



Developing Residential Child Care Project

Participation and consultation in Residential Child Care in England

Introduction

Participation is a popular theme within children and young people's services: its definition and understanding varies differently across the child care spectrum. At its best participation should reflect a process where children and young people are being actively engaged and are provided an ongoing opportunity to have informed ownership over the decision making process and their daily lives.

Legislation and policy shapes child care practice. Looked after children should be consulted in all aspects of individual care planning and service development.

There are many examples of good participation practice in children's services including residential child care, but this is not always as widely shared or promoted as it could be. The Children's Rights Director, a team that consistently uses consultations with children and young people, to inform their viewpoints, have noted in several reports that too often children and young people do not participate fully and are not being provided with the right platform to communicate their needs. Other publications make the same point and consider that such a situation can lead to young people feeling disenfranchised and detached from the system which is responsible for their well being and care. Uncorrected this could create a culture of mistrust and miscommunication

Given the current emphasis on 'service users' views and participation, it will be unsurprising if the White Paper following on from Care Matters includes an increased expectation of providers and care staff on developing the mechanisms for participation, within residential establishments.

This report should be seen as an enabling document for future development showing where the greater development of participation is needed and how it can be achieved.

Between January-March 2007 NCERCC was funded by a DfES project regarding the Voluntary and Community Sector to carry out a project looking at participation within residential establishments.

There are already numerous reports and guides regarding youth participation. However this report has been completed with the specific aim of providing a range of young voices from a cross section of residential establishments. Participants include voluntary, private and local authority homes and special schools across the country. The range of viewpoints from the residential community included in the report provides a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse jigsaw pieces, which make up the participation puzzle.

1. Aims and Objectives

The objective of the report is to give an insight into children and young people’s perception of participation within children’s establishments and note any potential or perceived barriers.

The report seeks to highlight where there is need for improvement and to help develop participation within the residential sector. This will ultimately be achieved through the development of a practical and accessible guide. It will include information gathered from the consultations with children and young people, key workers and residential managers. The remainder of the proposed guide will have policies and examples of good practice in participation work provided by each residential establishment involved in this survey and others.

There will be a DVD to accompany the guide, which will include artwork and some parts of the videos which children and young people created during their fieldwork for this project.

Additionally there will be a young person’s version of this report, to provide the resources/tools to help improve participation within their respective residential establishments and daily lives. For those with additional educational needs the report will be provided in a Writing With Symbols and Photo Symbols version or through a feedback session with the children and young people. This meets the final aim of this report, that of being accessible to every individual who has participated in the project and ensuring that they understand the outcomes of the work and report.

2. Methodology

The project was advertised to residential establishments through NCERCC’s Children’s Residential Network (CRN). This network consists of children’s homes and special schools across the country. In addition it was also promoted through NCERCC’s participation network, which has its focus on participation workers and children’s rights officers. The National Association of Independent and Non Maintained Special Schools were approached and asked to recommend several schools across the regions, to ensure that special schools were represented in the project.

In order to have a national perspective, two residential establishments from each of the nine different regions were selected. In total eight out of nine regions were represented, the exception being that of the East Midlands because of the time constraints of the project. Of the eight regions that participated all of the consultations included a visit to the region and meeting with residential managers. Five of the regions included further consultations with children and young people from a number of children’s homes in the area.

In total twenty-seven homes participated in the consultation, of which thirteen homes and two special schools took part in the children and young people’s consultation. Regions that only engaged in staff consultations did so because of time constraints of the project or difficulty in getting residential staff commit to the project. The final number of children and young people who participated in the session was 52.

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The quotations within the report, unless stated otherwise, are from children and young people. To respect their privacy NCERCC does not mention a specific name. There are also quotations where no names are given; this is in relation to artwork or writings in a session that were submitted anonymously.

Although there were a number of residential establishments involved this report, NCERCC does not consider it to be representative for all looked after children, however it does provide a *snapshot of participation* within residential childcare in England.

There was a three stage approach to visiting the homes; an extended meeting/discussion with the relevant residential manager/head of care; and then an interim period allowing for development of the idea by the setting. This then led to an interactive media session with the children and young people. The session lasted on average two and a half hours.

One of the key outcomes of the session for children and young people is that it covered Citizenship Unit 8, Key Stage 2, 3, 4 producing the News. Participants that follow ASDAN could also use work created in their session to benefit their portfolio of evidence. This has been an important benefit in terms of giving something back to participants. Participation should always try to be a two way process.

Themes that were explored in the session included:

- Children and young people’s involvement in care planning.
- Children and young people’s responsibility in Children’s homes.
- Children and young people’s social interaction
- Children and young people’s preparation for life and skill developing.
- The role of the media
- Preference of different communication methods

Children and young people’s Consultation

Children and young people were asked to read a variety of newspaper articles and headlines displayed around the room on looked after children. They were told to imagine they had the chance to write to the editors and respond. For those who had additional educational needs the articles were read to them and they were asked to respond by choosing a colour star that reflected their emotions. Stars included:

- happy (yellow)
- sad (blue)
- angry (red)
- jealous (green)
- orange (not bothered).

Afterwards they were asked to put an additional star (gold) to the article that upset/frustrated them the most.

This was an individual and private exercise and children and young people could choose how many articles they responded to. When the exercise was completed, responses were placed in separate envelopes. Although names and ages were optional, the establishment they were from was noted.

Once this exercise had been completed a short discussion was held on the media and how looked after children are portrayed.

Examples reflecting the current media representation of looked after children were selected from the NCB database of newspaper cuttings over the past two years. The NCB library has abstracted items from all the main daily and weekly newspapers for over a decade.

Care was taken to explain:

- That the balance of negative and other perspectives represented in the articles accurately recorded the views found in press reports over the past two years
- That the articles were examples of the recurrent themes, both of subject and reporting

Children and young people were then informed they had a chance to create their own media reports about care planning; responsibility; social interaction and their hopes and dreams for the future.

Subsequently the children and young people were given the chance to choose their medium to express their own views. Choices offered were; free style writing, filming, a discussion, completing a questionnaire, photography, voice recording and art collages. One session included the children and young people adding a further choice of beat boxing.

3. Children and young people and how they are perceived in the Media.

The start of the session involved a number of newspaper clippings. The headlines were mainly focused on the under achievement of children and young people in care. They also highlighted Children and Young People's involvement in crime, with separate statistics on White and Caribbean and Mixed Race children being lowest achievers in care (both were published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation).

Below is a short summary of the six articles chosen for use

“Caribbean and mixed-race youngsters are ‘most likely to face problems after leaving care’ compared to African and Asian Children and young people.”¹

“White Children in care often fare worse than children from Asian and African backgrounds.”²

“Only about 6% [of children in care] can expect to achieve the benchmark of five GCSEs at grades A to C... only 1 per cent of children in care can expect to go to university this year, compared with 37 percent of all children and young people.”³*

¹ ‘Young Issues Caribbean youths face problems after leaving care’ Page 16 The Voice July 11 2005

² ‘White Children do worst in Care’ Times Page 36 July 8th 2005

³ ‘Exam Failure means bleak future for children in care’ Page 22 The Times August 23rd 2006

“A study of press cuttings reporting on children’s homes and children in care (February 1996-December 1997) found that 97 per cent of these cuttings were negative...19 percent portrayed the children as troublemakers and a burden to society.”⁴

“Care Label Sticks”⁵

“Thousands of streets across the country will become no go zones for teenage yobs and other troublemakers.”⁶

The aim of this exercise was to highlight to children and young people the role of media within society. It was included as a springboard to allow them to say whether they thought the commentary on looked after children was fair or reflected of how they felt about themselves as individuals.

This part of the session provoked instant, and often emotional, responses from the children and young people in every NCERCC session that ran. The message was quite clear from all the children and young people that participated in this exercise. They saw the newspaper cuttings as reflecting a negative stereotyping that happened both in the media and in their daily lives. Twenty-two children and young people documented their response and the remainder discussed their reaction with a key worker or NCERCC staff in the session. The comments below are typical of their responses:

“Everyone needs to be treated the same”

“People underestimate Children in Care just cause what we do and live doesn’t mean they can give us a bad name”

“These comments made me feel angry...I am 18, I have a job, I do not take drugs and I do not have a criminal record.”

Not all children in care are criminals we don’t seem to get the same opportunities as children living with their biological parents.

“In my opinion people are looking at kids in care as a failure in education but a child living with a mother and father is given a positive comment whether they fail or succeed. All children have a right to try and with articles like that how does anyone expect kids to want to go to school...Kids in care have problems BUT WE AINT BAD.”

The stars used to respond to the articles were primarily red (angry) and blue (sad) with the exception of two individuals who used yellow (happy). When asked why they had chosen the ‘happy’ stars they explained that they were happy because at least children and young people in care were being discussed rather than being ignored.

Two individuals from different regions felt so passionately about creating a positive statement about care that they spent the session creating films about their home. They wanted to dispel the myth that children’s homes are “bad places for bad people”.

⁴ ‘Children in care in the media’ Page 12 Children UK Winter 1998

⁵ ‘Care Label Sticks’ Page 22 Community Care 11 March 2004

⁶ Independent Newspapers 2005 page 6 12 June 2005

The responses of all the children and young people highlighted how they perceive themselves to be treated as an underclass in society; that care labels not only stick but mark you out as an ‘underachiever’ or ‘troublemaker’. With many of the children in care coming from vulnerable or under supported backgrounds, the negative role that the media plays is just another barrier that they must encounter in their already complicated lives.

4. Themes and Methods used in Children and young people’s Consultations

The next stage of the session was to allow children and young people to choose one of four themes they wanted to explore and the medium in which they would choose to do this:

- Children and young people’s responsibility in Children’s homes;
- Children and young people’s social interaction
- Children and young people’s preparation for life and life skills development
- Children and young people’s involvement in care planning

The first three themes were equally popular choices whereas Children and young people’s involvement in care planning was the least popular with only 10-15 children and young people choosing to discuss this subject. Having a choice of medium enabled participants to communicate in the manner that best suited them. 30-35 children and young people chose film. The second most popular choice was art, with posters and collages the preferred outputs.

It is possible that film was the most popular as it was a novelty and not a resource they normally have the opportunity to access. Looking at a wide variety of methods/mediums was as much a significant part of the project as the subject matter. It is NCERCC’s view that children and young people need to be given confidence in distinguishing and understanding the medium by which they can best express themselves.

Participation or consultation and the National Minimum Standards

The requirement that children and young people be encouraged to communicate views is addressed in the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Children’s Homes and Residential Special Schools.

The NMS (Quality of Care) state that with regards to children’s homes:

- Outcome

Children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the home is run. No Child is assumed to be unable to communicate their views

(Department of Health (2002) *Children's homes. National minimum standards: children's homes regulations*. London: The Stationery Office. p.13

- A subsequent paragraph states

‘8.1 Children’s opinions, and those of their families or others significant to the child, are sought over key decisions which are likely to affect their daily life and their future. There are systems in place for doing this,

such as written agreements, private interviews, key worker sessions, children's or house meetings. The systems reflect children's differing communication needs.'

One reading of above standard leads to a view that it appears to assume children and young people either have high literacy (written agreements), or are comfortable speaking in public environments and communicating their needs and ideas in front of others (meetings) or with an allocated adult. The latter option also relies on there being on a strong relationship between the member of staff and young person (sessions and interviews).

A practical example of how such assumptions may be misplaced is that over 50% of the children and young people involved in the project sessions could not read the newspaper cuttings without assistance.

This is not something that is only to be found amongst this group of children or looked after children in general. The Department for Education and Skills produced statistics which indicate that 21% of Key Stage 2 pupils do not reach the reading standard expected for their age (2005) and 26% of Key Stage 3 pupils. (2005).⁷

There is an elementary lesson to be learned here concerning assumptions about any participants in training or consultation events. When it reached the final two sessions NCERCC removed the cuttings completely from the rooms and instead the clippings read by a member of staff.

Consultations and service user guides to children's residential establishments often produce information for young people through written guides and find information through questionnaires. Some providers and staff make these age-appropriate. Understanding this, and in the light of the findings from the report, one is led to the conclusion that it may be necessary to reconsider the methods currently used to gain children and young people's views and appreciate alternative methods may be more appropriate.

NCERCC's view is that there need to be a range of environments and media made available in which for children and young people can confidently share their views and concerns, similar to those outlined in the NMS (Children's Rights) for Residential Special Schools:

- '2.5 The school provides frequent and suitable means for any child, using their preferred method of communication, to make their wishes and feelings known regarding their care and treatment in the school. This includes availability of different adults who understand the child's preferred method of communication.'

NCERCC considers that such requirements could also apply to children's homes and are not specific to the context of special schools.

Another aspect to children and young people choosing their preferred method of communication is that it allows for more creativity and personal development. There was a measurable difference in output between those who completed a questionnaire and those who chose freestyle writing or filming.

An example of using different media to facilitate involvement came from one of the special schools that participated in the project. The young person was a charismatic individual with additional educational needs. She was given the opportunity to share her thoughts and concerns with her key worker on a regular basis. She evaluated her participation in these sessions as being hindered by transcription of her words whereas if a tape recorder were to be used instead then she would feel freer to engage more meaningfully.

⁷ <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/database/stats/englandstats.html#KS2>

Arising from this survey NCERCC concludes that much attention is focused on children and young people’s participation as a principle or an event. There is less focus on how that participation occurs or its role in wider social and life skills development. Children and young people, looked after or not, benefit from equal time and consideration being given to developing the skills to express themselves. Establishing this as a foundation allows us to consider that participation in residential establishments is undertaken not simply because they are looked after children and young people but as a contribution to their development as individuals.

5. Children and young people’s outcomes

The messages from the children and young people’s work on the four themes

(a) Children and young people’s involvement in care planning.

Just over one third of the children and young people chose to discuss care planning. This may have been because out of all the four themes, it is the one they are most commonly asked about. Whilst responses were varied between the different residential establishments within a specific home or school answers tended to correspond with each other.

There were clear differences between the homes and children and young people’s answers The range of responses received is well captured by two examples. In one home none of the five children and young people had heard of a care plan with their key workers also struggling to respond. In another home in a different region all the children and young people had heard of care planning and were satisfied with the process, as their responses highlight,

“ I do my plan with my social worker”

“Care plans are good”

“I get involved by asking questions and going to my reviews”

In another home, one young person commented,

“I don’t agree with my care plan. I don’t get a lot input, can’t read it and don’t know how to put [my thoughts] into words.”

This suggests that consistency of care planning, and of young people’s participation is still to be achieved.

(b) Children and young people’s responsibility in residential establishments.

Children and young people evidently felt that they were responsible and involved in the running of their homes and schools. In every establishment NCERCC visited, except one, children and young people saw themselves being responsible for:

- Themselves
- Their bedroom
- Abiding by house rules

They saw themselves having a voice by:

- Weekly meetings and complaint forms
- Talking to staff

It was a positive reflection on all the homes that children and young people of all ages understood the mechanisms in place for them to express themselves.

There were a small number of children and young people in each of three homes who expressed scepticism at the likelihood of staff acting on their complaints,

“We do not have much responsibility...there is no visitors allowed, no private place, ...everyone’s just hustling.”

“It’s harder than living at home.”

However there were a larger number of children and young people who recognised staff were acting in their best interests, even when staff actions ran contrary to their wishes.

“I know staff are a barrier as they stop me seeing my mates but this is for my own safety, I understand this.”

“Staff are there to try and help you build your confidence.”

However for children and young people to become more empowered, they considered they needed to have more comprehensive responsibility within their home. Many children and young people gave different examples of how they could be more widely involved in their homes and schools. For example one young person reflected, “I would like to learn more in the kitchen.”

The most common frustrations were; not having access to the kitchen, the ever-present keys, bedtimes and pocket money. One young person commented

“I want to be trusted with my pocket money to be able to see my own friends.”

Another said he would like to be responsible for,

“Cooking, washing up, using the computer, putting his games away and being able to walk around the site on my own.”

Looking to the future one reflected,

“I would like to buy and run my own shop with a few assistants and also I would like the feeling of being in charge for once in life meaning I would like to have power.”

Concluding a session one young person observed,

“They should give us more responsibility otherwise how we gonna grow. We need the challenge.”

The responses in this survey suggest that the greater the involvement of children and young people as an essential strand within the development of an establishment, there will also be dialogue regarding the appropriate taking up of responsibilities. Alongside this will be seen investment in the development of a wide range of skills designed to support young people's initiative and confidence.

(c) Children and young people's social interaction

Children and young people listed staff, family and friends as the people with whom they most liked to spend time. The relationship between staff, children and young people varied from establishment to establishment. Some staff made a large input into decisions regarding social interaction and involvement with other children and young people outside of the home with young people commenting,

"Cannot go out when I want"

"Distance, money, staff"

"I live in a bubble."

Some of the children and young people understood staff objections and that restrictions of their freedom of action were for their own safety, whether due to their additional educational needs or the potential harm that could come to them outside of the home. Nonetheless although they sometimes understood the rationale they also often struggled with the restraints this placed on their daily lives.

Other factors that limited social interaction included the design and layout of homes. For example in one residential establishment, there was no communal area, which meant that the children and young people's social interaction was in practice limited.

A predominant theme expressed in over 50% of the residential establishments was that the children and young people preferred to socialise with those from a care background even when outside the home. This was primarily because of how they were perceived by those that had not been in care and the comfort of being with people from similar backgrounds. This view is supported by a range of children and young people's views as highlighted below,

"The others [those with non care background] think all children and young people are criminals"

"I don't socialise with kids at school [my] social skills more used to people in children's homes."

"Live in bubble would like to keep everyone out of the bubble"

"Outsiders are posh...All our activities are with people in care."

Another theme that came across when children and young people were discussing social interaction was their concern for their own safety. At one home in particular the children and young people saw

the primary barrier to feeling safe and social interaction as being their fear of the other children who lived in the home.

‘Spend time with nobody’

“I wouldn’t build a relationship with anyone here. They are two faced”

In light of the messages emerging from both this and other work, NCERCC would emphasise some related points for practice.

1. Firstly staff need to actively address dynamics within residential establishments to ensure that children and young people feel there is a secure environment, feel safe and able to develop relationships with their peer groups without threat.
2. Secondly there should be a facilitated discussion between children and young people and staff to ensure they understand the reasons why they may not always be allowed to go out as they please. Children and young people are more likely to adhere to rules when they have been part of a transparent communication and decision process. Rules are best implemented with an explanation
3. Lastly, residential establishments need to provide children and young people with the skills and foundation to have friendships with those outside of their circumstances. If a residential establishment does not actively encourage this, children and young people with a care background can become a polarised group, unwilling to engage in mainstream social interaction and participation.

(d) Children and young people’s preparation for life and life skills development.

Most of the children and young people had hopes and dreams for their future. However they were not always aware of how to access or receive the appropriate or available support to develop these dreams.

Many of the children and young people could identify the practical skills required for independent living; what they needed; how to budget; kitchen equipment and so on. In contrast when asked whether they actually had these skills or knowledge they struggled to answer.

One who is sixteen years old had a clear understanding of the skills and commitment needed to run his own shop. In identifying routes to achieve his ambition he did not identify the staff from his home as a resource that could be useful in achieving his ambitions but did acknowledge that college could help him to attain those skills.

“Nobody yet has helped me yet to accomplish my dream job”

A thirteen-year-old boy spent most of the session drawing boxing gloves. When asked how he would become a professional boxer, who was helping him or whether he went to any boxing clubs his face went blank.

One young man of sixteen responded,

“I know I am going to do budgets and stuff I just can’t do it at the moment..”

One conclusion from the above is there needs to be a holistic approach to the education of those in residential establishments, which allows children and young people to aspire to their future ambitions and understand the skills that might be needed in future and not just in their present situation. This could be facilitated through external speakers, careers advice information being available in the home, or simply by engaging with the young person’s interests and helping them access the relevant information.

6. Outcomes for Professionals

a) The Power of Environment in Shaping Participation

The environment within a residential establishment is an important factor in how freely and effectively children and young people participate. When running activities that promote participation staff should consider the full impact of the ‘environment’ that they are using, the relationships and the built environment can have messages as much as the content and medium of enquiry.

If a session that is seeking to promote participation is held where young people hold other meetings with staff, they may associate the space with the other use. If this has been a meeting in which the young person struggles to achieve then the environment may be imbued with negativity. Equally if the session occurs where leisure activities occur, for example in the TV room, children and young people might find it difficult to focus.

A defined space for each activity is recommended. It may be in some instances that it is best to take the children and young people outside of the residential establishment to a neutral space.

In many of the residential establishments that NCERCC came into contact with there were children and young people with additional educational needs. This can bring further responsibilities when it comes to the environment within the residential establishment. A primary concern is ensuring that resources within the unit are ‘stage and age’ appropriate thus giving the children and young people equal opportunities to engage in social opportunities similar to the rest of their age group.

NCERCC’s position is that when working with children and young people with additional educational needs, staff should consider the following questions,

- Are you ‘stage and age’ prepared?
- How would you describe your practice - risk averse or risk management?

- What determines the routines within the establishment the needs of the young people or the needs of the organisation?
- How have you understood and acted upon recent reports that it is important to hold high expectations of children and young people with additional educational needs? Do you identify both the appropriate challenges along with the supports needed to achieve these expectations?
- Is potential discrimination being considered in all realms of the children's and young people's lives? For example in their daily lives and the choices they are allowed to make.

b) Residential Managers

Residential managers were met before the session to help NCERCC understand the particular ethos of the organisation and the needs of the children and young people who might be participating.

The majority of managers wanted to engage in the project and saw it as a means to improve their own structures and the philosophies within their home.

It was interesting to note that there were a small number of managers who were sensitive that having children and young people engage in the project might highlight or raise shortfalls concerning practice within the home.

An interesting finding with a regard to the forward development of participation was that there were a small number of children and young people across the different regions that were on care orders for whom it was difficult to get permission to participate in filming. A protocol, involving all who legal responsibilities for the young person, that sets out clearly the purposes of any photography is common practice in many school settings and is best achieved as part of admission procedures. This protocol may cover photography for recording life events, like holidays, or views, perhaps for reviews. When completed at this stage the commitment of both the provider and corporate parent is established.

c) Key Workers

A recurring dilemma during the sessions was the level of participation of the key workers. On a number of occasions key workers become over-involved in the session. For example framing the young person's responses to the newspaper articles or taking control over the responsibility for the filming.

The motives behind their behaviour varied. From an observer's perspective there were two primary factors. One was the dependency of the young person on the key worker; a belief that without their support they could not engage or provide the 'correct answers' for the session.

Secondly the key workers struggled to define their own role and task when facilitating children and young people's involvement. The role and task of the keyworker is to empower the young person and support their confidence in the validity of their views. At times, with well-intentioned motives, keyworkers were driven by enthusiasm to seemingly go beyond exploring and assisting in shaping and were actively selecting a response on behalf of a young person.

These behaviours could be addressed at Induction and Foundation stages for key worker training. A greater understanding of the nature of Participation could be established along with the development of skills. Key workers would emerge with a raised awareness and possessing the ability to ensure every individual matters when it comes to participating and empowerment within a home. CWDC Induction Standards (July 2006) are a good framework within which to start this process.

For further information log on to:

<http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/projects/cwdcinductionstandards.htm>

However it should be highlighted that success in developing participation will be enhanced by effective recruitment of key workers with the awareness and skills necessary. An NCERCC toolkit on Improving Recruitment for Residential Child Care, By Roy Grimwood, Karen Hawkins & Ann Gaffney is particularly useful when considering this matter.

For further information log on to: <http://www.ncb.org.uk/ncercc> Click on practice documents and then the link for recruitment.

In noting that some key workers overstepped the boundaries between facilitating participation and effectively taking over and directing or speaking for the young person, we must also mention those key workers NCERCC saw who were in tune with the children and young people's needs, and who were good facilitators in their participation.

For quick reference NCERCC includes below the Top Ten Tips for participation. These were created with residential key worker staff and managers in a NCERCC participation session for the Children's Rights Director Conference December 2006.

1. Know your audience
2. Be honest and realistic
3. Make it fun for everyone
4. Commitment at all levels
5. Varied and inclusive group
6. Feedback throughout the process
7. Share good practice and resources
8. Have a clear outcome and mechanism to evaluate
9. Embed principles from start at all levels
10. Be aware of different levels of participation

Participation has become a popular theme with many individuals and service providers eager to 'tick the boxes'. There are many misconceptions about participation. Questionnaires and designated meetings are a mechanism of participation but cannot and should not stand-alone. Nonetheless this practice is common within and outside of residential childcare. This sends a message to children and young people that there is a designated time and defined manner in which they must express their views.

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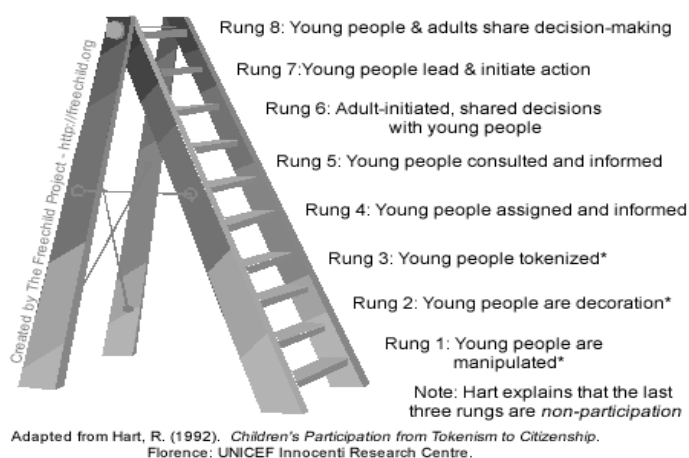
Participation must be an ongoing process with shared ownership. Children and young people will then feel they are part of a community that recognises that there is value in their ongoing contribution in many different forms.

d) Participation Materials

The foundation of most participation theory and practice began with Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Young People's Participation (1969), which was later adapted by Roger Hart. This model is still widely used today, as shown on the following page.

Although this model can be useful, it does have its limitations within residential childcare. One could argue that participation should not be a ladder that has a specific start and finish, top and bottom, and that residential staff should always be looking to develop their services further and improve participation practice. Different residential establishments will start their journey of participation in different starting points.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



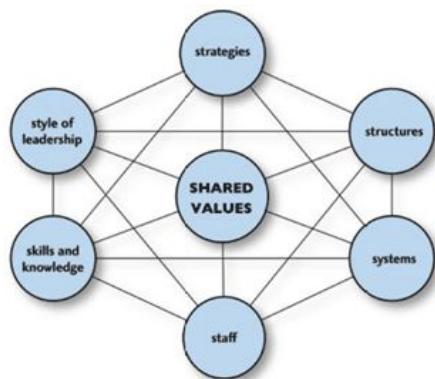
There are residential establishments that may have 'child initiated shared decisions with adults' (the highest tier on the ladder of participation) where the children and young people may nevertheless still not feel entirely comfortable to express themselves fully. This may be a result of previous experiences as much as existing structures or relationships within the home. The young people may not feel self-assured or comfortable to fully express their views with the staff present. They may feel that the process is geared towards only those that are confident communicators, rather than catering for a range of needs with varying methods. Lastly it may be that the discussions they initiate are framed by the culture of the institution or placements rather than concerns/needs of the individual children.

With the above in mind it is important to see the participation ladder as a useful tool or prompt rather than as a complete resource. One could equally argue that participation should be seen as a wheel, where there is no defined first tier or starting point, where one starts from is dependent on the children and young people's needs and those of the organisation at the time. A change in staff or residents may see a residential establishment shifting their starting point on the wheel or ladder of their participation practice.

However if one is to use the ladder metaphor the following should be added to it as a minimum requirement as Rung 6 and 7

1. Equal opportunity for child-initiated shared decisions with adults for all children.
2. Informed participation shaping where both adult and child share in the ownership process.

There are a variety of different participation resources available. The most commonly used across children and youth services are 'Total Respect' by Children's Rights Officers and Advocates (CROA), (CHILDREN'S RIGHTS OFFICERS AND ADVOCATES (CROA) (2000) *Total respect: ensuring children's rights and participation in care*. Willow, C. and Plowden, V. (eds.). Department of Health and CROA. 1 pack). and Wade, H., Lawton, A., and Stevenson, M. (2001) *Hear by right: setting standards for the active involvement of young people in democracy*. London: Local Government Association and National Youth Agency. Both are useful resources for those looking to develop participation. Included here is the Hear by Right Standards framework, 'Seven S' model which serves as a useful tool for organisational change,



For further information on this model and specific standards refer to www.nya.org.uk

NCERCC would also recommend Building A Culture of Participation (Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., Cronin, K., and Sinclair, R. (2003) *Building a culture of participation: involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation. Handbook*. London: Department for Education and Skills), which provides extensive information on how to implement participation and embed it within the ethos of your establishment. The link is included below:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/listeningtolearn/downloads/BuildingaCultureofParticipation%5Bhandbook%5D.pdf>

Equally useful is the Participation Development Pack which is available on the NCERCC website at: <http://www.ncb.org.uk/ncercc> Below is a quick reference to particularly useful sections:

Key workers induction and foundation	
Pages 3 -6	Importance and best practice
Pages 13 -16	Activities
Pages 26-27	Outcomes
Managers	
Pages 6-12	Ensuring Participatory Projects are Inclusive, Realistic and Appropriate.
Pages 16-18	Activities - strengths and difficulties
Pages 34-37	Practice guidelines
Page 38	Good practice indicators used by inspectors
Pages 39-41	Effective Participation – A Checklist

7. Other outcomes

a) Consultation involvement, support and fatigue

Consultation is part of the process of individual care plans. How children and young people can experience this can in turn impact on wider efforts to incorporate and deliver participation and to develop practice and services.

It was evident in the contact with those attending the NCERCC consultation that there are many and varied consultations which are offered to children and young people in residential childcare. A significant majority of children and young people have become disengaged with this process and have 'consultation fatigue'. In addition one of the most common frustrations felt by children and young people was being asked to contribute their views without being given feedback as to how or if their involvement had made a difference. Many consultations offer rewards⁸. These can be a useful inducement to encourage participation, but they can mean that children and young people become involved simply for the reward rather than because they necessarily want to participate or have any commitment to the process. This is a matter that deserves further consideration.

Many young people who had been involved in consultations were asked key questions about their life or aspirations. The concern is then how the children and young people are supported after the consultation. Where is the processing time for those often intense emotions they have shared? In asking these kinds of question we risk opening a Pandora's Box and the outcomes have to be dealt with sensitively and carefully.

⁸ NCERCC gave each participant a £10 HMV voucher for participating

[2](#)

Across Residential Child Care there seemed to be variations in care provision. Whilst the achievement of the National Minimum Standards, as evidenced by CSCI inspections, improves nationally, as a sector there still does not appear to be a uniformity of care or participatory practice across all homes.

Arising from the report NCERCC offers the following prompts that key workers and residential managers should always consider before committing to consultations:

- Do the children and young people want to participate in the consultation?
- What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of the consultation?
- What potential barriers may there be to children and young people participating in the session?
- How will the outcomes of the consultation benefit the children and young people?
- What will they learn or develop from participating in the consultation?
- Who will help them process emotions or thoughts that might have been raised from the consultation?
- What will be the feedback after the consultation to the children and young people? How will it be given?
- Is the consultation accessible for the diversity of needs and learning abilities?
- Does the adult facilitating participation have the power to act upon the children and young people's wishes?

Equally significant for staff to consider is how the children and young people are engaging in consultations or opportunities that are not related to being in care. Children and Young People are in danger of living in a care bubble. During one of the children's and young people's sessions one of the young people commented that all 'everyone cares about is how I feel about being in care'.

Residential establishments need to proactively think about how to create chances for the children and young people to participate in mainstream society, in particular sports and leisure activities which are primary concerns for many looked after children.

8. Practical Outcomes of the Project

a) Children and young people

- All Children and young people that have participated will have the chance to contribute to a website which is being developed to exhibit their artwork/photography and video in a permanent online exhibition. It will also have materials on participation that are young person friendly and will be a resource to empower children and young people within their homes.
- All Children and young people that were involved will be provided with a young person's version of the report. Where needed this will be conveyed through different methods.
- All Children and young people involved will have the chance to stay involved with NCERCC and develop their media skills further.

- NCERCC sees this as the beginning of their relationship with the children and young people rather than the end of a short consultation.

b) NCERCC and Professionals

- All those involved will receive the findings of the report which will be a resource for children's participation in homes providing examples of effective methods of participation. It will be strongly promoted on the NCERCC Website, in the Press, at Conferences and at Alliance for Child Centred Care events. Participation and Children's Rights Workers will be targeted specifically as part of the communications strategy bringing the report to a wide audience. The project will be for the use of by VCS (DfES), Providers, Commissioners, Social Workers and Participation Workers.
- Those homes that have been involved with the project will have a chance to access NCERCC training for key workers on effective methods of participation.
- The report will be provided to the CWDC with the aim of improving the training on participation within the NVQ3.

c) New Partnerships and Bridges

Two local authorities were provided with a joint session, which brought together four different homes. This was with the intention that homes can learn and support each other more and more, as well as providing further social opportunities for the children and young people. NCERCC will continue to work in this manner.

Lastly many of the homes that have engaged in the consultations have committed to continuing and developing their commitment to participation. In one local authority area NCERCC will be helping homes to consult with looked after children in care to assess how they are involved in education. In one setting NCERCC and the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) will be part of the team that develops the service user guide into a more accessible format. In another local authority area NCERCC will be working with the children and the young people to create a DVD that helps newcomers to residential establishments understand how they can participate in their home.

In these ways NCERCC's commitment to develop participation is ongoing and we hope to continue to inspire these new partnerships and build bridges between homes and NCERCC.

We would like to thank the DfES VCS project for helping to make these small steps happen.

Lucy Milich
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NCERCC

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