influence services and projects. A challenge seems to be to widen the influence of young people in decisions on the use of core funding.

A third example where young people commonly have a direct impact on services is at project level where young people have traditionally been involved with youth workers in deciding on activities within projects.

Fourth, whilst not affecting decisions about services, there are examples where young people have, for example, been involved in recruitment and selection wherein decisions have been overturned as a result of young people's views.

Finally, it is clear that the learning from the increasing engagement of young people is having an impact on the way in which adult professionals approach decision making; for example, in one Trust where young people are impacting on the way in which the commissioning process is undertaken.

5.2.2 Indirect impacts

Alongside examples where young people have had a direct impact on provision, there are numerous examples where young people have indirectly influenced decisions about services provided by having their views fed into and taken account of in the decision making process, even though they have not been involved in the final decision making. For example through inspections one young person stated:

"Managers of centres actually listen to us more now and act on our inspection changes"

Yet in one centre which, in last year's report noted that young people do not have the opportunity to impact on developments within the centre, the situation is still the same.

Examples here include surveys and consultations which have informed strategic decision making. In both Trusts, the Children and Young People's Plan has been informed by numerous surveys. For example in Devon the annual youth residential at Kongamana provides opportunities for different agencies to consult with young people and similarly in South Tyneside the

Children and Young People's Plan is informed by prior consultations and surveys with young people.

The evidence in this report suggests that young people are involved at each stage of the commissioning cycle. However, there does still seem to be a reliance on consultation rather than collaboration with young people at all stages of the commissioning cycle. To this extent it appears that some might consider young people to have a direct impact on planning of services because they have been consulted, and as such have affected the final plans and decisions whilst not being involved in making the final decisions. Indeed, given the reality of the multiple agenda at play in commissioning decisions, it may be unrealistic to expect young people to be involved in the whole decision making process. In such cases it is imperative that young people are at least informed and have opportunities to input at each of the different phases of the commissioning cycle and have that input taken seriously.

The assumption behind young people's participation is often that change happens through action and decisions taken by the local authority. This evaluation has revealed that meaningful change can also happen through 'non-formal' forms of participation such as campaigns and initiatives to promote learning. For example, young people are driving the Don't Judge Us campaign (section 3.2.4) to challenge negative portrayal of young people in the media and public eye. Similarly, intergenerational debates with older citizens can have an immediate and direct impact on re-animating public understanding of young people. In this last case significant outcomes included recognition that old and young have similar concerns, that young people did in fact value family and that mobile phones are important for keeping in touch with friends and family rather than symbolic of the separation of young people from society. Key to these initiatives is dialogue and learning rather than consultation and provision.

However, alongside stories where young people's participation had a positive impact on services provided in either a direct or indirect way, young people also recounted experiences where they felt their participation was in vain.

5.2.3 Negative impacts and outcomes

In spite of the strong practice outlined, we encountered a number of occasions where the participation of young people was undermined. A frequent complaint from young people related to situations where they were consulted for their view but then heard nothing about the final decision or course of action that was taken. For young people this was a sign of not being respected for their involvement and had a significant effect on whether they felt participation was worthwhile or not.

As one young person noted:

"Feedback is really important .. it really annoys you when there

is no feedback. How can you monitor change when you don't know what changes have been made"

An example of this concerned the involvement of three young people in the recruitment and selection for a senior officer post. All three young people voted for the candidate that didn't get the job. One of the young people reflected that (s)he didn't mind that the other candidate got the job, going on to say that (s)he thinks the successful candidate is now great in the new position. However, at the time they were not told who had been employed and there was no feedback about how the decision had been made, given that it went against young people's preference. As the young person said:

"We weren't told who was employed .. there was no feedback about how decisions were made.. there was probably good reasons for the final choice as they know more than me what they want but they weren't made aware to us .. I didn't mind who got the job ... but we just wanted the reasons."

In this situation, the outcome was of less significance than the process. Whilst young people are quite appreciative of the fact that their view may not always be acted on, nonetheless, without being informed about what decision had been made and how the final decision was made, young people readily conclude their voice was worthless.

This case study does raise another issue relating to how participation is implemented. Participation in this case involves young people participating by expressing a view which then may or may not inform the final decision which they do not participate in. If a culture of participation is to be truly realised, then young people need to also participate in discussions as part of the final decision making process. Feedback is important, but only necessary when one party has not been involved in a part of the decision making process. A major challenge in developing young people's participation in Children's Trusts therefore is to make a shift from a hierarchical model in which participation and decision making is ultimately controlled through the hierarchy, to a collaborative model in which power and decision making is transparent and shared (see model in section 4.6 above, also Percy-Smith and Weil 2003²¹).

A second way in which young people's participation can be undermined that was found in this evaluation, concerned situations where young people were invited to participate in decisions that had already been made.

One such example concerns the closing of special needs schools in one of the Trusts. Allegedly there were surplus places in the schools so some schools had to close and merged into one. There was a feeling in the authority that there shouldn't be a consultation session to decide which schools to close,

²¹ Op.cit footnote 19

because everyone would simply just say 'not mine.' So, data were used such as deprivation indices, how successful schools were, standards, etc to develop a set of proposals. These could then be consulted on to shape the final proposal. From young people's point of views this was a done deal. The young people wanted a meeting about it, so they asked for a debate because they didn't understanding why the changes were happening. When the meeting finally happened, the young people were told about the proposed merger, which the young people opposed. One young person stated:

"At the meeting we were told what was proposed and we put our views across about it. No one wanted the merger - putting physically disabled children with learning difficulties in one school and the rest in normal schools. Mine's the only school for disabled that still does GCSEs. If I am put into a special school with young people with mental or behavioural difficulties my chances of succeeding would be effected. But they did it anyway. They were just ticking boxes, because it looks like they are just listening to us even if they are not. The decision then went to the young people's scrutiny committee but the decision is going through anyway."

Reflecting on this situation, it is clear that sometimes there are difficult decisions local authorities have to make. However, if this was done in more of an open collaborative way, the dilemma could be presented to young people and members of the public, in terms of asking for how they can help solve the dilemma. This may have opened up alternative courses of action, and at least would have had a chance of taking the public with them on the decision. More importantly, this particular case illustrated the way in which 'participation' is approached as consultation, or even less as 'opportunity to comment on decisions already made' rather than a spirit of collaboration and joint decision making.

5.3 Outcomes for young people

Whilst there is an intrinsic value in young people being involved, for example to exercise their democratic right, ultimately people participate because they want something to change. A key measure of participation is therefore the extent to which outcomes are realised for young people collectively.

The impact of participation in decisions on young people's lives can be assessed at two levels. At one level decisions can be considered in terms of improving young peoples lives now. For example, a priority in one of the Trusts was on challenging negative attitudes and stereotypes towards young people (see section 4.3.2). However, changes in attitudes are difficult to monitor and take time for the effects to be felt. More immediate benefits can be realised for example in terms of improving public transport for young people by providing free bus passes. These sorts of changes are more

tangible and can be achieved in a shorter time span. Part of the problem here is that for decisions to go through committee, be discussed and approved and then implemented, can take time. Benefits are therefore often not realised until sometime in the future.

However, there are examples which emerged through this evaluation where impacts can be identified. For example, changes to sexual health services have already impacted in terms of young people's experiences of those services. In one of the Trusts a key strategic priority which emerged from various consultations was the lack of facilities for young people. As a result, significant work has been put in to identify funding for new provision including a state of the art sports centre, talent shows and theatre groups, the benefit of which for young people can be inferred.

In another example, through detached youth work and listening to young people, they are now working with the community centre volunteering and are now on youth work apprenticeships. So impacts can be seen in terms of progress over time, whereby young people have gone from sixth generation unemployment and in trouble with the police to being actively involved in ways that open up new opportunities whilst also increasing confidence and resilience.

The second level at which benefits for young people from participation can be assessed is in terms of impacts in improving their life chances. In one of the Trusts, there is a legacy of post-industrial economic decline. In this Trust, participation has been approached in terms of helping young people make the most of their life chances by encouraging projects that develop a sense of entrepreneurialism, increase confidence and resilience and help get young people work ready. These are tangible ways in which, through participation, young people can realise direct benefits to their life chances.

5.4 Personal benefits for young people taking part

The first year's report for this evaluation identified how important personal benefits were for young people taking part. This year's evaluation provides further evidence of the importance of personal development for young people. Some of the personal benefits and experiences of participation are captured in the following reflections from young people:

"I had a great time meeting new people and learning about the different services that are available across South Tyneside. I believe I've grown in confidence and have been able to put my stamp on a little bit of South Tyneside by helping out with different projects throughout South Tyneside."

In this case, through the increase in confidence gained, the young person concerned has progressed from involvement in the YPP to going to university

and training as a teacher. Elsewhere, career opportunities have materialised for young people as youth work apprentices.

"It's great for my future – decisions about what to do. I had nothing before but now I have a goal and more confidence"

"I feel listened to and valued enough to respond in an area wide campaign"

"Quite good fun ... it has opened my eyes to some of the issues that go on and some of the services that are available ... about how decisions are made .. doing this you start to realise how things work and helps you later in life so you can understand things a bit more. Overall experience and having projects and the sense of achievement you get after a term of office."

These quotes illustrate that young people are not solely motivated to just exercise their rights to have a say and participate in the democratic process to improve local services. Instead their intentions, aspirations, motivations and, in turn, the benefits they derive from participation are intertwined with their own sense of self and sense of identity and agency as they articulate their own personal aspirations and goals. This finding widens understanding of participation beyond the act of seeking to influence local decisions as a proxy for improving individuals lives and life chances through 'effective services'²², to an emphasis on personal empowerment in responding to life challenges.

This philosophy was mirrored in the ethos in one of the Trusts that placed the emphasis on participation as a way of developing entrepreneurial spirit in young people.

It's about Empowerment. We talk about outcomes a lot so whenever we work with young people we don't just want numbers (how many have come to the YPP), but what difference is it making, what was the starting point for that young people and are they better and different and know how they are different. ... we can give you a story about every child that has come and got involved because they have learnt something from what they've done and seen a growing number grow in confidence ... do a good job, so they are future stars and a number have gone on to get jobs in councils or training, e.g. those doing youth work. ... it is about confidence but also about resilience and how to cope. So we would say we want young people to become leaders, but it is more than that, is about young people becoming entrepreneurial. It is about 'have you got an idea and can you make that idea happen'.

²² Fielding, M. (2006) "Leadership, Radical Student Engagement and the Necessity of Person-Centred Engagement", *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 9:4, 299-313.

It is about ... how you can improve the lives of people and your own lives at the same time.

If you are talking about educational outcomes, we have improved. But the most important outcome for us is the Duke Of Edinburgh (DoE) award. The whole thing about the DoE award is that children have to plan, do and review what they have done. And learn to do that and the confidence building that starts from the beginning of that process right through to the gold standard. And employers would rather have a gold standard than a GCSE, because they know what has gone into it. And that is all about enterprise and understanding that people won't do it all for them and that is when they learn ... and understand [...] their [actions can] affect others. It's the culture and the feeling they get from succeeding and being acknowledged. When you get a smile from a young person who is severely disabled doing DoE then you know what its all about.

Below are summarised personal benefits young people derive from participation.

- L**earning new things and understanding how things work eg. democracy and ethnic issues
- F**riendships and getting to meet new people
- S**ense of Achievement
- C**onfidence
- N**ew skills (team work, public speaking, chairing meetings), information and qualifications
- E**xperience – good for the CV
- S**tatus and acceptance
- O**pening up new opportunities – eg. In volunteering and as a youth work apprentice
- O**pportunity to influence service delivery
- G**etting my voice heard
- S**ee different views, differences and similarities between (young) people
- F**eel valued and important, special and wanted,
- B**elonging - feeling part of the community
- F**un, enjoyment
- F**eeling proud and special
- C**hallenged and changed my own stereotypes
- B**eing acknowledged and respected for what you can do
- I**t feels great!

6. The role of the participation worker

The year one report highlighted the multiple roles that characterise the Participation Worker's job.

- As a support to young people in directly articulating their needs in different contexts of their lives so as to ensure appropriate support
- As an advocate for young people in meetings to make sure language is accessible and they have a space to make their contribution
- To inform governing or commissioning bodies about what needs to be done, that will inform resources and provision
- As a catalyst, promoting the development of participation work across agencies within the CT orbit
- Involvement and influence at a higher strategic level
- As a bridge or link between policy and practice.

It is clear that participation workers play a key role in enhancing young people's participation. In this year two report we provide further evidence of the role and qualities of the participation worker as experienced by young people and adult colleagues, as well as focusing on the role of participation workers when young people lead and/or participate in commissioning process.

6.1 Further insights into the multiple roles of Participation Workers

For young people, participation workers play multiple roles. Many of these are essentially youth work roles but linked to young people's participation.

1. They provide an ear for young people – a **first point of contact providing advice, guidance and support** when they experience difficulties and an opportunity for young people to talk confidentially.
2. These relationships of trust and respect provide the foundations on which **further engagement and participation** can be developed. For example, providing support for a young person in care through difficult times, can provide the impetus for that young person to be more actively involved later, as they **increase confidence and self esteem**, acquire skills and experience and the realisation that speaking out can make a difference.
3. Participation workers **provide opportunities** for young people to benefit from new experiences which they might not otherwise have, for example through projects in youth work settings, residential, outdoor

education, and youth exchanges where young people can realise their own abilities. Crucially, Participation workers also play a key role in **signposting young people to different opportunities** and options for taking forward their ideas, interests or issues. Whilst this might simply involve encouraging the young person to develop a campaign or project work, it may also involve young people feeding into and working through existing structures such as the Young People's Parliament.

4. **Supporting leadership and initiative.** It is clear that encouraging leadership and participation does not mean leaving young people to get on with it; on the contrary young people see the support of participation workers as crucial. From young people's perspective, the role of Participation Workers when young people lead involves:

Listening and advising

Sharing skills, experience and ideas with young people
Building confidence by being supportive

Allowing young people to lead and not controlling

Ensuring young people are safe, whilst at the same time allowing risks and learning from mistakes

Being understanding

One worker, reflecting on her work supporting young people, stated:

"Involvement in commissioning often involves vulnerable young people ... who need different layers of support, for example, as a sounding board, practicalities (funding, child care) .. and being flexible."

6.2 Championing participation with adults

A second dimension to the work of the Participation worker involves being an advocate for increased participation of young people across services and with key decision makers. Hence in one of the Trusts, since last year, all Trust partners now have Hear by Right champions to develop young people's participation in their own service.

Once partners have committed to young people's participation, the PW then has a role of ensuring partners have the skills and are supported in taking the small steps they need to take to involve young people. This may involve providing in-house or externally-provided training, but also creating a community of practice, in the form of a Hear by Right Champions group to

provide mutual support, learning and sharing, whilst also providing connections directly into the Children's Trust.

"The Participation Worker role is fundamental. Two years ago the PW was on an externally funded fixed term post and was not embedded at all. That post was mainstreamed and made permanent. ... We have the beauty of [the Participation Worker's] skills in facilitating consultations and events and the work with young people, but also working across the Alliance."
(Local authority officer)

6.3 Facilitating / coordinating participation activities

In the previous two sections the role of PW was discussed in terms of a developmental or educational role. At the same time the PW plays a key role in 'making participation happen' by coordinating and integrating young people's voices and activities with planning and decision making across the Trust. In Devon there is now close cooperation between the participation team and commissioning with the result that in almost every area of children's services young people are involved in some form in decision making and commissioning. As the lead participation worker stated:

"Tying in with commissioning has been key to developing the work."

In South Tyneside, the Participation Worker is also seen as being integral to the commissioning cycle as part of the strategic planning core team, although in reality this has not happened. In both cases, however, commissioning is informed by young people's views and priorities identified through various types of consultation. In Devon, many of the services attend the annual residential, which provides substantial data to inform the commissioning process.

7. Future priorities

The priorities recorded here are those voiced by participants in this evaluation. There will inevitably therefore be others. Although, these priorities provide insights into generic challenges for local authorities and Children's Trusts developing participation, the priorities listed here are not necessarily priorities identified by both Trusts. They do however provide an overall picture of where these particular Trusts are at in their development of participation work.

- Realise participation as a common entitlement for all young people.

- Get more young people involved at a local level.
- Increase information and publicity for young people about opportunities to get involved and to raise awareness.
- Enhance the quality and extent of participation in schools for all students beyond school councils and strengthening the links with wider participation structures.
- Embed across all partner agencies - selling activity is needed to explain the benefits/added value of young people's participation and with the support of Participation Workers to help make the next step achievable.
- Ensure the quality of involvement is there.
- Widen young people's role in participation from design to delivery to evaluation.
- Make involvement of young people part of everyone's job description, part of induction training for staff and include action planning for involving young people in staff appraisals.
- Expand further opportunities for young people to get involved.
- Make choices alongside health professionals to design services.
- Have participation budgets in core budgets within departments.
- Secure long term funding for participation work.
- Develop closer active working links between the Children's Trust and youth participation structures.
- Clarify how the participation worker fits within the Children's Trust structure.
- Secure money for older Members of Youth Parliament to run themselves
- Get newly elected Members of Youth Parliament in place.
- Expand lobbying and campaigning work.
- Learn and develop links and collaborative work across agencies.
- Create further opportunities for young people to come together in dialogue with professionals.
- Work towards young people making decisions about 5% of the budget for youth services by 2011 and 25% by 2018 in line with Aiming High objectives.
- Young people need to make decisions about funding across all partners in the children's Trust.
- Ensure young people feel listened to.
- All councils decisions are young person impact assessed
- Involve young people more in quality assurance roles with strategic plans.
- Formalise the process of young people providing reality checks for professionals and giving them more accountability.
- Respond better to areas of need young people have articulated.
- Do more work to involve younger children.

8. Summary of critical success factors

This last section combines learning about what makes a difference from the first year of the evaluation, with new learning from year two to provide a composite summary of critical success factors for developing young people's participation.

Starting off

- Start off small scale, for example, in one service and then widening out.
- Using networks and develop relationships to make it happen.
- Get quick wins – do something well, do it once, do it small scale and it shows people the benefits.
- Use every possible forum and opportunity to influence change.
- Create a network of informal as well as formal participation opportunities across the Trust area.
- Use parallel initiatives to raise awareness about working with young people and to support development of participation.

Building capacity and gaining support

- Ensure young people have access to information about their rights and opportunities for participation.
- Make sure young people are supported in developing the skills and confidence they need to participate effectively.
- Provide training and support for partner agencies in developing participation.
- Give practitioners the opportunity to explore how participation relates to what they do so as to enmesh participation in the way services are provided.
- Include senior managers and service directors in staff training, as well as elected members, to ensure understanding of what participation means beyond consultation and the implications for the whole organisation. Training needs also to challenge negative attitudes about young people and what they can do and how to work with young people.
- Gain sign up from the Chief Executive and key officers in the Trust, as participation develops more effectively with such backing.
- Ensure learning and new experiences are a continuing part of young people's continued participation.
- Use more experienced MYPPs to mentor new MYPPs to ensure continuity and development of youth participation structures.
- Provide a budget for young people to work with.

- Make sure staff also have a voice in the system. Staff will be less inclined to support the participation of young people if they feel disempowered.

Participation workers and champions

- The Participation Worker is key. Ensure there is a dedicated participation worker post to coordinate and support developments across the whole Trust.
- Ensure there are participation workers or champions for each partner agency.
- The participation worker needs to work at multiple levels connecting work with young people in practice with strategic level dialogues. Ensure the post is of sufficient status to reflect these roles.
- Ensure the participation worker role(s) are properly resourced and recognised across the whole Trust.

Opportunities for participation

- Ensure all young people have the opportunity to get their voice across.
- Create widespread networks of youth participation structures and opportunities rather than rely on one or two centralised representative structures.
- Recognise the different ways that young people can be involved at different points in the commissioning cycle.
- Ensure opportunities are provided for young people to take a lead and initiate activities, for example, through campaigns and lobbying.
- Match structures and opportunities with the development of quality relationships with young people based on trust and respect.
- Consider where young people might deliver services themselves.
- Use virtual media such as websites and social networking to communicate with young people and for young people to have a say.
- Help make sure the participation of children and young people is linked to issues of local importance which directly affect them.
- Be open-minded about the ways young people might think of participating. Allow the space for young people to create their own ways of participating.

The participation process

- Where possible, involve young people in discussions, analysis, planning and evaluation rather than just consulting on, or for, adult-prepared plans.
- Involve young people in the decision making process as well as voicing issues of concern.
- Keep young people informed after they have been involved and explain how and why decisions were made.

- Pay attention to the process by which young people are involved, as this is as important as the outcome for young people.
- Young people do not have to lead or initiate everything as long as they have the power to influence proceedings when they are involved and can lead sometimes. Being involved and making a contribution is often as important as initiating or taking a lead.
- Confidence and esteem rise when young people participate, take on responsibility and realise the benefits of their involvement.
- Ensure learning, inquiry and reflection are built into the participation processes.

Contexts for participation

- Ensure appropriate contexts for participation. Make sure it is fun and does not simply rely on reproducing shadow adult structures.
- Provide a variety of opportunities for young people to get involved – often informally – as a way of learning, developing skills and building confidence – as a precursor for more structured or formal participation.
- Quality youth work can provide a valuable context for personal development and active involvement.
- Ensure information is provided for young people to inform their involvement.
- Ensure staff have the capacity (time and resources) to involve young people meaningfully – ensure core services are adequate as a foundation.
- It is important that young people can get involved in ways they want, when they want and according to their own interests, inclination and talents. It is important to work to the pace and with the rhythms of young people.
- Have fun!