

Notes from the Participation Seminar: 15th July 2009

Our comments on the feet! One step beyond!

- “Talk to colleagues about this seminar.”
- “Talk and consult with young people more.”
- “Send presentation to Judy.”
- “Involve children and mums more on ideas for activities at the refuge.”
- “Look into website “portal” of children and young people views “?
(*Couldn't read last word!*).- “Add additional question to children evaluation form.”
- “Involving the children in planning from the very beginning to make the outcome worthwhile.”
- “Engage young peoples’ participation in representing their views by using relevant language and interests, valuing their feedback.”
- “Get more young people involved in initiating projects, involve families and parents.”
- “Talk to Diane about ways to engage young carers with our project.”
- “Sign up to ‘Participation Works’ site.”
- “Feed this into team meetings, emphasize importance. Ensure that future projects that I manage continue and progress in terms of participation.”
- “Raise the issue of participation at the Children and Young Peoples’ Partnership.”
- “Take some ideas to the community group.”

Opening Session: What is Participation?

- Making changes
- Listening and feeding back
- Learning
- Influencing
- Involvement
- Feeding back
- Recognition
- Being inclusive
- Sharing
- Leading
- Not tokenism
- Objectivity
- Understanding need
- Acknowledging
- Hearing every view
- Partnership
- Innovation
- Feeling valued
- Contributing
- Empowering
- Open to new ideas
- Valuing

Participation: Benefits for the community

- Young people will be engaged in positive activities.
- Breaks down barriers between different groups and generations, leading to an increase in tolerance and safer communities.
- Mutual respect
- Young people have ownership of their community
- Creative solutions creating supportive communities
- Tangible projects with ownership enables community development
- Gives the community more strength
- Develops valuable members of the community to take responsibility for themselves and the impact they make on the community
- Better understanding of different parts of the community
- Increased tolerance
- Engaging the non-engaged
- Broader experience at different levels across the community
- Encourages innovation and progress

Participation: Benefits for Children and Young People

- **Whatever! (Thanks to Meena!)**
- Understanding how the world works and its limitations
- Keeping busy and involved
- More confident
- More engaged in outcomes
- Respect for others' views
- Empowered
- Develop new skills
- Feeling valued and important
- Increased self-esteem
- Understanding of different points of view
- Shatters illusions – early experience of adulthood (!)
- Feeling in control
- Having a voice
- Getting a feel for community, politics and democracy
- Giving choice (especially for L + DD, young carers, children in care etc.)
- Socialising, increased enthusiasm
- Fosters creativity and independent learning skills
- Increased enthusiasm
- Greater awareness of choices and activities

Participation: Benefits for Organisations

- Children and Young People involved in the direction and shaping of the organisation.
- Feeds in to the evaluation process
- Meaningful changes and enables positive change
- Helps planning
- Gain creativity
- Increases quality and defines goals
- Achieves outcomes and matches needs
- Helps relationship with young person by creating feelings of being valued
- Can help create relevant projects and activities
- Diverse views
- Better engagement and use of resources
- Increase user-led organisations, leading to increased participation
- Organisations become truly representative
- Learning curve, increasing capacity and focus of policies

Participation: What are the barriers to making it work?

- Parents and family situations
- School restrictions (children and young people taking time off)
- Organisation not taking account of consultation outcomes
- Unrealistic expectations of senior managers – rigid questions
- No “buy in” from the top and lack of true understanding of participation
- Lack of understanding of the benefits of participation
- Difficulties of engaging young people, perhaps they have had bad experiences of participation in the past
- Time and money
- Where do you start?!
- The issues raised are “watered down” in the interpretation
- Blockage by middle managers (or others!)
- Finding young people

Discussion points: ideas for moving forward on participation

- **Find the right person to speak to when contacting a large organisation such as a school.**
Often the Head of Year is a good contact to start with, rather than the Head teacher or Deputy. There is likely to be someone in the school who is passionate about participation and keen to make it work, the challenge is to find them!
- **When planning any activity for children and young people, include food!**
Pizza is always popular; I have also found that doughnuts work well! Make the activity fun and steer clear as much as you can of official language and bureaucracy. The venue should be welcoming; this can be helped by photos or posters in the room.
- **If you have asked for peoples' views, make sure you let them know what happens as a result. If things are unlikely to change, be honest about this.**
It can be very frustrating things for people to spend time giving their views and then not hearing anything back. Be realistic about the extent to which decisions can be influenced.
- **When asking for feedback from young people, think of practical ways to make it work.**
Grace spoke about the Kingston "Recruit Crew" and gave the example of young people on recruitment panels given photographs of the candidates and smiley face stickers to state their preferences (or not!).
- **Genuine Participation takes time!**
Don't expect instant results, it can take many months of hard work to build up a committed group of young people. The most important factors are to meet on their terms whenever possible and to keep trying!
- **Use post-it stickers and walls!**
Justine has used post-it stickers successfully in a number of different venues, including a consultation in parks where people could write up their comments and stick them on a wall.
- **Use the web for more ideas**
<http://www.participationworks.org.uk/>