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inspectorate

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## Practice Guide

Involving children and young people  
in improving children's services

## Acknowledgements

This guide was developed through a partnership with Move On<sup>1</sup> and five youth ambassadors: Marc Dunn, Chris James, Leigh-Anne Kelly, Angela Smith and Ish Stonebridge. Photographs of four of the youth ambassadors can be found on pages 7 and 8.

We would like to thank the young people, staff, managers and elected members we met in each of the local authorities we visited and who shared their experiences with us with such enthusiasm. In particular we want to mention:

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- pupils of Ross High School, East Lothian
- young people and their carers from the children with disability service, East Renfrewshire
- the young people's forum, Falkirk
- members of the Exec of Highland Youth Voice and the Youth Convenor, Highland
- residents of Camoran, Orkney
- residents of Children's House, Cambuslang, South Lanarkshire
- members of the primary-age Having Your Say forum and residents of Torcroft children's house , West Lothian.

We would also like to thank staff from other local authorities that we were unable to visit who submitted practice examples. We provide some information about these services, along with their contact details, in appendix 2.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.moveon.org.uk](http://www.moveon.org.uk)

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We visited interesting and creative examples of practice and met young people who told us what a difference their experiences of involvement had made for them.

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# 1. Introduction

We have written the guide to support the development of practice across Scotland of engaging vulnerable children and young people to participate in improving the services they are receiving. Across the work of the Care Inspectorate, we look at how well children and young people are helped to participate in decision making about their own lives. In this guide we are focusing on how they are involved in planning and developing services. We visited interesting and creative examples of practice and met young people who told us what a difference their experiences of involvement had made for them. We met staff, senior managers and decision makers who were enthusiastic and committed to creating the culture and opportunities for children and young people to have their voices heard and listened to.

The guide is aimed at practitioners and managers in statutory services, private and voluntary organisations that are involved in planning, developing or delivering children's services. As services are increasingly required to undertake self evaluation, we hope that this guide will support and inform this activity through the model outlined in section 5. The Care Inspectorate will develop the model further and integrate it into other inspection work.

The purpose of the guide is to:

- share the learning from examples of effective practice;
- offer ideas about different approaches;
- provide a framework for self-evaluation that will support continuous improvement; and
- offer signposts for reference material providing more detailed tools and techniques.

## Context

There has been a growing recognition over the past 30 years of the need to challenge adult interpretations of children's wishes in setting policy and designing and delivering services. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child identifies participation as one of its guiding principles. Article 12 outlines the rights that children have in relation to participating in decision-making processes.<sup>2</sup> Momentum has gathered pace since 2000 and young people's participation is now understood as being central to National and Scottish government legislation, policy and guidance. Services for children in Scotland now have duties to consider the views of children and young people and enable them to participate.

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12

The core legislative framework for those providing social work services embeds a duty to find out and have regard to the views of the child.<sup>3</sup> The principles of choice and equality are contained within the national care standards for providers of regulated care services. The Children's Charter and Framework for Standards<sup>4</sup> sets the context for Child Protection Committees to demonstrate how they involve vulnerable children and young people. Effective management is at the heart of the work of Community Planning Partnerships.

The inspection methodologies of the scrutiny bodies that came together to form the Care Inspectorate all recognised the importance of involvement and participation in the continuous development of services.

The former Care Commission developed quality themes and statements to help evaluate how regulated care services perform against national care standards. Service user participation continues to be a mandatory area for evaluation within each of the quality themes. Evidence of good performance is a pre-requisite for achieving high grades.

HMIE and SWIA developed quality indicators around the involvement of children and young people in service planning and improvement. During the first round of HMIE joint inspections of services to protect children between 2005 and 2009, there was a particular focus on the participation of children, young people and families in policy development. During the current, second round of joint inspections a number of examples of good practice have been identified where children and families were involved in planning and developing child protection services to varying degrees.

SWIA's performance inspections of local authority social work services evaluated the degree to which people who use services and carers (and other stakeholders) were involved in policy development and service planning. This was subsequently built into the performance improvement model to support self-evaluation and continuous improvement in social work services.

A common finding from inspections across all three bodies was that services were at very different stages of being able to evidence how they routinely used feedback from children and young people to develop and improve services they received. Supporting vulnerable and marginalised children to become and remain involved is a challenge. Examples of effective and creative work were often isolated and learning from such practice was confined to specific projects or teams and not necessarily embedded within and between services. Practitioners and managers were enthusiastic about developing new approaches to involving young people, but were often disappointed and frustrated when they struggled to engage young people or sustain their involvement.

The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010<sup>5</sup> requires the Care Inspectorate to demonstrate continuous improvement in user focus in the exercise of our scrutiny functions. We are currently undertaking a review of our own approach to involvement within the agency and will build on our experiences with lay assessor and service user inspectors.

<sup>3</sup> Sec 17 Children (Scotland) Act 1995

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Executive (2004a) Protecting Children and Young People: The Charter Scottish Executive (2004b) Protecting Children and Young People: Framework for Standards

<sup>5</sup> Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 s 112



## 2. What do we mean by involvement?

In talking to practitioners and managers it became clear that ways of describing work varied considerably, and the terminology of participation, involvement and consultation were being used on an inter-changeable basis. Whilst there are broad similarities and links between them, it is important to define the parameters of these terms in order to be clear about what is being offered to young people. We use the term involvement throughout the guide making specific reference to participation and consultation where relevant. We talk about:

- Consultation – gathering children's or young people's views on a particular issue or question.
- Participation – children and young people joining in decision making, from giving their views in a consultation through to more active involvement.
- Involvement (children and young people) – where adults give children and young people opportunities and support to take part.<sup>6</sup>

How children and young people become involved in shaping and improving services can be considered using Hart's (1992) ladder of participation. It shows that decisions need to be made about the degree of involvement and influence being made available.



<sup>6</sup> Involving children and young people in decisions about their education; Enquire; The Scottish Advice Service for Additional Support for Learning 2008

## The ladder of participation<sup>7</sup>

	<b>Rungs of the ladder</b>	<b>Degree of participation</b>
8.	Children and young people initiated shared decisions with adults	Children and young people have the ideas, set up the project, and invite adults to join with them in making decisions.
7.	Children and young people are directed	Children and young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.
6.	Adult-initiated shared decisions with children	Adults have the initial idea but children and young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but they are also involved in taking the decisions.
5.	Consulted but informed	The project is designed and run by adults but children and young people are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.
4.	Assigned but informed	Adults decided on the project and children and young people volunteer for it. Adults respect their views.
3.	Tokenism	Children and young people are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.
2.	Decoration	Children and young people take part in an event, for example, by singing, dancing or wearing t-shirts with logos on, but they do not really understand the issue.
1.	Manipulation	Children and young people do or say what adults suggest they do, but have no real understanding of the issues, or are asked what they think. Adults use some of their ideas but do not tell them what influence they have had on the final decision.

Participation and involvement have been developed further through 'co-production', which seeks to deliver public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours<sup>8</sup>. It challenges all to radically change the way services are thought about, developed and delivered. It is not a concept explored further in this guide, but adds to the potential tiers of meaningful participation with young people.

The practice examples in this guide demonstrate a range of degrees of involvement which reflects where agencies are on the journey to embedding this systematically.

There is a range of published resources available for practitioners and planners that offer detailed guidance, tools and techniques for engaging young people that are based on youth and group work practice. We reference some of these at the end of the guide.

<sup>7</sup> Hart (1992) Children's Participation: from Tokenism to Citizenship", UNICEF

<sup>8</sup> www.nesta.gov.uk

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Feedback from young people we met was positive; they enjoyed being able to share their experiences; it reinforced their confidence in the benefits of involving young people and they felt the youth ambassadors were the right people to talk to them

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### 3. Our approach to writing this guide

In partnership with a voluntary organisation, Move On, we recruited and trained five young people who had personal experience of using social work services as Youth Ambassadors and invited heads of local authority children's services to submit examples of effective practice.

Sixteen councils responded to our request and we identified examples to follow up on the basis of;

- offering a geographical spread;
- urban and rural settings;
- the availability of young people to meet and sources of evidence to explore;
- small and large scale involvement activities and participation structures; and
- time-limited and ongoing activity.

We used the information provided by each local authority about their own work to design games and sets of questions to explore and test out their claims from different perspectives. Two youth ambassadors, a support worker and a senior inspector made up each team that visited each example.

During each of the visits we spoke to young people who were either directly involved, or who were now participating in involvement activities that had developed as a result of earlier work. We also held separate meetings with frontline staff and managers at all levels of the organisation, and during most of our visits, we talked to elected members.

Through working with young people who had experienced social work services we endeavoured to model and explore for ourselves aspects of involving young people in service improvement.

Feedback from young people we met was positive; they enjoyed being able to share their experiences; it reinforced their confidence in the benefits of involving young people and they felt the youth ambassadors were the right people to talk to them.

Senior managers were very interested in our approach and put considerable resources and effort into arranging the content of each visit. Elected members, senior officers and staff responded very well to interview questions and group discussions and acknowledged this had challenged them to think about what more they could do.

The Youth Ambassadors said this had been a rewarding opportunity to learn new skills, to meet young people and senior officials.



## 4. Practice examples

### Clackmannanshire Council: “Meet the bosses”

#### Why did they do it?

The council was committed to ensuring that looked after young people were given an opportunity to state their views on their experience and that the right people heard this. Young people could directly challenge the managers to improve the quality of their experience of services.

#### Who did they involve?

Any young person who was accommodated was invited, including those who received support from the leaving care team. The sessions initially involved young people living in the residential unit, but now included those in foster care too.

In terms of “the bosses”, a wide range of people were expected to attend. This included the leader of the council, the chief executive and senior managers from social services, health, education and social work.

#### What did they do?

The initial meeting provided an opportunity for young people to identify some of the issues and challenges that they were facing from being in care or leaving care. Senior managers were present to hear this information directly. Each subsequent meeting provided time for each relevant manager to tell the young people what they had done about the issue, and young people identified new issues they were concerned about. Action plans were used by the chief executive in management team meetings to monitor progress.

#### What worked well?

The senior management commitment and the leadership demonstrated by the leader of the council and the Chief Executive made a significant impact on the group. It ensured the effective involvement and action from all areas of the council, and demonstrated the importance given to the voices of the young people.

#### What difference did it make?

Young people told us how they had been listened to and that this had:

- provided real work experience for young people in care or who had left care within the council
- increased the range of supported accommodation that was available for young people leaving care
- provided a clear focus on ensuring that young people had as few social workers as possible during their time in care.

In our most recent inspection report, the Care Inspectorate evaluated participation in the children’s residential unit as excellent.

## East Lothian Council: Recruitment and selection

### Why did they do it?

Young people had been involved in staff recruitment for some posts in education and children's services since 2008. Managers saw this as a good way for young people to contribute to selecting staff who had the right skills for the job. It also provides an opportunity to develop skills and confidence through taking part. The more formal approach to this recruitment exercise was facilitated by the East Lothian involvement officer in order to involve young people in a more meaningful manner.

### Who did they involve?

A group of six young people aged 12 – 15 years, some of whom had been involved with social work services.

### What did they do?

They held an event to capture the views of young people in foster care about what would be important qualities for someone in the position they were recruiting for. They designed a questionnaire, advertised and hosted a public young person's session to get more information about qualities, skills and experience to inform the job advertisement. The young people then competed to design a letter that best captured this information and the winning entry was sent to all candidates. The involvement officer facilitated a preparation session with the young people. This covered employment legislation, interview skills, equality and confidentiality. The young person's panel agreed a set of questions, interviewed the candidates and gave feedback to the senior officers and elected members about their preferred candidate.

### What worked well?

- The role of the involvement officer with a dedicated remit across education and social work services to promote and embed participation.
- Having a multi-agency participation steering group to join-up the various strands of involvement work within the council and its community planning partners.
- The capacity to plan and prepare for the recruitment exercise and communicate effectively with HR, teaching and social work staff.

### What difference did it make?

The process had both impact and influence at an individual and a service level. Elected members valued the feedback from young people and took this into account in making their decision. The young people considered their voices were heard, that they were supported and prepared to undertake the task to a high standard and felt they had been treated as equals. The HR manager was clear about the benefits of involving young people and had confidence in the approach taken. Draft guidelines were being developed to embed the involvement of people who use services in the corporate recruitment and selection policy. Discussion was taking place about the degree of influence and weighting this should have.

## East Renfrewshire Council: Improving services for young people with disabilities

### Why did they do it?

The staff and managers of services for children and young people with disabilities were committed to enabling young people to be actively supported to influence the provision and development of the services they received. They believed that young people were not always asked for their views about services.

### Who did they involve?

All children and young people with disabilities who attended either the holiday programme or the community based support service.

### What did they do?

Two services were run for children and young people with disabilities to enable them to participate in a full range of leisure and social activities. One was a holiday programme, the other was a 52 week community based support service run in the evening and weekends. There was a continuous cycle of consultation and evaluation which integrated seeking the views of children and young people into all areas of work. Young people had been able to influence when, where and how activities took place and were given a say in which staff supported them. Activities and plans were all now much more focused on the interests, priorities and wishes of the young people. The service had dedicated time and resources to selecting, training and developing staff with the right skills and values.

### What worked well?

Understanding what children and young people thought about the services that they received was integral to everything that the service provided. The range of methodologies used was comprehensive and included:

- activity diaries completed by workers, parents and young people to allow a continuous flow of information to make sure that young people were really enjoying what they were doing
- observations; where a young person may have more complex communication difficulties, regular observation records were kept to ensure that a wide range of feedback was included
- a wide range of communication formats such as pictures, storyboards, graffiti art, computer programmes, body maps.

### What difference did it make?

- Children and young people experienced a strong sense of ownership and connection to the service.
- They were supported to make real choices in a safe setting.
- Friendships were formed around shared interests, and new skills were developed.
- They developed confidence in communicating their views and wishes.
- Children and young people had opportunities to have fun and improve their emotional wellbeing.

## Falkirk Council: For Falkirk's Bairns forum

### Why did they do it?

The decision to involve young people more systematically in the council came from the development of the children services plan in 2005. An external organisation was brought in to work with young people to seek their views. This had developed into a range of different approaches for different activities.

### Who did they involve?

'For Falkirk's Bairns' was a group that met regularly and included young people from across Falkirk who were interested in working to improve services. Other specific pieces of work included young people in residential care and those who were the children of foster carers.

### What did they do?

Falkirk established For Falkirk's Bairns as a means to provide a regular forum that could be used as a consultative group for developments across all children's services. The young people met on a monthly basis. In addition to this group there was a wide range of ways that young people had been involved in a systematic way to improve children's services.

Young people had been involved in:

- interviewing staff and influencing recruitment decisions.
- developing a training pack to support other young people's involvement in recruitment work.
- developing a DVD that had been used with elected members to help them understand the issues for young people accommodated away from home
- training people interested in becoming foster carers
- helping a voluntary organisation make their website more young people friendly.

### What worked well?

Staff employed a range of methods to engage young people. These included drama and role play, arts and crafts, story-boards, peer education, team building activities. They saw it as a real strength that staff from across the council were involved, making the best use of different skills – for instance the group work skills of youth workers. Working towards an award recognising their participation had been a significant motivator for young people.

### What difference did it make?

It had given young people a much greater influence over services, and had helped the whole council and other providers understand the significance of having young people involved. For example, a national voluntary organisation had used the group to help develop their own website.

## The Highland Council: Highland Youth Voice (HYV) and the Highland Youth Convenor

### Why did they do it?

They created a youth parliament for the Highlands to provide opportunities for consultation and a forum to address issues generated by its members. The youth convenor post was created to provide a link between council committees, the youth services team, the Highland Youth Voice (HYV) and local youth forums to formally represent young people's views in policy and decision making.

### Who did they involve?

HYV had around 100 members predominantly aged 14 – 18 years, elected via schools and local youth forums. Youth development officers supported the work of the forums and had a remit to work with vulnerable young people and provide a link with the more formal consultation structures.

### What did they do?

The elected youth parliament met twice yearly for residential conferences. An executive group met on a six-weekly basis to take the business forward, to provide a link with geographical areas and a forum for officials and members to consult with. The youth convenor post was created in 2007 to champion the cause of young people in the highlands and work with council officials, elected members and partner agencies. It operated as 12 month position and carried a bursary.

### What worked well?

- Bi-annual elections maintained momentum and sustainability and recognised the window of around 18 months when members were most active. Regular projects provided lots of opportunities for involvement at different levels.
- The youth convenor was based in council HQ and acted as a visual reminder to members and officers. She held a pivotal role in representing young people in different settings and at different levels of decision making.
- The HYV Exec met every six weeks from Friday evening until Saturday lunchtime with overnight accommodation in a local youth hostel. Food and transport were provided.
- "Apprentice day" where HYV members shadowed senior officials from the council and community planning partner organisations and were able to represent the voice of young people by raising local concerns and issues.
- Bi-annual themed conferences were planned and organised entirely by the HYV Exec.

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**What difference did it make?**

- HYV took part in a major budget consultation exercise. Elected members were very impressed with their understanding of financial issues. Funding for the youth service was preserved with full support from all elected members.
- The relationship between HYV and elected members had matured and a culture had developed which recognised that young people offered a meaningful contribution to debate and discussion. Members were much clearer about their role in listening to young people and actively sought opportunities for consultation.
- The youth convenor post was now in its 4th year and the level of influence had incrementally grown to give full voting rights on council committees for education, children and young people with a recent invitation to attend all strategic committees.
- HYV members attended electoral ward forums, community councils and drug and alcohol partnerships and were able to "have their say".
- Plans were in place to increase the role of young carers in HYV.

## Orkney Islands Council: Consultation for the integrated children's services plan

### Why did they do it?

The Services for Children and Young People Development Group wanted to build on previous practice and develop a more meaningful and comprehensive model of consultation to inform the Integrated Children's Services Plan (ICSP) 2008-11.

### Who did they involve?

The consultation involved every child attending school and those who were home educated. This included those who were looked after at home and in residential and foster care in the islands.

### What did they do?

Children were asked to respond to the eight wellbeing indicators (safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included) and comment on how these words applied to their current situation and how things could be improved. The responses were analysed and summarised and used to inform and shape the priorities of the ICSP.

### What worked well?

The consultation was promoted through head teachers and facilitated by class teachers so all teaching staff were engaged. This approach was chosen to maximise inclusion and bring the work into the child's own setting. Age appropriate methods were used to engage young people including the use of story books to generate discussion for younger children. There was good cross-agency support and resources were in place for planning and analysis. Young people took part in the analysis and presented findings to managers and elected members. This enhanced the impact of the findings and although responses were anonymous, the views of young people living in the residential unit came through giving powerful messages about stigma and negative attitudes associated with being accommodated.

### What difference did it make?

The views expressed by young people in residential care became a springboard for developing and publicising the corporate parenting agenda and in challenging and influencing attitudes and decision making.

- The commitment to consult and engage with young people was now built into policy and procedure and happened regularly.
- Attitudes towards looked after children had improved and the children's champion was able to have a wider influence among elected members.
- Local press were more willing to celebrate young people's achievements.
- The advocacy service was reviewed and systems and resources were in place to report the views of young people in residential care at a unit and service level.
- There had been improved access to accommodation for care leavers.

In their most recent inspection report the Care Inspectorate considered that participation in the children's unit was excellent.

## South Lanarkshire Council: Children's House

### Why did they do it?

The staff and manager had a clear commitment to improving the experience of young people living within the house.

### Who did they involve?

All of the young people who lived in the children's house were able to be involved in affecting the way that the house was run and in improving things there. The staff were very conscious of the need to recognise that different young people want to be involved in different ways and so all the opportunities were available to the young people to take up as and when they wanted to.

### What did they do?

There were a range of methods that were used to involve the young people in the running of the home. These included:

- providing the young people with information about how much money might be available for a particular school holiday time, to allow them to collectively plan what might be possible;
- using the fridge door as a means to seek views, take votes, post ideas;
- attending young people meetings and staff meetings; and
- holding a young person's development day, facilitated by the children's rights officer, to help them think about what they wanted their house to be like.

### What worked well?

It was clear that the house had become far more child-centred and responsive to what the individual young people needed. Previously policies had been applicable across all the children's houses, for instance what age you were determined your bedtime. The young people were able to influence this and make it more personal. The policy that they are most pleased about is being able to have friends come and stay in the house. This has become a much less bureaucratic process, and one that is now negotiated within the home.

The staff's commitment and willingness to make this happen was key in ensuring young people were able to make a difference. The young people thought that it was great that the staff kept coming back to them and asking and including them in all parts of running the house.

### What difference did it make?

The young people had been able to influence:

- policy - as it related to visitors, bullying, bedtimes
- how the house is decorate and fitted out
- activities and holidays.

In our most recent inspection report the Care Inspectorate considered that consultation and participation activities in this children's house were excellent.

## West Lothian Council: Having your Say forum

### Why did they do it?

The forum was established 10 years ago alongside the development of multi-agency working in children's services and was part of the wider participation agenda. Key aims were to nurture personal, social and emotional development; actively involve children and young people in decision making processes; and influence service development.

### Who did they involve?

The forum was open to any child or young person, aged 5-15 years who had experience of the care system. Most of those who attended were looked after away from home or in respite.

### What did they do?

The forum had three distinct groups; for primary and secondary aged children, and a third for those in transition, as care leavers. The council and partners developed a multi-agency organisational structure to agree strategy and deliver operational practice with looked after children. The children's rights officer acted as a conduit between the forum and this structure.

### What worked well?

- Interest and involvement was sustained through regular fortnightly meetings.
- The agenda for each meeting was set by the group and the methodology was age-appropriate. It included discussion groups, consultation processes, games, drama and dance productions and outings.
- The role of the children's rights officer was pivotal in managing the forums, being a member of the multi-agency operational team and having strong links with the strategic team.

### What difference did it make?

- Young people we met told us they knew what their rights were, they felt safe to talk about why they were in care, and they felt they were being listened to.
- It influenced local policy; with the production of an information pack for newly accommodated young people and helped to establish residents groups in children's houses.
- It instigated a review of current IT policy for children looked after away from home, leading to investment in **Netopian**, a safe means of accessing the internet and age appropriate access to social networking sites. Young people were involved in the implementation plan.
- There was an expectation that young people would always be involved in staff recruitment within the children's houses.
- Young people were involved in the delivery of "we can and must do better"<sup>9</sup> training to schools.

<sup>9</sup> Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better, Scottish Executive January 2007 – training materials on improving educational attainment and life outcomes for looked after children and care leavers

## West Lothian: Peer negotiation

### Why did they do it?

This was an approach to changing behaviour based on peer negotiation methods. This developed from the need to find a more effective and sustainable way of reducing conflict between young people in a residential setting.

### Who did they involve?

It involved the staff and residents in children's houses, and was established in collaboration with Peer Mediation Network: Scotland.

### What did they do?

- Worked in partnership with Peer Mediation Network: Scotland and obtained funding to deliver training for staff and young people, monitored and evaluated the programme and assist young people to integrate peer mediation into the residential houses.
- Established a regular young person's group to discuss, explore and coach young people through the stages of peer negotiation.
- Established a parents group to help them understand the approach.

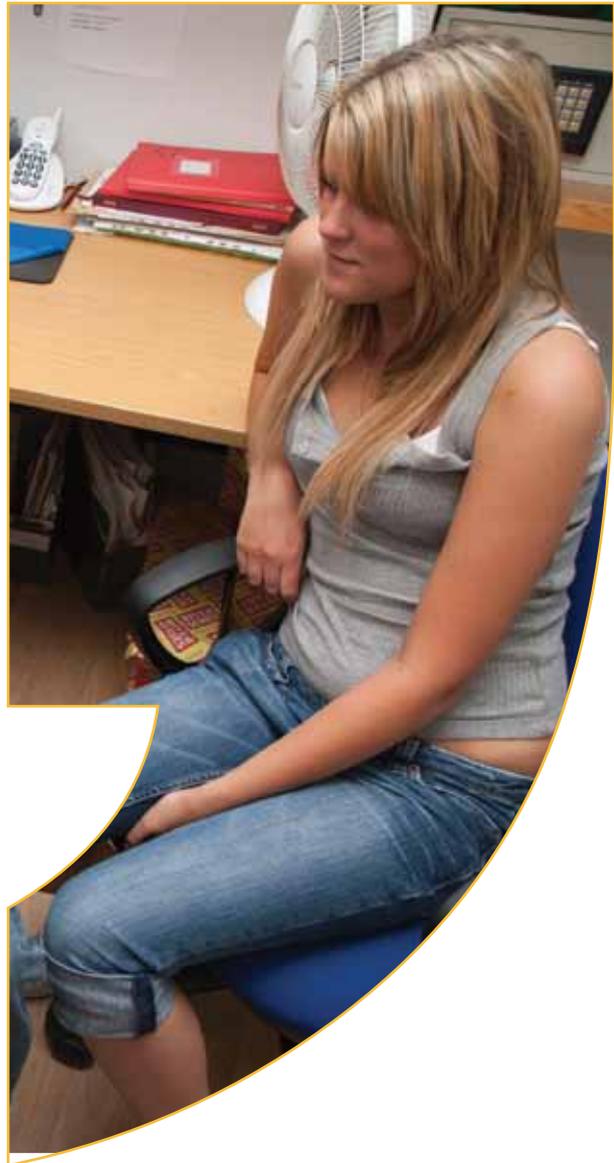
### What worked well?

- Weekly young person's meetings held out with the residential house with 80% attendance.
- Young people made decisions about how to implement and maintain the momentum of the approach.
- Young people delivered refresher training for staff. This provided an opportunity to identify positive and less effective behaviour.
- Young people acted as champions for the approach with their peers and new residents. This increased ownership and sustainability of the approach.
- A commitment to mutual respect, with young people and staff being praised and encouraged with successes recognised through external awards.

### What difference did it make?

- The number of police call-outs, physical restraints and sanctions had dropped significantly and the number of rewards had increased.
- The power balance between staff and residents had shifted; young people told us they had managed to negotiate lots of benefits for themselves by asking in a different way and that staff were now less likely to say "no" to requests.
- Young people had the skills to confidently challenge practice they saw as unfair, and were better able to cope with being challenged themselves. They were confident they would retain these skills.

In their most recent inspection report, the Care Inspectorate considered that performance against the participation quality statement continued to be excellent in this children's house.



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Effective leadership is essential if involving young people in service improvement is to be embedded into the culture of an organisation

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## 5. What works

We identified a number of themes in the practice examples that were in place where children and young people were being involved successfully.

### Leadership

Effective leadership is essential if involving young people in service improvement is to be embedded into the culture of an organisation.

Leaders are able to offer:

- Values: A genuine belief in the importance of listening to children and young people and responding to their views.
- Vision: A clear sense of what the service or organisation wants to achieve by involving children and young people, and the ability to communicate this to key people.
- Modelling: Where those in authority believe in the value of this approach and model it in their practice, the culture of an organisation or service is more likely to change.
- Resources: Either through time, people or facilities, leaders are able to commit resources to the work.

We saw and heard many examples of good practice in particular areas of service. However, where there was no overall ownership by senior managers, it remained good practice in one area only. Leaders are in a position to ensure these examples are replicated throughout the organisation. This contributes to a shift in culture which in turn increases the impact and sustainability of the work.

The leader of the council, the chief executive and relevant directors attended all of the “meet the bosses” sessions at Clackmannanshire council. All involved were clear that this gave a significant message about the importance of the approach and modelled the expectation to the whole organisation that young people’s voices were important and should be listened to.

Working in partnership is integral to allow children’s services and leaders to influence the involvement and commitment of partner agencies. As young people become more involved in supporting the development and improvement of one service, they inevitably have an impact on the improvement of others.

Managers in social work, education and health in West Lothian had developed a structure for integrated working with looked after children at an operational and strategic level. The participation network through the having your say forums is linked to all three partner agencies and facilitated by the role of the children’s rights officer. The views of young people reach representatives of the key agencies simultaneously.

## People who make it happen

Leadership does not only rest with those in senior management positions. Those who are close to the work itself also demonstrated the same vision, values and commitment. One of the common threads in the examples we visited, was the presence of a worker or front line manager who was making the involvement happen. They had the leadership qualities, as outlined above, but also had the time and permission to put the vision and values into action.

The people 'who made it happen' held the significance of the work in mind at all times and brought a focus to it. They had positive, trusting relationships with young people and were respected as partners with colleagues at all levels of the organisation. Key elements of this role included:

- Delegated authority: 'Permission' to develop and pursue the ideas that the involvement work generates.
- Access: Staff and managers need to be able to move between tiers in organisations to access those that can influence.
- Ability to challenge: This role inevitably demands the ability to challenge the status quo, to help others think about the benefits of listening and responding to what young people tell them will make things better.
- Positive relationships: With young people based on respect and mutual trust.

In East Renfrewshire, the worker responsible for the inclusive leisure services and the holiday play scheme for children with disabilities was the key driver in making the work child-centred. Her staff used a wide range of methods including diaries, observation, play, continuous feedback and workshops to understand young people's experiences and views about services they received. As a consequence, creative and individualised services were developed which expanded opportunities and improved the quality of care offered.

Whilst we have highlighted the strengths of these key people, we recognise that a systematic approach to engagement will only be achieved when staff, managers and decision makers collectively prioritise and embed this in everyday practice.

## Resources

Supporting genuine participation requires time to provide:

- training
- opportunities to plan and practice
- practical and emotional support
- skills and tools to support communication
- information
- reflection and evaluation
- transport and suitable venues.

Young people need to be supported to develop the right knowledge and skills to participate as competently as they are able, and have access to personal support when needed. The use of graphic facilitators can capture the views and feelings and vision of children and young people and ensure

these are accurately represented and not re-interpreted by those writing it up later. Independent advocacy and support organisations can facilitate young people's input and offer training and practical support.

There are practical implications of working to the young people's availability. Sessions and activities may need to be held at weekends or in the evening. Other resources include access to food/ refreshments, comfortable and appropriate venues and transport.

The issue of incentive or reward for the young people's participation should be considered, including the option of remunerating young people where they are participating in an event where others are being paid for their time. Some of the examples we visited offered money or vouchers whilst others linked the reward into personal development and achievement awards. All approaches had merits and some challenges attached. What was important was that the rationale for any approach had been clearly thought through in terms of its implications.

## Processes

In order to make the most difference and embed young people's involvement across an organisation or within a service, systematic and robust processes are required to consider the following:

- **How to identify potential outcomes**

It is important to be clear about the purpose and scope of the work and what the sphere of influence is going to be. Thought should be given to involving young people in determining the outcomes they want from their involvement. Involve young people at the start of the process; this will help them have more influence and feel valued.

Staff and managers from the children's house in South Lanarkshire were clear that they were involving young people to improve the home that they were living in. Although good practice was shared across other homes, the primary goal was to ensure that the home the young people lived in, was as good as it could be.

- **Deciding who to involve**

One of the risks in undertaking this work is that those young people who are most able, articulate and accessible become the ones who are asked to participate. It is important to identify the range of influence that the work is to have and then consider which young people need to be given a voice. Who best understands the service you want to improve? This may include young people who are currently receiving a service but also those who have moved on but can reflect on their experiences.

Forums that are established to consult on a wide range of issues should be properly representative and include more vulnerable young people who may require additional support, encouragement and/ or incentives to take part. Plans for ongoing recruitment and retention should be established at the outset that recognises the influences and speed of change in young people's lives.

- **How to identify and deploy a range of methods**

The practice examples provide a range of ideas about successful methods for engaging and involving young people that are flexible and creative. The approaches chosen should match the anticipated impact and outcomes of the work to the needs of the young people involved.

Creative, age-appropriate methods were identified to engage young people and staff in Orkney. All junior high and primary schools were sent copies of three story books, and teachers were encouraged to choose one of the books to stimulate discussion of the wellbeing indicators, in particular "included" and "nurtured".

- **How to work with what young people tell you**

Consultation and involvement forums may also generate their own priorities, issues and solutions, not all of which will be welcome or comfortable for staff or others to hear. For participation to be meaningful for young people, their views and perspectives cannot always be managed into positive messages for services and staff must be prepared for debate and challenge.

- **How decisions will be made and reported**

The children and young people need to know what they can and cannot influence. A clear route and process for decision making and reporting feedback will keep the issues current and help young people feel connected to the work. This does not assume that all ideas are agreed, but it is essential that the children and young people witness a fair and legitimate process.

The Youth Convenor is invited to attend all council committees with full voting rights for committees for children's services. Directors of all council services in Highland were expected to seek the youth convenor's views on all relevant issues to allow comment and observation at an early stage of all reports that are written.

- **How to deliver on what you have developed**

Ultimately this process is about changing services and systems based on the participation and engagement that has taken place. With their scope of influence, what has been agreed with the young person must then be acted upon. Credibility and the ability to further develop this work is dependent on delivery. Organisations and services must be committed to implementing the course of action that has been agreed.

- **How will the work be evaluated**

Arrangements for evaluating the work should be agreed at the beginning, with feedback invited from all relevant stakeholders at regular intervals. This will encourage those involved to continue the ongoing development of more effective practice and find solutions to problems and barriers. If the work has been successful ensure there are processes in place to share the experience with other parts of the organisation or service. Make sure that what works is replicated, grown and developed further.

Staff and managers in Falkirk told us that their key learning from involving young people has been:

- it was worth doing
- it was far more time consuming than they had imagined
- thorough preparation for all those involved was essential
- the young people benefitted from opportunities to practice any skills needed for the task beforehand
- the young people needed support to participate, emotionally and practically and this was best done by people who knew them
- ultimately those involved have to believe that the young person's view is valid.

Young people should be involved in ongoing planning, evaluation and review of all participation processes. Their views must be seen as being equally valid to the adults and professionals.

### Impact and outcomes

The impact of doing this type of work cannot be overstated. Children and young people told us that being involved helped them:

- gain self confidence
- increase their self esteem
- learn to speak publicly
- develop a wide range of new skills
- have new, rewarding experiences
- achieve awards
- enjoy being listened to for the first time
- have access to people who made decisions about them
- gain work experience and jobs.

Providing feedback to the young people who have been involved on their contribution to the process is really important. Enabling them to learn and develop from the experience ensures that the skills they have used can be taken into other spheres of their lives.

Impact on the services included:

- improving the quality of services
- helping services become more child-centred
- generating enthusiasm and creativity
- improving staff morale
- raising the public profile of services
- changing and challenging the thinking of staff and decision makers.

The recruitment process for a senior management post in East Lothian included an interview by a panel of young people. The successful candidate felt challenged by the interview and was impressed by the quality of the questions and level of preparation that was evident. He recognised the importance of directly hearing the views of young people and the commitment given to involving young people in shaping and influencing services.

Measuring the impact and difference this work makes is a challenge. Some areas are directly measurable. Others require a more qualitative approach to identifying what has worked and why.

“

Don't overlook the need to feedback to young people; they have a right to know what you have done with the information they have given you and whether it has made a difference.

”

## 6. What to avoid

There are some things that young people told us are barriers to their becoming involved that are distinct and worth emphasising.

- Don't talk at young people; trust them and give them space to explore the issues as they see them.
- If an approach is working don't just keep it to yourself; share and celebrate the good work.
- Don't assume that you are reaching the right people by involving those that are readily accessible. Make sure you involve the most relevant children and young people, including the most vulnerable and or the most challenging.
- Don't oversell what you are doing; challenge yourself, and allow others to challenge you to do more. Be clear what young people can expect from you and what you expect from them.
- Don't start the process without being able to fully support young people's involvement; commit to making it effective and real.
- Don't begin without seeking the young people's views about what they want to achieve, and without identifying your aspirations about the work; hold to the vision and values that inspired the work.
- Don't continue if you have to compromise core principles; make sure these are shared and articulated from the start.
- Don't overlook the need to feedback to young people; they have a right to know what you have done with the information they have given you and whether it has made a difference.



## 7. Conclusion

This guide aims to help services and organisations be aspirational in what can be achieved by working with young people to improve their services. We know that this can work; not only have we seen it in researching this guide, but we have experienced it ourselves in working with the Youth Ambassadors. It has constantly challenged our inspections and our ways of working.

What we hope to have shown in this guide is the rich variety of the ways that young people can be involved; to offer some ideas as to how this can be done. Not all of the ways are unique but all of it was making a difference. We did not set out to state how to do this work, there is much written in this area already. We hope the guide helps social work and social care services and organisations reflect on the work that is already taking place, and to ask “are we doing enough, are we doing it well and could more be done?” to really involve children and young people.



## 8. Self-evaluation model

Key elements	Key questions to ask	Possible evidence
Leadership	<p><b>How well we can show that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We value the involvement of children and young people in how we deliver and improve our services</li> <li>We know what we want to achieve by involving children and young people</li> <li>Our staff, elected members and stakeholders understand our commitment and understand the role they have</li> <li>Our aims are embedded in our outcome agreement</li> <li>Our leaders model these values and commitment with young people and staff</li> <li>We have champions at all levels of our organisation who's views are respected</li> <li>We are willing to be challenged by children and young people and our staff</li> <li>We have involved young people in all of our services</li> <li>We celebrate the achievements of young people in being involved</li> <li>We encourage and enable young people to influence decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written vision statement and over-arching strategy</li> <li>Service and team plans</li> <li>Requirements to involve and consult contained in policies and procedures</li> <li>Presence of senior managers at involvement events</li> <li>Evidence of award submissions</li> <li>Celebration events</li> <li>Evidence of involvement in corporate events</li> <li>Committee reports</li> <li>Communication and engagement plan for all stakeholders (foster carers, social workers and so on)</li> </ul>
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We know what resources are needed to involve young people effectively</li> <li>We make the resources securely available with contingency plans/funds</li> <li>Our practitioners have the necessary knowledge and skills to involve young people</li> <li>Our young people have the necessary knowledge and skills to take part effectively</li> <li>That the timescales we set are achievable</li> <li>That we have a range of methods and approaches to involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Costed resource plan</li> <li>Agreed budget</li> <li>Audit of skills and knowledge</li> <li>Evidence of protected time for staff</li> <li>Evidence of training/learning materials</li> <li>SMART project plan</li> </ul>

Key elements	Key questions to ask	Possible evidence
Key processes - structures and systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have effective representation of young people across all our services</li> <li>• We have consulted young people about how they want to be involved</li> <li>• We have a structure to ensure young people's views are built into decision making and policy setting</li> <li>• We involve young people in partnership structures</li> <li>• We have policies in place to make sure the arrangements for involving young people are safe and appropriate</li> <li>• We have a system for recording our work</li> <li>• We have a system for evaluating our work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procedures and guidance for staff to facilitate involvement and consultation</li> <li>• Evidence of reporting and decision making structure</li> <li>• Representation of young people at meetings/planning and implementation groups</li> <li>• Minutes/records of consultation/involvement</li> </ul>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We know what we want young people to gain from being involved</li> <li>• We have anticipated potential risks</li> <li>• We are prepared to support young people throughout their involvement</li> <li>• We are prepared to be challenged by what we learn and deal with unexpected results</li> <li>• We can demonstrate that we have helped more young people to articulate their views about their experience of services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that young people and their carers and workers have been asked for their views</li> <li>• Evidence of resources to support young people and the involvement process</li> </ul>
Building capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We ensure the learning from effective practice is shared and replicated</li> <li>• We have sought feedback and improved on our work as a result of learning from effective practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-house or external evaluation reports</li> <li>• Number of staff engaged in involvement work</li> <li>• Evidence that we have publicised our successes</li> </ul>
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people have been asked what they want to be different</li> <li>• Young people have been actively involved in considering solutions to issues in services/ organisations that they have identified</li> <li>• We have helped others within the service or organisation understand the significance of this way of working</li> <li>• We can demonstrate that we have influenced the work of others</li> <li>• We can evidence that our services have improved and that the difference they have made to the lives of children and young people has improved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual feedback from children and young people that outcome have improved</li> <li>• Inspection reports</li> <li>• External and internal service evaluations</li> <li>• Performance and audit information</li> </ul>

“

How children and young people become involved in shaping and improving services can be considered using Hart's (1992) ladder of participation. It shows that decisions need to be made about the degree of involvement and influence being made available.

”

## Appendix 1: Contact details for practice examples

Clackmannanshire Council; [kayesmith@clacks.gov.uk](mailto:kayesmith@clacks.gov.uk)  
 East Lothian Council; [rcampbell@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:rcampbell@eastlothian.gov.uk)  
 East Renfrewshire Council; [mary.gallagher@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:mary.gallagher@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)  
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**Anne-Margaret.Thompson@westlothian.gov.uk**

## Appendix 2: Other examples submitted

Local authority	Area of work	Contact details
Aberdeen City Council	Young people's involvement in recruitment of senior managers.	<a href="mailto:sdevlin@aberdeencity.gov.uk">sdevlin@aberdeencity.gov.uk</a>
Argyll and Bute Council	Service user involvement group in young person's care home. Central Forum for consultation with looked after children.	<a href="mailto:mark.lines@argyll-bute.gov.uk">mark.lines@argyll-bute.gov.uk</a>
East Ayrshire Council	Framework for Continuous Opportunities for Gathering and Sharing (COGS). Young people's forum – for residents of three children's houses.	<a href="mailto:susan.taylor@east-ayrshire.gov.uk">susan.taylor@east-ayrshire.gov.uk</a>
Fife Council	Range of involvement and consultation work including: pathway reviews, staff selection, welfare rights and advocacy.	<a href="mailto:David.Wright@fife.gsx.gov.uk">David.Wright@fife.gsx.gov.uk</a>
The Moray Council	Consultation with young people and families involved in child protection.	<a href="mailto:John.carney@moray.gov.uk">John.carney@moray.gov.uk</a>
North Lanarkshire Council	Involvement in development of integrated children's services plan. Consultation with young people about their experiences of receiving child protection services.	<a href="mailto:cameronf@northlan.gsx.gov.uk">cameronf@northlan.gsx.gov.uk</a>
South Ayrshire Council	Range of involvement and consultation work in services including: through-care, youth support, children with disabilities and new-build children's residential unit.	<a href="mailto:hugh.carswell@south-ayrshire.gsx.gov.uk">hugh.carswell@south-ayrshire.gsx.gov.uk</a>

## Appendix 3: Reference material

- Badham, B and Wade, H (2008), Hear By Right: Standards framework for the participation of children and young people; The National Youth Agency / Local Government association
- Hart (1992) Children's Participation: from Tokenism to Citizenship, UNICEF
- Re:action consultation toolkit , a practical toolkit for consulting with children and young people on policy issues (2001) ; Save the Children and The Scottish Executive
- [www.participationworks.org.uk/](http://www.participationworks.org.uk/)
- [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/09/16093124/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/09/16093124/0) Practical Guidance on Consulting, Conducting Research and Working in Participative Ways With Children and Young People Experiencing Domestic Abuse



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