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YOUNG VOICES

guidelines on
HOW to involve
children and
young people
in your **work**

The National Children's Office
The Children's Rights Alliance
The National Youth Council of Ireland

June 2005

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GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN THIS PUBLICATION

NCO	National Children's Office
CRA	Children's Rights Alliance
NYCI	National Youth Council of Ireland
CYPU	Children and Young People's Unit (UK)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (UK)
HSE	Health Service Executive
Comhairle na nÓg	Local youth councils for children and young people, run by City and County Development Boards (CDBs)
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
Dáil na nÓg	The National Youth Parliament, a national forum for young people aged twelve to eighteen years, elected through Comhairle na nÓg
Dáil na bPáistí	The National Children's Parliament, a national forum for children aged eight to twelve years, elected through Comhairle na nÓg
Coiste na dTeachtaí	The representatives committee, elected at Dáil na nÓg, to follow up on the recommendations and outcomes of Dáil na nÓg

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT'S

Young Voices: Guidelines on How to Involve Children and Young People in Your Work was prepared jointly by the National Children's Office, the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland.

Independent consultant Anne Colgan undertook documentary research and compiled material which formed the basis for the guidelines contained in *Young Voices*. Practical advice was provided by the Reference Group established to support the development of the guidelines, which included young people as well as representatives of statutory and non-statutory organisations. Its members are listed in Appendix 2.

In preparing *Young Voices*, materials developed by a wide range of national and international organisations with experience of involving children and young people were used. The case histories highlight the excellent participation work being done throughout the country by statutory and non-statutory organisations and provide evidence that the involvement of children and young people in policy development and service delivery is both possible and achievable. *Young Voices* also builds on *Hearing Young Voices: Consulting Children and Young People, including those Experiencing Poverty or other forms of Social Exclusion, in relation to Public Policy Development in Ireland* (2002) and accompanying Guidelines (2003), published by the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland (on behalf of the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative*).

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S OFFICE

The National Children's Office (NCO) is a Government agency, established to improve the quality of life of children in Ireland, by leading and supporting implementation of the National Children's Strategy. The NCO has the lead role on Goal One of the National Children's Strategy, namely 'children and young people will have a voice in matters that affect their lives and their views will be given due weight, in accordance with their age and maturity'. The NCO is committed to promoting participation by children and young people in public policy and service delivery.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ALLIANCE

The Children's Rights Alliance is a national coalition of seventy-nine non-governmental organisations concerned with the rights and welfare of children in Ireland. The Alliance works to secure the full implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Among its other activities, the Alliance strives to promote the right of children and young people to be heard in all matters affecting them, in accordance with the provisions of Article 12 of the Convention.

NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is a membership-led umbrella organisation that represents and supports the interests of voluntary youth organisations and uses its collective experience to act on issues that impact on young people. NYCI is the representative body for youth in Ireland and this is recognised through the Council's status as the Representative Body for Youth Organisations under the Youth Work Act, and in its role as a Social Partner. NYCI maintains relationships with a diverse range of external bodies and nominates representatives to a number of key national policy-making and Government bodies.



FOREWORD



'Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight, in accordance with their age and maturity'. This far-reaching commitment was made by the Irish Government in Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy*, published in November 2000. It is an important statement of intent to work towards meeting the requirements of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Ireland in 1992.

Young Voices: Guidelines on How to Involve Children and Young People in Your Work has been prepared with the aim of encouraging agencies and organisations in both the statutory and non-statutory sectors in Ireland to explore ways in which they can develop a culture of participation by children and young people. It shows how participation can become an integral part of an organisation's policy-making, planning and activities and provides practical guidance on initiating and developing different forms of involvement. *Young Voices* focuses primarily on participation by children and young people over the age of twelve. However, much of the practical advice is relevant to children and young people in all age groups and several of the case studies refer to younger children.

Participation by children and young people increases their sense of belonging to organisations of which they are a part and their sense of being valued and taken into consideration by organisations or agencies whose policies affect their lives. The involvement of children and young people in decision-making 'improves the relevance and quality of policies and services, gives young people a sense of civic responsibility, makes them more interested in national and local politics and increases the likelihood that they will vote in elections'. (Children and Young People's Unit, 2002)

Participation does not simply happen: it requires champions at national, local and organisational level. In particular, strong leadership is needed within organisations to initiate and extend opportunities for real and active participation by children and young people. *Young Voices* aims to encourage adults in key positions in organisations to embed strategies for participation in their work. It acknowledges the value of consultation, which is the most obvious and widely-used form of involvement, but it highlights the fact that effective consultation processes can be the foundation for other, more challenging forms of participation, through which children and young people can deepen their influence on decision-making.

The readiness and willingness of organisations to engage meaningfully with children and young people will be influenced by many factors, including cultural values, resource issues, adult perceptions about the value of children's opinions, skills within the organisation, and the readiness of children and young people themselves to engage. *Young Voices* encourages organisations to seek training in participation processes, to learn by doing, to try out new options, and to build on the learning from their experiences as they move on to new and more challenging possibilities.

Some children and young people will want a limited involvement in organisations and agencies that affect their lives, while others will want fuller and more long-term involvement. Those who want to get involved should have choices that match their abilities, skills, time commitments and interests. As these guidelines highlight, the possibilities for participation are many and varied. Organisations are encouraged to develop a continuum of choice and opportunity to match the interests and ability of the children and young people they serve.

Children and young people need information, understanding, skills and confidence if they are to participate well. The development of the capacity for participation begins in the family. Families can help to empower children in the course of everyday life, by offering them choices and helping them to understand the consequences of their decisions and actions, and by fostering a culture of respect for their opinions. Next to the family, the school curriculum and the culture of the school provide the most significant means by which children and young people can learn the skills, capacities and responsibilities of active participation and citizenship. 'Citizenship practice is learned through the lived experience of belonging and participating, of listening and speaking, of being valued and included'. (Devlin, 2004)

Involving children and young people is a creative process that can be approached in many ways. These guidelines describe only some of the possibilities. Organisations need to network with others interested in this kind of work, to share learning and to pilot new initiatives to add further to a bank of best practice.

I would like to compliment the NCO, CRA and NYCI for their excellent work in preparing these guidelines. I think it is entirely appropriate that this was a joint initiative by the statutory and non-Government sector. Since I took up the post of Minister for Children, I have had the privilege of seeing at first hand the contribution children and young people can make to both policy development and planning of services. I am delighted that these guidelines will help a wide range of organisations to involve children and young people in their work and to progress the implementation of Goal One of the National Children's Strategy and Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.



Brian Lenihan, T.D.,
Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Children





CHAPTER 1

THE VALUE OF PARTICIPATION

"THESE YOUNG PEOPLE, THROUGH PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES, CAN LOBBY TO GAIN FURTHER SUPPORT FROM SERVICES THAT ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR CARE, BUT WHO MAY NOT BE REACHING THESE GROUPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE."



why involve children & **YOUNG** people?

THE RIGHT TO BE INVOLVED

Involving children and young people in decision-making is national public policy in Ireland. The first National Goal of the National Children's Strategy expresses a commitment to give children a voice in matters that affect them, in line with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Ireland in 1992.

BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

Involvement in decision-making brings direct benefits to children and young people themselves. They gain by learning skills such as teamwork, negotiating, problem solving and influencing. They obtain knowledge of how policy is made and how organisations work. They learn to engage with adults as partners and their confidence and self-esteem may be enhanced through participation.

Having opportunities to participate can bring particular benefits to children and young people who are marginalised or excluded from the social, cultural, economic and political life of their communities. In the DfES report, *Building a Culture of Participation* (2003a), the research looked at the impact of participation on citizenship and social inclusion and showed how participation was beneficial, particularly for specific groups of more disadvantaged young people. They give an example of participants in a Young Refugee Rights Group who had received greater knowledge of the rights and issues of asylum seekers and refugees. "These young people, through participation activities, can lobby to gain further support from services that are responsible for their care, but who may not be reaching these groups of young people." (Kirby et al, 2003a: 136)

BETTER POLICY AND BETTER SERVICES

Children and young people have unique perspectives and experiences to offer on issues that affect their lives. Giving children and young people a say in how policies and services are developed, provided, evaluated, monitored and improved will ensure that those policies and services really meet their needs and that unmet needs are recognised.

The National Youth Agency and the British Youth Council carried out a survey in 2004 of statutory and voluntary sector organisations in England, in order to establish a systematic picture of the levels and ways in which they involve children and young people in public decision-making. Among those organisations which had structures for participation, approximately 80 per cent of both statutory and voluntary sector respondents agreed that their services had improved as a result of involving children and young people in decision-making. (Oldfield and Fowler, 2004)



PROMOTING CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Children and young people learn that they can make a difference when they influence what happens in their own communities and in society. This promotes stronger democracy and healthier communities.




When children and young people are involved in public policy-making, they move from being passive recipients of adult decisions to 'rights holders' who are able to assist in shaping their lives and their society. "Apart from the information gained and the representative viewpoints accessed, the actual process itself enables members to discuss and prepare as well as anticipate their involvement in change etc. and to discover and reassert their value as citizens." (Representative of *Voluntary Youth Organisation*, in *Hearing Young Voices*, McAuley and Brattman, 2002a: 61)



DONEGAL YOUTH COUNCIL

Following research by the North Western Health Board into participation by young people in decision-making processes, it was agreed to set up a Youth Council in Donegal to capture the voices of young people in the twelve to eighteen age bracket and to develop a mechanism whereby the issues they highlight can be addressed in a systematic and professional manner. This is a partnership project between the Donegal County Council (under the auspices of the County Development Board) and the Health Service Executive (HSE), North Western Area. The project involves young people being elected by their peers to have a voice on young people's issues and to participate in local projects which impact on the lives of young people living in Donegal.

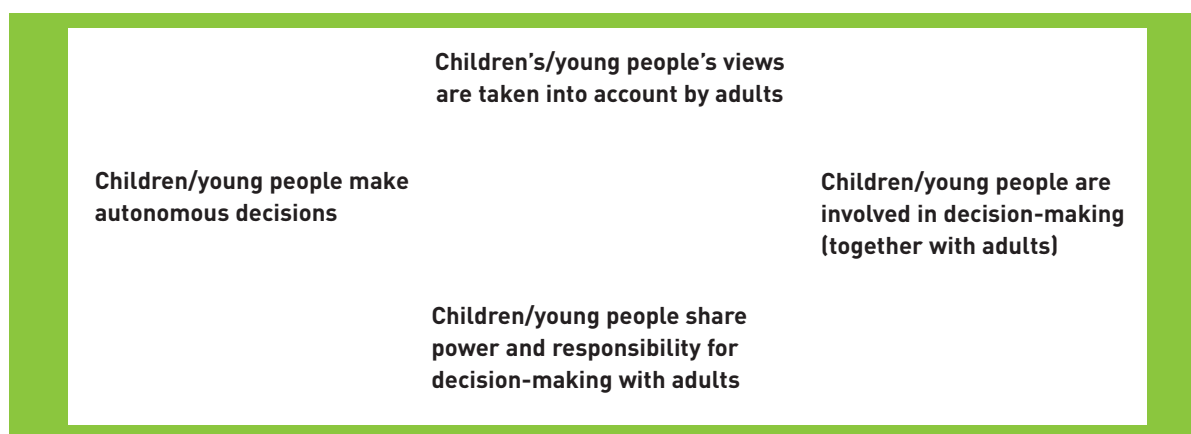
Objectives of the Youth Council:

-  To provide a forum for young people to raise issues via monthly meetings and consultation sessions with agencies regarding their services for young people;
-  Develop specific programmes in response to issues raised by their peers;
-  To promote personal learning and development to foster community relations, partnerships and networks in a meaningful non-tokenistic way.

what is PARTICIPATION?

In this document, the term participation is used in its broadest sense, to mean 'children and young people taking part in making decisions on issues that affect their lives'. In the area of participation, the balance of power or influence can be tipped in favour of adults or of children/young people or it may be equal. In participation strategies for children/young people, their level of influence and decision-making on the final outcome is crucial. Throughout these guidelines, policy-makers and service-providers are encouraged to work towards a level of participation which is meaningful and allows children/young people to have real influence over decisions that affect them.

A model of participation, which is particularly useful, is put forward in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), UK, publication 'Building a Culture of Participation', Research Report (2003a). This model is non-hierarchical and therefore does not assume that one approach is better than another but rather that each one may be useful in different situations. The model describes four different types of participation and is presented in the diagram below:



Children and young people's views are taken into account: Children's views, whether volunteered or sought by adults, need to be taken into account if their rights are to be respected under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The information children provide is one source, amongst others, that adults use to make a decision.

Children and young people are involved in decision-making: At this level, children are actively and directly involved at the point where decisions are made. Children and adults share views and discuss issues together. Adults still hold ultimate responsibility for deciding the course of action, but children will be involved in steering that.

Children and young people share power and responsibility for decision-making: There is not always a clear distinction between this level and the previous one but the critical difference is the degree of influence that children have on decisions. At this level, adults have a commitment to share power and to undertake joint decision-making with children. Decisions may be made by negotiation, consensus or voting.



Children and young people make autonomous decisions: Children make autonomous decisions, but often the implementation of these decisions will require input from adults and is ultimately dependent on adult structures, responsibility and power (Kirby et al, 2003a: 22-23).

Taking the first step in involving children and young people (such as organising a consultation on a particular issue or service) is vitally important and most organisations find it to be a worthwhile and rewarding experience. It is important not to be afraid to involve children/young people, as there are many and varied benefits of participation. As outlined above, these benefits are experienced not only to the children/young people themselves but also by organisations and the wider society through better policies and services for children. "We make a difference and it raises our confidence and self esteem" (Kirby et al, 2003a: 139). Even challenging forms of participation, such as involving children and young people in staff recruitment or in the governance of organisations, have yielded excellent results, as is evident from the case studies in this document.

All strategies which promote the participation of children and young people are valuable. These guidelines outline some of the mechanisms that work well and how they can be used.

CAVAN 2010 – YOUR SCHOOL'S VISION

When compiling the *County Cavan Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development 2002-2012*, Cavan Community and Enterprise Department felt that it was important to include the voice of youth (locally). Accordingly, it was decided to hold a competition open to all schools in the county called 'Cavan 2010 - Your School's Vision'. A total of 22 schools entered the competition which involved children presenting a collective view on their vision for the year 2010 from two perspectives:

-  The Development of their Local Communities;
-  The Development of County Cavan.

DEVISING AN ADOLESCENT-FRIENDLY HEALTH SERVICE

The active involvement of young people in the planning and delivery of a more adolescent-friendly health service in Ballybay, County Monaghan and Cootehill, County Cavan, has resulted in positive change. Adolescents as service users have identified the areas within the health service which they have experienced not to be adolescent-friendly and have developed an intervention plan to develop and change the areas within the service which need to be more adolescent-friendly. Young people are involved in delivering a more adolescent-friendly health service in a number of different ways: through their involvement/participation in training workshops with health professionals, peer education programmes, developing a website for GP practices and having youth delegates on planning committees within the health service executive.

The benefits of young people working in partnership with health service providers in developing a more adolescent-friendly health service in Cootehill and Ballybay has been huge. Young people finally feel that the health service wants to listen to what they have to say and that this exercise is not tokenism because the health services are working with young people and their communities to develop and implement the ideas and suggestions that young people have come up with. (Project Co-ordinator, Cootehill and Ballybay Adolescent-Friendly Health Project)

principles for **BEST PRACTICE**

The involvement of children and young people works best when guided by a set of principles for best practice. Those principles will help to ensure that young people's involvement in decision-making is real and meaningful and that it is not simply a token gesture.

INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN EVALUATING A TENDER

In March 2003, the National Children's Office advertised a three-year EU tender for a graphic design company to design its publications. An evaluation committee of eight people, four of whom were children and young people aged nine to seventeen, examined the tenders. The involvement of the young people was crucial to the decision made by the committee: the young people had very strong views on the type of design that would appeal to children and young people. The presence of the young people made the process of selection both enjoyable and productive.

VISIBILITY

There should be visible commitment at the highest organisational level to the principle and practice of involving children and young people. This commitment is a core value and should be matched by detailed planning, provision of resources and capacity building.

RECOGNISING DIVERSITY

Children and young people are not a homogenous group. Their involvement in decision-making is more likely to succeed when the diversity of their circumstances, ethnicity, background, interests, skills and needs is recognised and respected.

EQUALITY

All children and young people should have the opportunity to be involved in policy development and planning. It may be hard to reach some children and young people because of their personal circumstances, or because of lack of easy access to public consultation. An inclusive approach pays particular attention to ensuring the involvement of children and young people who might be at risk of being left out - for example, children with learning disabilities, Traveller children or very young children.

HONESTY, TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY

Children and young people must be treated honestly. They should be made aware of the purpose of the work and why they are being involved.

- ✎ They should be involved in ways that are appropriate to their age and stage of development;
- ✎ They should know what level of influence they will have;
- ✎ There should be a real possibility of influencing what is planned;
- ✎ The contributions of the children and young people should be taken seriously;
- ✎ They should get feedback that lets them know the impact of their views.

BUILDING CAPACITY

The commitment to participation means being prepared to invest in building the capacity and readiness of both children and adults to engage together. It is important to provide resources for participation and support its implementation.

EMPOWERMENT

The ways in which children and young people are involved should be empowering and should increase their sense of self-esteem and confidence. The methods of participation should promote skills such as decision-making, problem-solving and negotiation.

CHOICE

Children and young people should 'opt in' to being involved, and should know they have the right to choose when, how and whether to be involved.

SAFE PRACTICE

The safety and well-being of children and young people is a top priority. It is essential to have a clear code of practice for protecting their safety and welfare and for ensuring that child protection requirements are met. (See Chapter 2 and Appendix 7)

CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVING

The involvement of children and young people is a new venture for many organisations. It is important to develop mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating activities and progress.

HIGH QUALITY

Arrangements for involving children and young people must be of a high quality, otherwise they may, at best, be tokenistic or, at worst, make for a bad experience for adults and children/young people.

RESPECT AND PARTNERSHIP

In participatory work, children/young people and the adults should work in partnership with each other, in a way that is respectful to both partners.



SCHOOL JOURNAL (HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE, NORTH WESTERN AREA)

The School Journal is a mental health promotion initiative targeting young people in the North West of Ireland. It evolved from consultation with young people where they said that they needed well presented information on mental health. It involves active partnership with young people to produce a homework diary which includes over sixty pages of information on issues they say affect their mental health, positive tips for coping and a comprehensive directory of services. It covers issues such as coping with family, depression, bereavement, sexual health, alcohol, in a teenage-friendly and up-beat manner. The school journal is disseminated through schools free-of-charge to senior cycle students. An evaluation of the first school journal in 2001 showed that the journal was received very positively by students who use it and that the journal's strengths are 'drawn from the language that it uses to communicate to students - language that is theirs - written by their peers.' To date, two editions of the journal have been produced and a group of young people is currently working on the third edition to be launched in September 2005.



levels of PARTICIPATION

There is scope for involving children and young people in many areas of the work of Government departments, agencies and organisations responsible for service delivery. Organisations that are new to involving children and young people in their policy development and planning should start by engaging children in high quality consultation events. Giving children and young people quality and accessible information about matters that affect them, and seeking their views about policy and planning, are important building blocks towards fuller participation and partnership.

“We were particularly pleased with the level of responses received from children and young people. We found their experiences and ideas were particularly insightful in a way that can be given practical effect in the code”. (Quote from Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) Press Release, on developing an advertising code for children, January 2004)

‘A great chance to get views heard’. ‘I am here to voice my opinions. I am here because I want to be listened to.’

(Young person/child at consultation on developing a code for advertising for children, January 2004)

Initiatives to enable the participation of children/young people can range from the provision of information, to consultation, to involvement in governance of an organisation. The broad levels at which children/young people can have influence include the following:

National

Children and young people should be facilitated to contribute to the development of national policy in areas which affect them such as housing, transport, health, education, play and recreation.

It is essential that children/young people with particular needs, such as children with disabilities or children in care, are involved in planning service delivery, where that service directly impacts on their lives.














Local

Children and young people should be involved in local authority planning for the community and in particular, for children’s services, such as the City/County Development Plan, planning for play facilities or cycle tracks. Children/young people can play an active part in evaluating and planning for improved service delivery by health services and local authorities and in planning for improvements.

Organisation level

Involving children and young people at the centre of organisations such as schools, children’s and youth organisations can be particularly beneficial, as their core mission relates to the needs of children and young people.

There are many opportunities for real and meaningful participation. Children and young people can:

-  Contribute to the organisation's overall strategy;
-  Help to update the organisation's vision, mission and goals;
-  Give feedback about how well services are working;
-  Look at ways of improving service delivery;
-  Review and help develop particular policies;
-  Help to plan new services;
-  Advise on ways of improving information for children and young people about the work of and services provided by the organisation;
-  Help to design relevant publications;
-  Be peer mentors or peer advocates (support or represent other children/young people);
-  Be part of representative structures for children/young people in the organisation;
-  Take part in staff or volunteer recruitment;
-  Participate in delegations to meetings or conferences;
-  Be part of the governance of an organisation.

In 2001, the Carnegie Young People's Initiative carried out an international study of young people's involvement in key policy decisions that affect their lives. In Ireland, the National Youth Council of Ireland carried out this research on behalf of the Carnegie Initiative and responses were received from 104 organisations including youth organisations, statutory bodies and community organisations. Almost half of the organisations cited involvement of young people in decision-making as part of their everyday work. In the majority of cases, this involvement was at an operational level, with a smaller percentage involving young people at policy level (O'Leary, 2001).

LEGAL RIGHT TO INVOLVEMENT

Some forms of involvement for children/young people are provided for in legislation, for example, the involvement of students in school development planning is included in the Education Act, 1998.

CluedUp.ie

HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE (HSE), NORTH WESTERN AREA

This is the only dedicated sexual health information website for young people in the Republic of Ireland. The site has been operational since 2001 as an action research project, taking in the views, comments and concerns of a selected population group of 1000 people throughout the North West. The site was developed based on the demands of young people for accessible, friendly, non-judgemental information about sexual health and relationships.

Young people were actively involved in every stage of development of the site, from planning the content and structure to the design, layout and name. They were also instrumental in designing posters, flyers and wallet cards, which have been distributed to schools, clubs, surgeries and public spaces throughout the North West. The site has grown rapidly from a user-base in the hundreds to the current monthly average of 15,000. The site is bright and youth-friendly, containing sections on Body Changes, Relationships, Sexuality, Pregnancy, Infections and Getting Help. The 'Getting Help' section does have a North West slant, but is accompanied by a national directory.

creating the CONDITIONS for participation

“I think for a lot of consultation with young people... there’s a lot of tokenism... They’re consulted to see what they want and then it goes back to a group of adults who decide ‘we can or we can’t do this’... Young people have a particular way of looking at things... One thing about young people, they’re not caught up in politics... They’ve a very clear-cut way [of thinking].”

(McAuley and Brattman, 2002a: 51)

Deciding to involve children and young people in influencing policy and services is an exciting and challenging step. Before putting structures in place, it is important to create a climate within your organisation or service which promotes an open and honest approach to involving stakeholders in a real and meaningful way. The following areas could be examined in order to prepare for a programme of participation:

BUILDING AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

An effective way to prepare for participation is to develop an awareness-raising programme for key decision-makers in your organisation about the benefits of involving children and young people. This programme should highlight the fact that matters affecting children and young people go beyond traditional children’s issues and include housing, transport, environment and finance and equality issues, all of which impact on their lives.

If possible, a ‘mapping exercise’ should be carried out, to identify the aspects of the work of an organisation in which children/young people should participate. Ideally, children and young people should be involved in this exercise.

BUILDING SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES FOR PARTICIPATION

Effective participation requires the establishment of structures. These can be short-term (for the duration of a project) or they can be long-term arrangements that give young people a voice in the way the organisation works on an on-going basis.

The choice of structure will depend on the agency or organisation. For example, the development of effective ways of engaging with children and young people should be an integral part of organisations that provide services to children, such as schools, child care providers, hospitals, disability organisations and local authorities.

THE YOUTH HEALTH SERVICE (YHS)

The Youth Health Service (YHS) is a demonstration project established in 2004 in Cork city by the Health Service Executive (HSE) Southern Area and funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency. It is a dedicated youth service providing a range of health and youth support services under one roof. These services include: crisis pregnancy counselling, youth welfare information, drugs and alcohol counselling, health promotion, sexually transmitted infection clinic and plans for a family planning clinic. The project is a partnership between HSE Southern Area and Ógra Chorcaí Youth Services. Cork City Development Board is also involved in an advisory capacity. The YHS is based on the premise that young people may find it hard to access mainstream services.

A series of focus groups were held with young people to inform the service. The young people were consulted on the preferred location of the premises, the design and layout, the name, the opening hours and the most important services to have in situ. Client comment cards, visitor books and regular field trips to the YHS by local schools and youth centres ensure on-going consultation and feedback from young people.

Organisations that are occasionally involved with children/young people's issues should plan ways of including children and young people in the aspects of the work relevant to them.








In youth-led organisations, child and young members should be fully involved in all aspects of the work, including high-level decision-making. These organisations should also aim to involve young people from outside their organisation, where appropriate.

GIRLS ACTIVE

A SCHOOL BASED PROGRAMME TO PROMOTE PARTICIPATION

There are serious concerns regarding the physical activity levels of young people and particularly of teenage girls. The Cardiovascular Health Strategy and the National Health Promotion Strategy target teenage girls as a priority group and highlight the need to 'identify models of good practice which encourage young people, especially young girls, to participate in physical activity'.

The need to consult with teenage girls regarding physical activity levels in the Health Service Executive (HSE) North Western Area was identified. The aim of the consultation was to identify the motivators and barriers to participation by girls in physical activity and to obtain suggestions regarding the promotion of physical activity amongst this target group. As a result of this consultation:

-  The HSE North Western Area works with fifteen schools to promote the active involvement and decision-making of girls in programmes to promote participation;
-  Girls sit on working groups within their own schools;
-  Girls survey other pupils on the choices of activities to be offered;
-  Girls interview and recruit the providers of programmes such as Yoga and Tai Chi;
-  Girls recruit the group to participate in the programme;
-  Girls receive leadership training;
-  Girls are active participants in reviewing the process.





CHAPTER 2

PLANNING FOR PARTICIPATION



initial PLANNING

An organisation that is committed to involving children and young people in its work should develop a formal policy, supported by an action plan. The plan will ensure that goals, aims, objectives, targets, training needs and resources for participation are identified, and that progress is measured and monitored.

SETTING PRIORITIES

With the right support, information and opportunities, children and young people can play a valuable role in many aspects of the work of organisations, Government agencies or departments. The issues in which children/young people can be involved include:

- 👉 Those that are most relevant to them;
- 👉 Those in which they have a real interest;
- 👉 Those in which they have the greatest possibility for influence;
- 👉 Those that will broaden the child/young person's horizons.

The decision on how to involve children and young people should not rest solely with adults. There should also be a mechanism for inviting children and young people to identify the issues of most concern to them.

DÁIL NA NÓG 2005

The issues for discussion at Dáil na nÓg 2005 were chosen by the delegates. Each Comhairle was asked to choose two topics that were of most interest to them. One issue, 'Alcohol and Drug Misuse', was chosen from the list of ten special initiatives from *Sustaining Progress: Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005*. There was an open choice for the second issues and the one chosen was 'Facilities for Young People'.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT ON YOUR WORK

It is important to involve staff at all levels in the organisation/agency in discussions on how children and young people can contribute to the work programme and on the possible impact of their participation. The following issues should be considered on the role of staff:

- 👉 What is their role as an adult in the process?
- 👉 What do they need to know to engage in the process?
- 👉 How do they perceive the participation of children/young people in their work programme?
- 👉 How can they make the complex aspects of their work accessible to children/young people?
- 👉 What training might staff need to support their engagement in participation work?

The following issues should be considered on the role of children/young people:

- ✎ Why should children/young people participate in this work?
- ✎ In which areas could they have most impact?
- ✎ In which areas will they be involved?
- ✎ In which areas will they not be involved?
- ✎ What are the implications of their involvement for the work of the organisation/agency?
- ✎ What is the potential for this work and what will the organisation/agency look like in the future?
- ✎ What additional adjustments will the organisation/agency need to make to accommodate this new way of working?
- ✎ How will the organisation/agency make contact with the children/young people?

Children/young people should also be involved in this stage of the project and their views should be obtained on the role they can play in the work and the likely impact on the organisation/agency.

NCO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S FORUM

As part of its plan to establish a children/young people's forum, the National Children's Office (NCO) held meetings with its staff to find out how people felt the forum would impact on the day-to-day work of the office. Members of staff were asked their views on what areas of work would benefit from the input of the forum and how the existence of the forum would impact on their own work. Staff also considered the implications for budgets and resources within the NCO. Young forum members will also be asked to identify issues which interest them, from the work programme of the NCO and within the context of the National Children's Strategy.

PLAN FOR AND PROVIDE SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

Successful participation requires training and support for both the adults and children/young people involved. Both groups need new information, knowledge and skills. The resources for such capacity building should be included in the action plan. As part of that process, participants need to examine their attitude to participation.



'My experience in appointing the Ombudsman for Children has been just brilliant from all the wonderful people at the National Children's Office and the ISPCC that have helped us so much, to all the wonderful places we have gone to in the training for appointing the Ombudsman. The best part of this exciting experience was the roleplay and meeting new people from all over Ireland. This experience of appointing the Ombudsman for Children has been by far the best experience of my life.'

(Quotation from Áine Treanor (13), in NCO, Annual Report 2003: 10)



Budgets

A specific budget is required for participation by children and young people. Involving and consulting children rarely fit into the 'neat' practices used for consulting adults and usually incur additional costs.

Building organisational capacity

The skills and experience for involving children and young people may not be available in some organisations. Staff may need training and support to work in new and different ways. They will also need to adapt their meeting styles and use of language. Key decision-makers, including County Council members, school principals, members of boards of management and directors in organisations providing services to children and young people, should be offered support and training to enable them to engage in high quality participation work.






The National Children's Office will provide advice and support on how to build capacity for participation. The experience and expertise of organisations which have a track record in involving children and young people (see Appendix 3) should also be sought. The creation of networks with other professionals and organisations involved in participation work can be very worthwhile.

Everyone's business – someone's responsibility

Make sure a named person with the skills and influence to champion the work has lead responsibility for the participation strategy. Her/his role is to promote and support participation in the organisation, but not to be the only person working in a participatory way.

internalising NEW WAYS of working

Once awareness has been raised in the organisation and staff are committed to involving children and young people in a meaningful way, there is a need to 'internalise' these new ways of working into the organisation so that they become a central part of the work. The Handbook, *Building a Culture of Participation*, (2003b), suggests that internalising participatory ways of working requires that organisations should:

-  **Communicate and develop a common vision:** This can be done by holding awareness-raising events and by publicly promoting the message as widely as possible. All staff, including those in senior management positions, should be encouraged to have contact with children and young people and undertake direct projects with them where possible. A Charter of Participation should be developed for the organisation and displayed in the building;
-  **Develop an understanding of participation in practice:** Through regular discussion and work in the area of participation, staff will begin to recognise good participation practice and challenge practice which is not participative;
-  **Build capacity of staff.** The staff capacity in the area of participation can be developed by ensuring that staff members have time to actively listen to children/young people. There should be initial induction and on-going training for staff in the principles and methods of participation. Staff and team meetings should include an opportunity for staff to discuss difficulties in the area of participation and possible ways of addressing these difficulties. Above all, the practice should be documented and made available for learning purposes;
-  **Motivate and sustain enthusiasm for the work:** It is important that achievements and new initiatives in the area of participation are highlighted and celebrated in the organisation. Good practice should be promoted and disseminated among other organisations or agencies;
-  **Acknowledge conflict and resistance.** In implementing any new ways of working, it is almost inevitable that there will be some resistance to the changes entailed which needs to be acknowledged and addressed. Staff should be supported and be actively involved in deciding how practices could be changed. Some people may take longer to come on board and can be encouraged over time to get involved. The backing of senior management should be sought to help remove barriers and actively resolve conflicts.

“The first year was quite difficult because it was really hard to get through to adults, saying that children do have a voice...We did a lot of presentations, we did a lot of challenging: saying they do have a voice, like how do they know children don't know anything? ...But now they're coming to us. We've done successful consultations and they know, they've loads of information from children.”

(Kirby et al, 2003a: 73)

challenges for **CHILDREN** young people and adults

Adults and children may need new skills for joint working. The pace of working, vocabulary, methods of sharing information and decision-making will have to be adjusted. There will be a sharing of influence and changes in the level of autonomy that decision-makers have traditionally held. Unless decision-makers actually agree to make these changes to the way they normally work, the involvement of young people may not be meaningful.

“Do not take the fact that young people want to get involved as a challenge because it simply is not. Student councils are a way of co-operating, for implementing school policy and most importantly for information exchange, or customer feedback”

(Quotation from President of Union of Secondary Students (USS) at launch of Student Council Working Group leaflet, March 2004)

Young people and adults will need time to learn good ways of working together. The adults, in particular, should consider how their normal working practices could exclude children or young people. The following issues should be considered:

- ✎ Adults often know each other through professional contact. The young people may not know anyone else in the group, which can be quite daunting;
- ✎ Adults usually have more knowledge of the issue under discussion. In addition, they normally have time for preparation and briefing during working hours, whereas children/young people are often obliged to prepare in their own time;
- ✎ The language and pace of meetings can lead to children/young people feeling intimidated or excluded;
- ✎ The dress code for adults, such as suits, can be daunting for the children/young people;
- ✎ Meeting venues may seem very formal and perhaps uncomfortable for some of the children/young people.

All of these challenges can be handled well through good working practices. Most of the issues can be easily addressed by adults and young people working together to plan for meetings and events.

“What has emerged from our experiences of the participation of children/young people is that effective participation has a number of elements, all of which must be in place. The young people need preparation and support which is non-directional; different groups need different approaches yet all must be treated with equal weight.... Adults need as much, if not more support. This is a challenge especially when there is not a consensus among adults on complex issues” (McAuley and M Brattman, 2002a: 62)

choosing the **RIGHT TYPE** of involvement

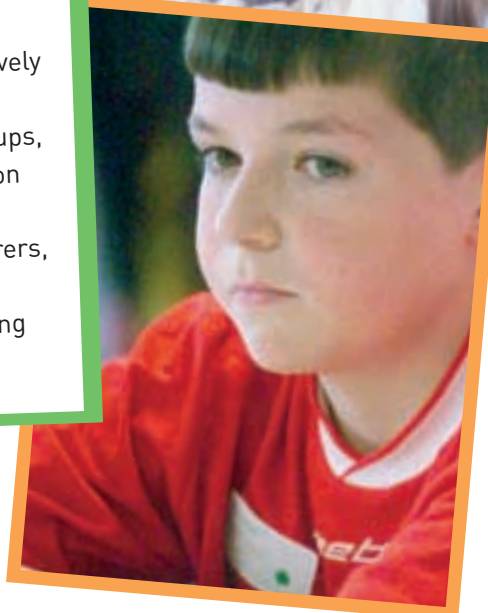
Children and young people may be involved at more than one point and to different degrees in policy development or planning. The method of involving young people and the degree of involvement should fit the purpose. Avoid having one single strategy for working with children/young people, regardless of the issue.

The type of involvement will be shaped by the number of children/young people, their availability, needs, abilities, backgrounds and interest in the issue. The time-scale for the project, the complexity of the issue, the sensitivity of the matter being discussed and the skills of staff will also influence the participation method to be used. Review the purpose of involving the children/young people and choose appropriate methods to achieve the best results for all involved.

BALLYBAY AND COOTEHILL ADOLESCENT-FRIENDLY HEALTH PROJECT

This is a demonstration project, which aims to develop a more adolescent-friendly health service in the target areas of Cootehill, County Cavan and Ballybay, County Monaghan. The unique element of the project is the emphasis placed on engaging adolescents, health service providers, parents, local schools and the two local communities in the change process and to do so in the context whereby young people are actively involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the health services for adolescents.

The key to the project's success is ensuring that the project is 'owned' by young people. This has been achieved by the development of several youth health groups in both local areas; these groups enable young people to become actively involved in planning, delivering and evaluating the interventions that take place. From the youth health groups, five young people have been elected as representatives on to the project's Steering Committee. The local Steering Committee is one way in which adolescents, parents/carers, health service providers and other relevant community groups/organisations can be actively involved in managing the planning, delivery and evaluation of the project.



HEALTHY EATING GUIDELINES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

To support schools in introducing healthy eating guidelines or policies, the Health Service Executive (HSE), North Western Area, supports schools through the *Healthy Eating in Primary Schools* initiative. This was successfully piloted in twenty schools in the region. We learned from the trial that by actively involving the children from the outset, the choices made by them for both lunch and snacks improved and the policy in these schools received widespread support from parents.

Schools receive a Certificate and Award from the HSE in recognition of their work in promoting healthier eating habits in school. The project has been adopted by the Department of Health and Children and is now being made available to schools in other regions through the HSE.



ensuring **QUALITY** outcomes

Involving children and young people in policy development and service planning, delivery and evaluation is an exciting and rewarding step for public and voluntary bodies. The focus should be on delivering quality outcomes and on ensuring that the participation process is worthwhile for all individuals involved. The following areas are worth noting when preparing for any participative project:

RECORDING OUTCOMES AND DECISIONS

- 👉 The children/young people's views should be accurately captured so that they can have influence;
- 👉 Skilled note-taking or tape-recording of the feedback should be provided;
- 👉 Note-takers should report accurately what children say, and not 'translate' their views into 'adult speak'.

If art or drama is used to enable children to express their views, the children themselves must be allowed to describe their work rather than it being interpreted. Children and young people should have the opportunity to present their views directly to the organisation and have dialogue with adult policy-makers. Children should know exactly how their views will be used and how they will be quoted. Participants should get copies of any written accounts of their views and should have the opportunity to check the accuracy of what has been recorded and to amend any inaccuracies.

EVALUATION AND LEARNING

It is advisable to plan for evaluation, even before the process begins. At the planning stage, an evaluation group, which would include some children/young people, should be established. The evaluation methods should be age-appropriate and accessible. The evaluation process should ensure that the views of all who participated are heard and that the whole experience is well documented. It is important to communicate the limitations of the process to all those who are involved. The involvement of children and young people in policy and service development in Ireland is relatively new and monitoring and documenting initiatives is critical to developing models of good practice.

GETTING FEEDBACK

Children and young people should get regular and timely feedback.

- 👉 The feedback should make clear what has happened as a result of their participation and what difference their input has made;
- 👉 Where adult groups have also been involved, the children and young people should get feedback on their views;
- 👉 Where the young people's views have not been taken on board, the reasons for this should be given;
- 👉 Children and young people should be informed of the next steps, especially in a policy-making process that may take a long time.



CODE OF CHILDREN'S ADVERTISING

The Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, in conjunction with the National Children's Office, invited young people to give their views on a Code of Children's Advertising. One of the mechanisms was a national consultation event. After the event, the views of the young people were documented and drafts of the document were sent to the children and young people for comment. Representatives of the children and young people attended public events to debate the draft code and were present at the launch of the final Code in October 2004.

FOLLOWING-THROUGH

Organisations should make it clear to young participants how issues raised at consultations or participative processes will be followed-up, if at all. It is very important to the ownership of the process that the children/young people understand that they have a stake in the process and the final outcomes.

DÁIL NA nÓG COISTE NA dTEACHTAÍ

Six delegates from Dáil na nÓg 2003 formed a Coiste na dTeachtaí (representative committee) to follow up on the findings of the Dáil. The Coiste was trained for this work. Coiste members met with Government officials to follow up on the issues raised and to try and make progress on them. They also attended and spoke at relevant national and international conferences on the issues. They fed back the outcome of their work to the Dáil na nÓg delegates. (Coiste na dTeachtaí, Dail na nOg, 2003)

DESIGN AND CONTENT OF A CHILDREN'S LEAFLET ON THE NATIONAL PLAY POLICY

In November 2003, the NCO conducted a small but focused consultation with children aged between eight and twelve years, from Dublin City Comhairle na nÓg and Fingal Comhairle na nÓg, on the design and content of a children's leaflet to accompany the publication of the National Play Policy: *Ready, Steady, Play*. The children were very clear about the information they wanted in the leaflet. They also had strong views on the shape, colours and kinds of cartoon characters that would appeal to children. The final leaflet was itself a piece of colourful play, with activities for all age-groups at primary school level. Copies of the leaflet were circulated to every primary school in the country in April 2004 and have been hugely popular with children, parents and teachers.



SAFE practice

The safety and well-being of children and young people must be a top priority for adults in all activities. Child protection protocols must be observed at all times.

Good practice includes observing some basic guidelines such as the following:

- ✎ Show respect and understanding for the rights, safety and welfare of each child/young person;
- ✎ Adopt a policy of good practice in working with children and young people (see sample in Appendix 7);
- ✎ All venues for the children/young people must be safe and comfortable;
- ✎ Appoint a 'designated person' who will ensure that best practice is followed in relation to the safety and welfare of children and young people;
- ✎ Put in place appropriate ratios of adults to children/young people for any meetings or events (refer to the Code of Good Practice, Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector, Department of Education and Science);
- ✎ Inform parents and guardians of the work programme for the children and young people and make them aware of the policy of your organisation on safe practice in working with children and young people.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO BE TAKEN

Parental/guardian consent

Children and young people must be free to decide whether or not they want to participate. Parents or guardians of children and young people under eighteen must also give informed, written consent. If the child or young person is in voluntary care, the consent of a parent must be obtained for participation events. If the child or young person is in formal care, the consent of a social worker must be obtained for participation events. However, it is good practice for the social worker to consult with a parent on this matter. Consent forms should include contact numbers for parents/guardians, information on any special needs the child/young person may have and relevant medical information. (A sample parental/guardian consent form is included in Appendix 6.)

Putting systems in place

Systems should be put in place for noting the arrival and departure of participants, which will ensure that everyone is accounted for, and for recording any incident or accident that may occur.

Passing on the views of children and young people

The views gathered from young people at a consultation should only be used for the purpose for which they were gathered. This should be explained to the participants. Children/young people should be informed about who will have access to their views and materials such as tape recordings. Access to the names of the children/young people who participated and to the materials gathered should only be made available to third parties identified and agreed in advance.

Confidentiality

The question of confidentiality should be discussed with children and young people. They should be allowed to choose whether they want their views to be treated in confidence, to be treated anonymously, or to be attributed to them. Where children under the age of 12 years want to be named as participants, parents or guardians should be asked for consent as part of the consent form.

Consulting children and young people about sensitive issues

Particular attention must be paid to ethical considerations when children and young people are being consulted about sensitive issues that may involve them in speaking about difficult experiences. When sensitive issues arise at a consultation process, facilitators should have a plan for responding appropriately and supporting the children and young people involved. It may be helpful to seek professional advice in advance of and after the event, if necessary.

Media

If members of the media will be present, have ground rules about what is acceptable. Make sure that both parents and children have given their permission for photography, video-recording or interviews. There should be agreement in advance with participants and the media about how photographs or film may be used, and what protocols will be followed in naming people who appear in photographs or on film.

Advice

For information, advice or support on the issue of child protection and welfare, contact the Children First Information Officers in each HSE area, the National Child Protection Officer (NYCI) or your local children's or youth organisation.



the invitation to PARTICIPATE

There are different ways of making contact with children and young people who may be interested in participation, depending on the nature of the work and the purpose of involving the children/young people.

It is important to find ways of contacting children and young people that are safe and acceptable (for example, through community centres, youth groups or schools). The way contact is made will influence the openness and inclusiveness of the process. It should be borne in mind that adults can act as 'gatekeepers' and can influence whether children and young people are involved at all, or who gets to be involved.

In recruiting children and young people, make sure that they are clear about their role and why they have been invited to participate. Sometimes children and young people will be involved in an individual capacity. At other times, they will be representing a wider group or their communities. A local Comhairle na nÓg might represent the views of the local young people in discussions with a local authority about the provision of local services for children. When acting in a representative role, children/young people need to understand what is involved in speaking on behalf of their group, and in giving feedback to those they represent. They should be supported and offered training on how to consult with, and give feedback to, those they represent.



DELEGATES TO DÁIL na nÓG

Each Comhairle na nÓg in the 34 City and County Development Boards throughout the country elects/selects delegates to attend Dáil na nÓg. These young people are representing the views of their Comhairle at the Dáil. The delegates are asked to consult with their Comhairle, and with other young people, if possible, in advance of the Dáil on the selected themes. Where Comhairle meet on a regular basis, the delegates at Dáil na nÓg feed back the outcome of the Dáil to their Comhairle.

It may be useful to get advice from representative organisations and organisations which work with children/young people on how best to make contact with potential participants. Consideration should be given to the following:

- 👉 The age group required;
- 👉 Gender balance;
- 👉 Rural and urban representation;
- 👉 Regional balance;
- 👉 Groups of children/young people who may be left out – for example, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, young people with disabilities or young Travellers.

It is also important to consider whether the children/young people will be selected randomly or through specific criteria for their inclusion.

INCLUSIVENESS

Some children and young people may be 'hard to reach' because of their particular circumstances. Those circumstances can include being homeless, living in a disadvantaged community, being a lone parent, being a Traveller or a member of an asylum-seeking family. The child or young person may have a disability or a special need. These children have a right to participation and organisations, as well as the children and young people themselves, will benefit when they can be successfully included and involved.

When organisations want to reach marginalised groups of children and young people, they must examine and adjust their attitudes, ways of working and use of language, rather than expecting children/young people to 'fit in' with established practices.

“It will take [young people out of home] time... to be able to be vocal about what they think and what way they want things to be... It's about opening up those possibilities... for them”

(McCauley and Brattman, 2002b: 9)

Gaining the trust of 'hard to reach' children and young people will take time, skills and new understandings. It is important to be aware that participation events or processes may not appear to have any relevance for some 'hard-to-reach' families. 'Hard-to-reach' children/young people and their families may fear discrimination or exclusion through becoming involved in participation events. Work closely with those groups which are already involved such as:

- 👉 National and local youth organisations;
- 👉 Community and voluntary sector groups working with children;
- 👉 Organisations with expertise in working with Traveller children, children with disabilities, children of refugee and asylum-seeking families, or other groups at risk of being excluded from participation.



As part of the planning process, you should:

- 👉 Talk to young people from groups at risk of being 'left out';
- 👉 Talk to organisations which represent children/young people at risk of being 'left out';
- 👉 Check if they would prefer to work in their own parallel group or join with the main event;
- 👉 Make sure the young people are ready to join with other groups and know what to expect;
- 👉 Prepare well – give information in accessible formats, give children and young people time and opportunity to prepare;
- 👉 Get advice from them and from adults working with them about effective and accessible ways of running meetings or a consultation.

PAVEE POINT VOICE OF THE CHILD PROJECT

The Voice of the Child Project is an initiative developed by Pavee Point Traveller Centre in association with six organisations working with young Travellers. The project seeks to enable young Travellers to voice their opinions on a variety of issues that they have identified as important to them. Innovative and creative methodologies are being used in the consultations.



CORK YOUTH HEALTH SERVICE

The primary target group of the Cork Youth Health Service (YHS) is more vulnerable young people who are not normally in touch with health and information services. The partnership between the Health Service Executive (HSE) and Ógra Chorcaí Youth Services ensures that such young people can be contacted through outreach initiatives and youth service networks. The YHS is intended to act as a gateway or point of entry for such young people. It supports and encourages service use within the centre and then facilitates follow-on access to mainstream services through referrals and supported pathways.

SUPPORT¹ systems

In doing work of this nature, it is important to acknowledge the potential risks for those involved and to acknowledge the need for, and use of, support systems. The research report of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in the UK, *Building a Culture of Participation* identifies many different sources of support for the children and young people involved in participation initiatives. These include:

- 👉 **Mentor support.** It may sometimes be appropriate for the organisation to provide a mentor for the children and young people, where the participation is taking place over an extended period of time;
- 👉 **Peer support.** Peer support can be crucial for the children/young people involved in participation initiatives and create valuable opportunities to meet other young people and make new friendships. Where a young person is from a minority group, it is important to offer the option of a second representative from that group, to ensure that both children/young people feel supported;
- 👉 **Parental support.** It is important for the organisation involved in participation to build good relationships with the parents of the children/young people involved, particularly where the young person/people will be involved with the project over a period of time. Adequate information must be given to parents and the relationship between the parents and the workers must always be based on prioritising the best interests of the child;
- 👉 **Wider community.** Children and young people who participate in an organisation are also members of a wider community. Organisations will find that there are many benefits to be gained from building strong links with the immediate community (Kirby et al. 2003b).

NEED ASSESSMENT – REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER PROJECT, LETTERKENNY


A needs assessment in Letterkenny, conducted by Children's Services Planning, Health Service Executive (HSE), North Western Area, looked at quality of life issues for refugee and asylum-seeking families living in the area and included an extensive consultation with children and young people up to the age of eighteen years. A range of consultation methodologies was used and the key findings from the young people were:

- 👉 Lack of play spaces and green areas;
- 👉 Need for a drop-in centre for young people;
- 👉 Lack of transport – no town bus;
- 👉 Cost of facilities for young people;
- 👉 Specific issues were highlighted for children who are non-national;
- 👉 Safety on the streets and bullying;
- 👉 Lack of sexual health services.

As a result of this consultation, the following areas of work are being developed:

- 👉 An arts-based community programme for children who are foreign nationals and
- 👉 Young people have formed a sub-group to assist in the development of a drop-in centre.





CHAPTER 3

IMPLEMENTING PARTICIPATION

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD
BE CONSULTED AT ALL STAGES IN THE
PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A POLICY**



INTRODUCTION

There are a variety of ways through which organisations can involve children/young people in order to improve services or facilities. It is rarely the case that there is only one point in time when children/young people can contribute, or only one way in which they can participate. The method of involving children and young people must match the purpose of the task.

Remember that involving children and young people in the work of an organisation or agency is most likely to be successful when:

- 👉 The topic draws on the interest and experience of participants;
- 👉 Participants can see clearly that the work is relevant and worthwhile;
- 👉 The topic is accessible to non-professionals, including children. It may be necessary to 'translate' technical material into language that is appropriate for children and young people;
- 👉 The timescale for the work allows it to follow good practice in involving children and young people;
- 👉 Clear information and good support structures have been put in place for 'hard-to-reach' children/young people;
- 👉 The times of the meetings are not disruptive for the children and young people. Children/young people's school, training or work commitments must be respected, which may require finding other ways of getting their input into the work.

A number of mechanisms and methods for involving children and young people are set out below.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE DÁIL na nÓG STEERING GROUP

A Dáil na nÓg steering group is established each year to oversee the preparation for the Dáil. Young people are members of this group, which also includes the other stakeholders in the process. The young people are former or current delegates at Dáil na nÓg so they are very familiar with the process and have an interest in it. The meetings are held on a Saturday to fit in with the young people's schedules. They have an input into all decisions made regarding the Dáil. This is vital in ensuring that the Dáil meets the needs of young people and is an enjoyable experience for them. The involvement of young people on the steering group has improved the operation of and follow-up to the Dáil na nÓg.

CONSULTATION

Consultation is a way of gathering views, getting feedback on proposals, or checking priorities and needs. Consultation is most appropriate when children and young people are being offered the chance to have some genuine influence on what is to happen, but are not part of the decision-making process.

WHEN TO CONSULT

Ideally, children and young people should be consulted at all stages in the process of developing a policy, plan or service:

At the planning stage – to gather a wide range of views and ideas

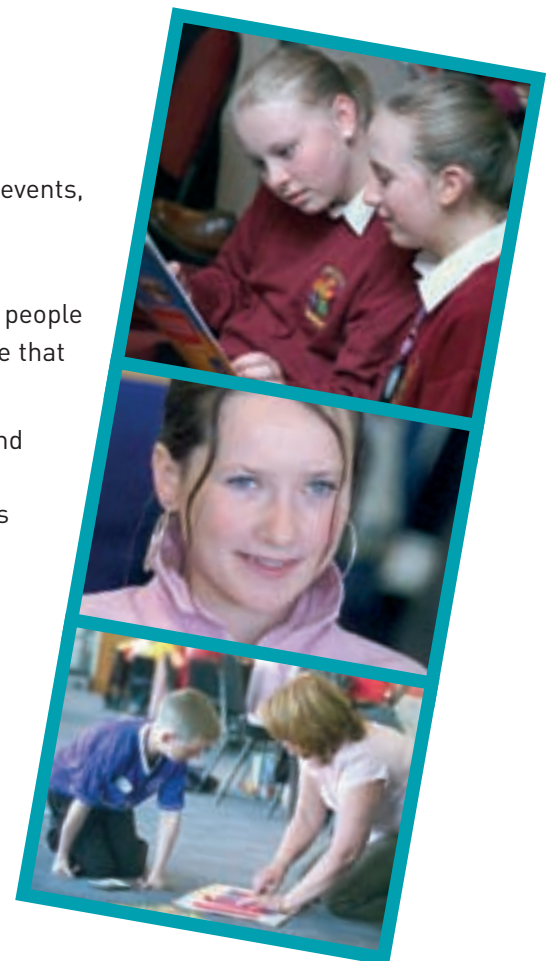
During the development stage – to give children and young people a chance to work on the details

At the final stage – to get feedback on proposals and/or to advise about implementation

ELEMENTS OF A CONSULTATION PROCESS

The consultation process may involve a range of options:

- 👁️ Inviting views from all children through the media that they access (television, internet, scoilnet, radio, print media);
- 📧 Inviting views in a wide range of formats such as in written format, e-mail, video, tape, poems, essays;
- 👁️ Inviting both group and individual views;
- 👁️ In-depth interviews or surveys as a way of deepening the insights from children and young people;
- 👁️ Holding national/regional/local workshops or consultation events, where children and young people can explore policy issues in more depth;
- 👁️ Holding special consultation events for children and young people who might miss out on 'mainstream' events so as to ensure that the diversity of children's views is captured;
- 👁️ Setting up a working group or advisory group of children and young people who can engage in the policy development process on behalf of their peers, and advocate for the views gathered in the public consultation phase.



CONSULTATION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE ON THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STRATEGY

In February 2000, the Irish Association of Young People in Care (IAYPIC) was invited to take part the consultation process for the *National Children's Strategy*. IAYPIC invited young people in care from all over the country, in the thirteen to nineteen age bracket, to a one-day consultation on the following questions:

- 👁️ What are the issues facing you in the next ten years?
- 👁️ What's good about being in care? What's not good about being in care?
- 👁️ What would you change?

The young participants talked about the next ten years, facing school exams and moving out of care at the same time. They spoke of their fear about starting college, being on their own in a flat and having no one to go home to. They talked of the stigma of being in care and dealing with how others label them. They spoke about how, sometimes, the friends they had before coming into care did not want to be seen with them anymore.

On the positive aspects about life in care, they spoke about the opportunities for education and sport, which they might not have had if they had remained at home. They spoke about having made some good friends and about people being there to care for them. They talked about having their own bedroom for the first time when they came into care. On the negative aspects of being in care, the concept that arose frequently was that of not 'having a say' and not being heard. This arose in relation to protestations about pocket money, friends, freedom, sanctions, phone calls, pets ... in fact, practically every facet of their lives.

In discussing what they would change about their care experience, they suggested that they should be able to attend meetings which concern them and see their families more often or less often, if they wished. They suggested that they should be able to have pets and that the children's home should look like a normal house in a normal housing estate.

This was the first occasion that these young people had ever debated the wider issues of being in care with others in the same situation. They were never before asked by policy-makers what care has been like for them and were very appreciative of the opportunity to have their say through the consultation on the *National Children's Strategy*. They demonstrated maturity, insight, and the ability to look beyond themselves when making suggestions about improving the care experience for other children and young people.

TALLAGHT WEST CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

The Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative has been established to develop a ten-year plan for Tallaght that will build on local child and family services and/or implement new services that will measurably improve the developmental and educational outcomes of local children. In Jobstown, Fifth and Sixth class children were asked to give their perspectives on their local environment through the theme of 'community'. They drew maps of their community and discussed their needs in relation to play, shopping, entertainment and leisure.

INDIRECT CONSULTATION

There are times when it may not be possible or advisable to consult directly with all children and young people affected by a policy, plan or decision, and alternative approaches are needed.

Consulting with representatives

Often, the most appropriate form of consultation is through working with young representatives. Pressure of time or lack of resources sometimes prevents an organisation from engaging in wide-ranging consultation. In such circumstances, consultation may be confined to a group of representatives of children and young people. Ideally, children and young people should select their own representatives.

Established representative structures can be used for this type of consultation. For example, the local Comhairle na nÓg, (Youth Forum of the City and County Development Boards), could be consulted about local community policies, or a student council about school policies.

Focus groups

In certain circumstances, focus groups are more appropriate and effective than wide-ranging consultations. Focus groups are considered to be particularly valuable in situations where little information is available on the area under discussion. They are based on an understanding that an individual's attitudes and beliefs do not form in a vacuum and that people need to listen to others' opinions and understandings so that they can focus on their own (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, Reed and Roskell 1997).

Morgan's (1997 p6) definition is commonly used to describe focus group discussions as 'a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher'. This type of approach differs from others because of the number of people that take part in the discussion.

- ➡ There is no agreed number of participants for a group interview and numbers suggested range from five to ten for focus group discussions (Morgan 1997);
- ➡ Focus group events may last for 90 to 120 minutes, although some may be shorter or longer depending on the group and the topic under discussion;
- ➡ A skilled facilitator usually leads the group and it is very important that this person is capable of drawing out different aspects of the subject under discussion without making judgements;
- ➡ The number of groups that are necessary is a judgement call, depending on budget, location and the issues being discussed;
- ➡ Many groups are recorded for later review, in which case it is essential that permission is explicitly sought.



- 👉 Prior to the discussions, make sure:
 - You are very clear about the aim and objectives of the discussion so that it will be possible to “focus” the group at all times;
 - You have five or six questions to draw on if the discussion goes off the track or dries up;
 - The group can give you the opinions that you need. For example, if you want to know about problems for children/young people in rural Ireland, you need to make sure there are enough children/young people from different types of rural settings in the group.
- 👉 At the start of the discussion set ground rules, including those about confidentiality;
- 👉 During the discussion remain focused but flexible;
- 👉 Give everybody an opportunity to contribute;
- 👉 After the discussion, check for trends, themes or patterns.

For a practical guide to focus groups, check the bibliography in Appendix 1.

Consulting on sensitive issues

Consultations about sensitive issues are best handled with advice from people with expertise on that issue. For example, in planning a consultation with children and children/young people who are using mental health services, it is advisable to work with professionals who already have a relationship of trust with the children/young people concerned. These professionals can guide and advise, or engage directly with the young people on behalf of the agency seeking the children’s views.

Expertise

When an organisation or agency does not have expertise in consulting children and young people, it may opt to invite people with skills in this area to conduct the consultation on its behalf or in partnership.

A LITTLE BIT OF RESPECT

Sexual Health: A Consultation with young people, parents and professionals in the North West.

In June 2002, the North Western Health Board (now the Health Service Executive (HSE) North Western Area) received funding from the Department of Health and Children to develop a sexual health strategy for young people in the North West. Phase 1 of this strategy involved consulting widely with young people, parents, teachers, youth and community workers, health professionals and other relevant organizations. A range of methods were used in the consultation process:

- Focus groups;
- One-to-one interviews;
- Draw and write for younger children;
- Open space;
- Video;
- Drama and workshops;
- Questionnaires.

We consulted with over 1,000 young people, 200 parents, 100 service providers and 75 teachers in the counties of Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim.

The key messages from the consultation were:

- Young people need more information on sexual health;
- Young people want more youth-friendly services delivered by professionals who know how to work with young people;
- Young people want good quality sex education programmes in schools delivered by teachers who are comfortable and confident in delivery;
- Alcohol and peer pressure are the two main influences in becoming sexually active.

We also learned that:

- Friends, magazines and TV are the primary sources of information for young people;
- Young people would like more information from their parents;
- There is very little sex education happening in the schools;
- Parents are uncomfortable discussing relationships and sexual health issues with their children and need support;
- Most youth clubs have no policy provision on sexual health programmes or sex education.








During Phase 2 of this strategy, an action plan has been developed. We will be establishing a young people's group which will play an integral role in ensuring that the action plan and projects developed from the plan continue to meet the needs of young people.



PREPARATION

Children and young people need good, accessible information about the subject matter of the consultation. The information should be clear and free of jargon. It should be given in suitable formats and reflect a sensitivity to cultural diversity. Parents and facilitators should also get the information in good time, so they can help the children to prepare.

Children need to know:

-  The purpose and limitations of the consultation;
-  Who is sponsoring or organising it;
-  Who else is invited;
-  What level of influence they will have;
-  Who else will have a say in what happens;
-  What will happen to their views;
-  How they will get feedback.

Information for the children and young people should include a parental/guardian consent form, to be completed and returned with an application form.

Cost

Budgets must take account of the cost of including particular groups of children, such as transport, assistance or sign-language interpreters for children and young people with disabilities and translators for refugee and asylum-seeking children. Every effort should be made to ensure that financial considerations should not be a barrier to children, young people or accompanying adults taking part.

Timing

Children and young people lead busy lives and it is important that this is respected. School days should not be disrupted too often but, equally, consultation should not intrude unduly on children's free time. School principals are usually willing to consider the consultation as *a day of education*, thus ensuring that children/young people are not be marked absent from school.

Venues

Venues should be accessible to all participants, including children with disabilities. Venues should be welcoming and safe. Be sure that they can accommodate the activities planned for the consultation event.

Selecting facilitators and rapporteurs

A lead facilitator should have overall responsibility for the design of the consultation event, in partnership with young people and with the organisation running the consultation. It is necessary to have a preparatory meeting, where facilitators can plan together, agree roles and create a team focus for the event.

Facilitators must have the skills and experience to empower children and young people to have a voice. Facilitators should be:

- 👉 Experienced in working with children and young people;
- 👂 Good listeners and open-minded;
- 👁️ Skilled at ensuring that everyone is heard;
- 🌍 Aware of and knowledgeable about cultural differences;
- 👁️ Aware of the specific needs of particular groups, such as children with disabilities;
- 👂 Aware of issues which may impede children's participation;
- 👉 Skilled at building bridges and breaking down barriers for children and supporting their participation;
- 👁️ Aware of children's energy levels, attention spans and interests;
- 👁️ Committed to enabling children to take the lead in various roles, where possible;
- 👉 Skilled at communicating with children/young people in accessible language;
- 👁️ Flexible, creative, and focused on making participation fun;
- 👂 Trained to deal with safety and child protection issues;

You should check if there are young trained facilitators in your area. If participants would prefer to work with a facilitator they know, make every effort to accommodate this preference.

Consider the scope for linking with schools and youth organisations in order to develop a panel of young facilitators and rapporteurs in your area.

YOUTH FACILITATORS

A Coiste na dTeachtaí (representative committee) was formed after Dáil na nÓg 2003 to follow up on the findings of the Dáil. The Coiste was trained by the NYCI as youth facilitators. They have worked as co-facilitators with experienced adult facilitators at a number of consultation events with young people. These include the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland/National Children's Office consultation event on the development of a Code of Children's Advertising and the meeting between the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin TD, and Dáil na bPáistí representatives in January 2005.

Briefing presenters

Those making presentations to the children/young people should be given full information about the purpose of the event, the number of children and the age group of participants. They should be given guidance about suitable formats for presenting their material.

CHOICE OF METHODOLOGIES

Appropriate

It is important to choose ways of working that match the age and maturity of participants. The activities should capture the diversity of experience in the group, their energy levels and capacities.

Interesting

The activities should be interesting and fun for children and young people. They should offer the participants new insights, skills and real opportunities to engage.

Informative

The methodologies should provide space for information to be given on the issue under discussion and ensure that the information is relevant and useful.

Safe

The activities chosen must have regard to the safety and welfare of the children and young people.

Ensuring success

Resources and supports are available for ensuring that the session is useful and productive for all the participants. (See Appendix 4 and Appendix 5 for useful contacts and materials). It may be necessary to remind facilitators of issues such as:

- 👂 Building relationships and trust in the group;
- 👂 Ensuring inclusiveness;
- 👂 Hearing quiet voices;
- 👂 Dealing with sensitive issues.

Recording outcomes and ensuring follow-up

Outcomes should be carefully noted and participants informed of any proposed follow-up to the consultation. The children and young people should be kept informed of how the outcomes of the consultation are being used and given the opportunity to participate in any follow-up consultative events.

DUBLIN CITY COMHAIRLE na nÓg SEMINARS

In 2003, the Dublin City Comhairle na nÓg area seminars focused on the review of the Dublin City Development Plan 1999 and the preparation of a new Dublin City Development Plan 2005-2011. Over 500 young people aged from seven to seventeen years, from primary and secondary schools, youth groups, disability and minority ethnic groups, attended the six area seminars. The Comhairle seminars involved a series of workshops on particular themes. The young people used drama, artwork, crafts and discussions to formulate their ideas for the City Development Plan. The themes discussed were: Transportation, Infrastructure, Community Development, Open Space/Recreation.



consumer panels/ ADVISORY GROUPS

Organisations that provide services to the public often set up consumer panels for their customers. A children and young people's consumer panel or advisory group can:

- ✎ Take part in reviews of children's services;
- ✎ Propose ways for checking if children and young people are happy with the services;
- ✎ Act as a point of contact for children or young people who want to raise concerns about the services;
- ✎ Advise about information provision to children and young people;
- ✎ Identify whether children/young people from minority backgrounds use the service and if not, why not;
- ✎ Propose and/or help to organise wider consultations with children and young people;
- ✎ Comment on and contribute to annual reports, newsletters, or other communications;
- ✎ Meet with service management to give feedback on issues.

MEMBERSHIP

The members of a consumer panel or an advisory group are not usually elected and are not expected to be representatives, but are instead randomly selected. However, the membership should reflect different geographic areas, age groups and social groups.

It is advisable to select fifteen to twenty members, so that at least twelve children and young people will be available to attend meetings.

Members usually serve for a fixed time. The term of office should be agreed with the members and should allow enough time for them to gain knowledge of the work of the organisation. In deciding an appropriate term of office for the panels involving children and young people, account should be taken of their age, commitments and interest.

WAYS OF WORKING

- ✎ The role and work of the consumer panel to an advisory group should be discussed fully with the children and young people, so that they can have a clear, shared understanding of their task;
- ✎ The young members will need sustained support from staff to enable them to understand issues such as service plans, evaluations and reviews;
- ✎ Management and staff will need support and training to enable them to work well with the young members;
- ✎ Children and young people should have opportunities to meet with management and decision-makers from time to time. They should get regular feedback about how their views are making a difference;
- ✎ The children and young people should be able to raise issues, as well as responding to the issues raised by adults. They should be supported to consult other children/young people who use the service and gather concerns to be raised with management.

service planning, review & EVALUATION

Organisations which work with children and young people or promote their rights should involve them in organisational service planning, implementation and review. Many organisations have comprehensive systems for engaging with their client group on a range of issues from design of services to accessibility and level of use.

VIEWPOINT: EVALUATION OF ISPCCC SERVICES

Viewpoint is an internal evaluation of ISPCCC services, seeking to obtain children's and young people's views of the ISPCCC services they receive and feedback from parents engaged with such services. The purpose of *Viewpoint* is to help the organisation plan, prioritise, and deliver better services for children and young people; ensure services are designed to meet the needs of the service users; ensure services are inclusive and representative of the whole community and to reflect an ethos of child-centredness.

The evaluation is carried out on a bi-annual basis. A number of consultation methods are used to engage with all children and young people using ISPCCC services to capture feedback regarding staff and services. In order to meet the individual needs of clients, a number of supports have been employed to ensure that all clients can actively participate in the *Viewpoint* process, including:

- A specific questionnaire has been designed for each category of service;
- Age appropriate questionnaires and consultation techniques have been designed;
- Accessible questionnaires are being developed to ensure that the evaluation is fully accessible for all clients, including children with disabilities, children with literacy difficulties and children for whom English is not their first language;
- Customised techniques for administering the evaluation have been developed to ensure full participation from children with varying levels of ability.

DESIGNING A FAMILY SUPPORT BUILDING BARNARDOS FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT, TULLAMORE

Children helped to design the use of space in a new family support building. A Building Committee of twelve children worked closely with staff to help to build a child-friendly environment. The older children and the younger children developed plans for what they ideally wanted. Finally, one plan was agreed by the whole group - it included a 'dream corner', which was the idea of one child. The children and young people had a central role in the ceremony to mark the official opening of the building.



REPRESENTATIVE

groups for children/young people

Many organisations, and particularly those which have a strong role in children/young people's services, have established permanent, formal structures where children/young people can discuss the work of the organisation and contribute to the development of appropriate programmes and services.

Student councils provide students with the opportunity to be involved in the affairs of the school, working in partnership with school management, staff and parents for the benefit of the school and its students. In many children's and youth organisations, youth forums are established to give children/young people a real voice in the day-to-day running of the organisation.

In establishing a representative structure for children and young people, there are a number of factors which should be considered:

- How many?
- What method will be used to choose a representative?
- What age groups will be represented?
- What support will be necessary for the group – how will it be provided?
- What are the terms of reference for the group?
- What is the term of office of the group?
- How will the group feed into the other structures of the organisation such as the Board of Management and senior staff?
- What kind of influence will the group have?
- Are there aspects of the organisation on which the forum/group will not have an input?

This type of representative structure offers a valuable opportunity for children and young people to meet on their own and to make recommendations to the wider organisation.

It is essential that the organisation is clear about the purpose of the forum, its role and level of influence. Children and young people should be involved as early as possible in the process of establishing the forum, in order to ensure that the structures are workable and acceptable to them.

THE YOUTH THEATRE'S MEMBERS' FORUM (YTMF)

Established in 1996 by the National Association for Youth Drama (NAYD), the YTMF consists of members nominated from individual youth theatres in Ireland. Though there could be any number up to seventy, the average attendance is twenty-five young people, aged fourteen and upwards. The YTMF uses dramatic arts and stimuli to initiate discussion, debate and exploration concerning policies, programming and issues that effect them and their own youth theatre through their engagement with youth drama. It meets two to three times a year. Recent YTMFs have informed policy, practice and thinking on involving children (under twelve) in youth theatre and the effects of involvement in the arts on young people's neurological and linguistic development.

WORKING GROUPS and committees

Children and young people should be involved in working groups and committees dealing with issues that affect them, unless compelling reasons exist for not involving them. The children and young people should be regarded as equal partners with adults in the process and this should be made clear to all involved. The young members may not need to attend all meetings and different options exist, such as parallel meetings or sub-group meetings.

Children and young people can contribute to a working group or advisory committee either by being members of the main committee or by having a parallel working group, with both groups meeting from time to time, which may be the best option in many circumstances. Whichever method is used, it is essential that good practice is employed.

EFFECTIVE WAYS OF WORKING FOR JOINT OR PARALLEL WORKING GROUPS

Good meeting practices benefit everyone on a committee. Participants will contribute well to the group if there is careful preparation, an agenda, clear rules of engagement and supports for children/young people.



PREPARING WELL

- 👉 Provide training for adults and children/young people before the process begins to assist in the process of working together;
- 👉 Invest time in exploring together the role of the group, and make sure everyone is clear and in agreement about that role;
- 👉 Invest time to allow people to get to know each other and build trust and develop a sense of belonging;
- 👉 Make sure documentation gets to people in plenty of time, is brief, clearly written and free of jargon;
- 👉 Prepare a glossary of terms that may come up regularly during the work;
- 👉 Find out how best to communicate with the young members – for example, not everyone has regular access to e-mail; use other ways of working as well as meetings, such as telephone contact.

GOOD MEETING PRACTICE

- 👉 Where written documents cause problems for some group members, put in place a support system (like a 'buddy system' where people can link up to talk about the meeting agenda and papers ahead of the meeting);
- 👉 Do not expect young people to 'download' lengthy documents from email;
- 👉 Use nametags or name cards until people get to know each other;
- 👉 Ensure that the seating arrangements do not distance people from each other, making it hard for them to get the attention of the chairperson or to join in the discussion;
- 👉 Provide everyone with pens and paper;
- 👉 Avoid singling out young people to ask for their views;
- 👉 Be open to using creative ways of working, such as drama or art where this is possible and appropriate;
- 👉 Divide participants into pairs or small groups for discussion as the children/young people may be more comfortable working in small groups;
- 👉 Be aware that children/young people may need time to become familiar with the systems and practices at formal committee meetings.



MAKING IT WORK – ÓGRA CHORCAÍ

A programme called *Open-Doors* was given the task of setting up structures that ensured young people had a real voice in all decisions taken on their behalf by Ógra Chorcaí. The programme was to be overseen by a voluntary committee, 50% of whom were to be under 22 years of age. Its role was to:

- ✎ Devise structures for participation and consultation;
- ✎ Give a voice to young people to express their interests, needs and concerns;
- ✎ Organise an annual forum to explore these concerns and to elect representatives to the committee;
- ✎ Train and support the young people to take initiatives that they have identified;
- ✎ Prepare and facilitate young people to represent the organisation at local, national and international forums.

The outcomes have been all that was hoped for:

- ✎ Since 2001, the chairperson of the committee must be under 25 years. This chairperson is a member of the Board of Ógra and is the voice of the young people in all decisions taken by the organisation;
- ✎ The forums for young people to express their views have expanded and include biennial surveys of their concerns;
- ✎ Young members participate in the Cork City Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg, and the Development Education Advisory Committee of NYCI;
- ✎ A working sub-group of peer educators decides on the priorities and themes for all events for the year. They design the methodologies and facilitate at the Youth Forum and all Development Education events;
- ✎ Every year members of the committee have represented the organisation all over Ireland, in Europe and as far away as Mozambique!

PROVIDING SUPPORTS

It is useful to find out from children and young people what support they would like. Consider engaging an advocate to work with them, if they would find this helpful. The advocate could help in a number of ways, including:

- ✎ Helping them to prepare for a meeting by going through the documentation and agenda in advance;
- ✎ Helping them to clarify issues or obtain extra information;
- ✎ Being available at a meeting to support their involvement, if they wish;
- ✎ Being alert to the dynamic of meetings and observing the meeting practice;
- ✎ Discussing outcomes with the young members;
- ✎ Finding out if they have any concerns about the process and feeding this back to the chairperson.

EVALUATING PRACTICE AND LEARNING

Check with the children and young people and with the whole group about the experience of working in the group, and build on the outcomes of this review.

Evaluation could be done through any of the following:

- ✎ Setting aside one meeting from time to time for a facilitated group evaluation;
- ✎ Inviting participants to complete an evaluation sheet about the work of the group;
- ✎ Taking feedback, either verbal or written, at the end of meetings.

CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE AS MEMBERS OF THE MAIN GROUP/COMMITTEE

Where children and young people are members of the main working group or committee with adults, they must be equal partners with the adults involved and have an equal voice at the table. This should be made clear to the adults and the children/young people at the beginning of the process and everyone should be asked to respect the opinions of all members of the working group or committee. The chairperson or another appointed person should monitor the situation to ensure that the children/young people are engaging well with the process and are being treated as equal partners by all participants. The working group or committee should be operated in accordance with the good practice detailed above. In addition, it would be helpful for the children/young people to have 'pre-meetings' so that they could go through the documentation together and discuss what they want to say at the meeting. The chairperson should also ensure that children/young people are well represented on any sub-groups that are formed.

CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE ON A PARALLEL GROUP

Where separate groups of young people and adults work in parallel, the children and young people should be provided with the means of managing their own work programme, with adult support if required. This approach can work well if the members of the adult committee or the young people are not yet ready for joint working.

An effective system will be required to bring together the work of the two groups and negotiate common outcomes. Possibilities include:

- ✎ Exchanging agendas and meeting notes;
- ✎ Holding a joint meeting, with independent facilitation, from time to time, when decisions or agreement need to be reached;
- ✎ Having observers from the other group present, by invitation.



STUDENT COUNCIL WORKING GROUP

The National Children's Office, as the Government agency responsible for driving implementation of the National Children's Strategy, established the Student Council Working Group in June 2003 in co-operation with the Department of Education and Science, to promote the establishment of democratic student councils in second-level schools. Eleven second-level students, in the thirteen to seventeen age group and all the partners in education (Department of Education and Science, school management bodies, teachers unions, parent organisations) are members of the Working Group and its ethos is one of partnership and equality. The students were nominated through Comhairle na nÓg throughout the country and the Union of Secondary Students (USS). There are twenty-six members of the group, which is chaired by the NCO and meets quarterly.

To ensure that the young people on the Working Group are fully and equally involved, an observer/evaluator has been appointed. Working Group meetings take place on Saturday afternoons and the students have pre-meetings in the morning at which they discuss the agenda for the main meeting. The students find the pre-meetings very useful as a means of preparing themselves for the full meeting and of getting to know one another better. The pre-meetings are attended by the evaluator. It is hoped that his final report will act as a good practice guide for Government departments and other agencies on involving children and young people in decision-making.

The students are very well integrated into the Working Group and have no problem expressing their views and contributing to the work.

including children/ young people on **DELEGATIONS**







Including children/young people on delegations dealing with children's issues is a very effective way of ensuring their formal participation. Children/young people can be involved with statutory bodies or non-Governmental organisations in delegations to Government. They can also be part of Government delegations to international meetings dealing with children's issues.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE YOUNG PEOPLE CHANGING THEIR COMMUNITIES

Two young Comhairle na nÓg representatives from Fingal Comhairle na nÓg and Cork City Comhairle na nÓg, accompanied the Head of Communications of the NCO and the CEO of the Family Support Agency (Department of Social and Family Affairs) to an International Initiative study tour and conference: 'Young People Changing their Communities', in Washington DC, USA, in November 2004. The conference was attended by representatives from ten countries. Delegates highlighted the different levels of participation currently being practised. In some countries, particularly certain areas of the USA, it appears that youth participation is primarily a means of engaging troubled young people or young people at high risk. The only countries present which appeared to approach child and youth participation as a right and an essential component of devising and delivering effective and relevant services were Ireland and the UK. The two young people from Ireland made frequent and excellent contributions. They made really good contacts with other young people, particularly from the UK. Both of them gained a huge amount from the experience and are very enthusiastic about bringing the information and perspectives they gained from the conference to their respective Comhairle.

PREPARING AND BRIEFING YOUNG DELEGATES

The young delegates will need good preparation so that they can contribute well and benefit from the experience. A well-structured programme of preparation should cover:

-  An account of the purpose of the conference or meeting;
-  Background information on the event, its history, the 'politics' surrounding the event and possible outcomes;
-  How the proceedings will be conducted;
-  Briefings on the topics to be covered, in child-friendly formats;
-  What is expected of them at the meeting or conference;
-  The level of influence they can expect to have and the limits on that influence.

PLANNING THEIR INPUT

Children and young people should have scope to explore the issues to be discussed and decide on the views they want to promote. When children and young people are part of a larger delegation, their views may need to be negotiated with the adult members of the delegation. They should not be expected to 'buy in' to the adult views.

PREPARING AND BRIEFING ADULTS

Adults may need preparation for being part of delegations with children and young people. They will need to:

- 👉 Be open to the range of ways in which children may choose to present views and acknowledge their validity;
- 👉 Ensure that their own presentations are accessible to a young audience.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Children and young people will be more confident in being part of a delegation or meeting if they have the chance to meet delegates from other organisations or countries in advance. Depending on the duration and nature of the meeting or conference, it may be possible to arrange for young delegates to arrive early and get to know other young people attending, as well as familiarising themselves with the venue and technology.

MAKING PRESENTATIONS

Young delegates should have a choice about the issues they want to raise and, if possible, a choice about the method of presentation. They should have the freedom to develop their own presentation, with access to support if required.

Children and young people will benefit from the opportunity to develop and rehearse their inputs at preparatory workshops.



WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO) FOURTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH, BUDAPEST

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health took place in Budapest in June 2004 with the overall theme *The Future of our Children*. Two young representatives from Galway City Comhairle na nÓg and Fingal Comhairle na nÓg joined the Irish Delegation to the conference, supported by NCO staff. The youth delegates participated in the Youth Parliament at the conference, where a youth declaration on environment and health was prepared. The Galway City Comhairle na nÓg representative was selected by his conference peers to present the youth declaration to the adult conference. This was incorporated into the 'Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe' (CEHAPE). The Minister for Health and Children, Micheál Martin TD, attended the conference and was greatly impressed by the 'exceptional work' of the two youth delegates. The WHO was also impressed by Ireland's contribution to the conference and requested assistance from Ireland, through the NCO, in drawing up a framework to support young people's further participation in the CEHAPE process.

staff recruitment & DEVELOPMENT

Children's involvement in staff recruitment is in its infancy in Ireland. However, it has become more common in the UK in recent years. The feedback from the evaluations of children and young people involved in this work is generally positive, as indicated in the National Children's Bureau publication, *Involving Young People in the Recruitment of Staff, Volunteers and Mentors*, (National Children's Bureau, 2002).

The involvement of children and young people in recruitment is based on the principle that they have a right to a say in the recruitment of those who will make decisions affecting their lives, and that they have valuable insights to offer about the skills required for such work. It is essential that their involvement is properly planned, resourced and supported.

A POLICY AND A PLAN

An organisation intending to involve children and young people in recruitment should have a policy and a plan to guide the work.

- 👁️ The policy should describe the organisation's commitment to involving children/young people in recruitment and lay out the objectives to be achieved by their involvement;
- 👁️ The plan should describe how children and young people will be involved, the training and support they will be given, the detailed protocols for their involvement, and arrangements for review;
- 👁️ The task of overseeing this plan should be the responsibility of a named person in the organisation;
- 👁️ The plan should set out the kinds of training and preparation that will be given to the children/young people.

EXTENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT

The organisation needs to consider how the children and young people will be involved in the recruitment process. The following aspects of the process should be considered:

- 👁️ Developing a job specification;
- 👁️ Developing a person specification;
- 👁️ Job advertisement;
- 👁️ Short-listing;
- 👁️ Interviewing panel(s). There could be separate boards of young people and adults or there could be one board combining both;
- 👁️ Assessment of candidates;
- 👁️ Final selection.

From the outset, the children, young people and adults should be very clear about how much influence each group will have on the final decision.



INTERVIEWS

Where children/young people are involved in interviewing candidates, the following should be put in place:

- 👁️ The children/young people should receive appropriate interview training, including information on what questions are appropriate and what questions are inappropriate;
- 👁️ The children/young people should be clear about the requirements of the post for which they are interviewing;
- 👁️ The children /young people should receive sufficient time to prepare for the interviews and appropriate support before, during and after the interview process;
- 👁️ The marking scheme should be agreed and understood by the children/young people in advance of the interviews, particularly when the marks of an adult board and a children/young people's board will be combined;
- 👁️ The candidates should be informed in advance of the interview that there will be children/young people on the interview board.



RECRUITING THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN

The recruitment of Ireland's first Ombudsman for Children was a landmark event, and it was the first time in Ireland that children and young people were actively involved in a senior State appointment. The National Children's Office (NCO) was asked by the Department of Health and Children to devise a plan to ensure the involvement of children/young people in the appointment process. The process began with a consultation event attended by children and young people, aged between nine and seventeen, from around the country. Working in small, facilitated groups, the participants identified six qualities to be included in the person specification. Each group elected two representatives to form a panel of sixteen participants, which met to finalise the person specification and job advertisement. Following a residential training weekend, young people were involved in short-listing candidates as part of a joint youth-adult committee. The interviews were conducted in three stages: a youth-only interview board, a youth-only role-play and a youth-adult interview board. Panel representatives also sat on the youth-adult Steering Committee for the appointment.

The participants represented a cross-section of those living in rural and urban Ireland and included disadvantaged children, Traveller children, children with disabilities, children from minority ethnic backgrounds and young people in care. The Office of the Civil Service and Local Appointments Commission had responsibility for the appointment process. The Children's Rights Alliance and the ISPC were contracted by the NCO to assist with the involvement of children and young people in the process.



YOUNG PEOPLE AS PART OF AN INTERVIEW PANEL IN THE NORTH WEST

History was made in the Health Service Executive (HSE), North Western Area when, as part of the cross-border participation project, two young people were invited to be part of the interview panel for the project posts. The process of training the young people to be full interview board members took time. Conversations have begun with the Human Resources Department about training a group of young people to sit on interview boards where appropriate, thus ensuring that the involvement of young people in the participation project interviews was not a once-off. During 2005, it is planned to develop a protocol that can be used by the Executive or other boards on how best to involve young people on interview panels.

GOVERNANCE

The Board of Directors or the Board of Management has the overall and final responsibility for what happens in an organisation. This role is commonly referred to as 'governance' of the organisation.

To date, relatively few organisations have devised structures to allow for the involvement of children and young people in key decision-making. Research conducted by the Carnegie Young People Initiative found that less than twenty per cent of the organisations which responded had young people involved in their management (O'Leary, 2001).

Organisations working with, or on behalf of, children and young people, or providing services that impact directly on their lives, should consider whether, and in what ways, children and young people could be involved in their work. Youth-led organisations, in particular, should make provision for the participation of children and young people in their policy-making structures. Schools and other organisations providing key services for children and young people should explore how they can create opportunities for young people to contribute to their governance process.

Children/young people could participate in governance in a number of ways. They could be:

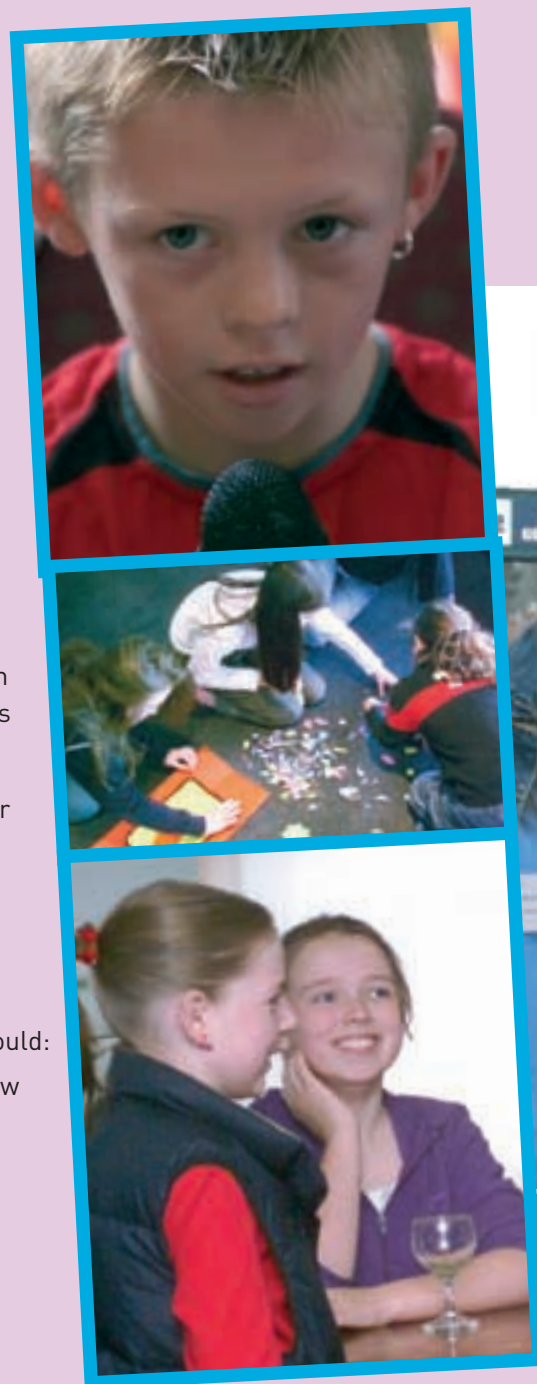
- 👁️ Full voting members of the board;
- 👁️ Observers;
- 👉 Members of an advisory group linked to the Board.

An organisation intending to involve young people on the board should:

- 👁️ Check the legal situation – membership may be confined by law to people over eighteen;
- 👁️ Make sure the young people are aware of the responsibilities involved;
- 👁️ Make sure that the young people are not exposed to financial or legal risks;
- 👉 Provide training for all board members, including the young members.

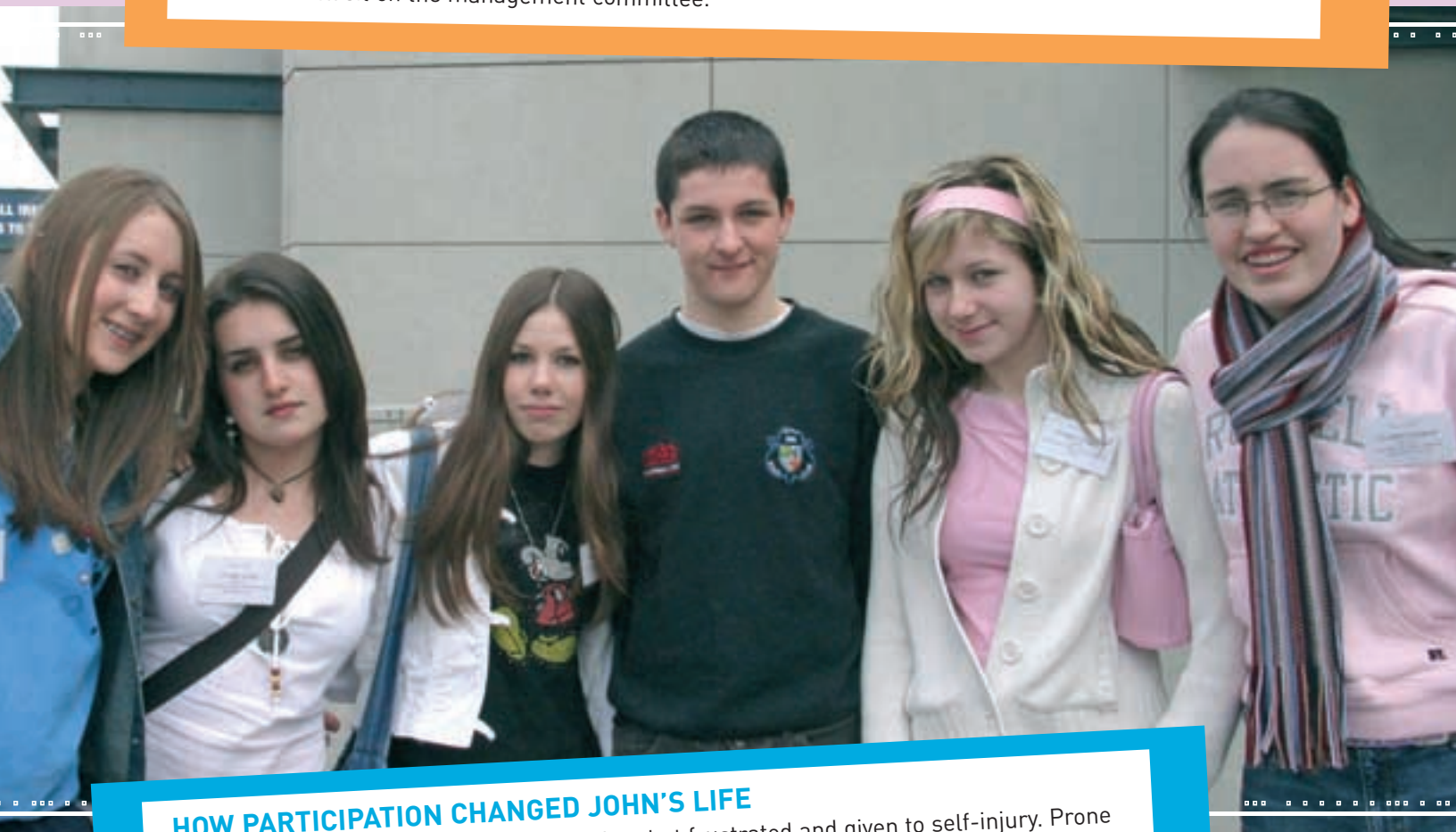
SUPPORT FOR INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE

Young people need training for the task of governance. They need to understand the responsibilities involved in being part of a management committee or board. They should have a clear picture of their role and status, whether as full voting members or as observers. Their status on the board or management committee will affect the nature of their involvement and differences in status should be made clear to all members.



CAVAN AND MONAGHAN YOUTH ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP PROJECT

In 2004, Monaghan and Cavan County Development Boards were granted funding under Measure 2.6 of the PEACE II Programme to develop a two-year pilot project, 'Cavan and Monaghan Youth Active Citizenship Project'. The aim of the project is to build the capacity of youth to engage and participate in the democratic process and to develop awareness of community development on a local, cross-community and cross-border basis. The project will build on the concept of Comhairle na nÓg within both counties, while also encouraging cross-border and cross-community ties. The project employs a Youth Development Officer. An Inter-County Management Committee, which is made up of relevant community, voluntary and statutory groups from both counties, supports the project. Four young people (two from Cavan and two from Monaghan) in the fifteen to sixteen age group will receive training in committee skills and will sit on the management committee.



HOW PARTICIPATION CHANGED JOHN'S LIFE

At fifteen, John was intelligent and articulate but frustrated and given to self-injury. Prone to furious outbursts of temper, he had been expelled from two schools. He felt he was going nowhere. One of the few bright spots in his life was the youth project he attended. He only went there for the soccer. He has been a soccer fanatic since the age of eight and, in spite of rows at the project, he kept coming just to get a game. The youth workers urged him to take on a leadership role in the project and sought to give him responsibility coupled with support. They nominated him for a 'New Young Europeans' cultural project. The project involved working with other young Irish people and young immigrants/asylum seekers using photographs, testimonials and drama to tell their stories and express their hopes and dreams for the future. He was outstanding. His openness and ability to 'tell it like it is' moved and impressed everyone. He is now a helper in the project and Captain/Manager of one of the teams. A new school agreed to give him a chance. He loves it. He is working for his Leaving Certificate, has contacted the Access Department of University College Cork and is determined to become a Youth Worker to help other young people.





CHAPTER 4

RESOURCES

APPENDIX i

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX 2

MEMBERS OF REFERENCE GROUP FOR YOUNG VOICES

June Barry	Ógra Chorcaí
Anne Colgan	Independent Consultant
Maria Corbett	Children's Rights Alliance
Deirdre Dunworth	National Children's Office
Donal Geoghegan	National Youth Council of Ireland
John Glynn	Youth Representative
Ruth Griffin	National Youth Federation
Anna Gunning	National Children's Office
Deiniol Jones	National Youth Council of Ireland
Hilary Kendlin	Fingal Development Board
Ide Mulcahy	National Children's Office
Shane Mullins	Ógra Chorcaí (youth representative)
Colette Murray	Pavee Point
Anne O'Donnell	National Children's Office
Yvonne O'Driscoll	Cork City Comhairle na nÓg (youth representative)

APPENDIX 3

ORGANISATIONS WHICH PROVIDED CASE STUDIES FOR YOUNG VOICES

Broadcasting Commission of Ireland

2-4 Warrington Place, Dublin 2

Cavan Community and Enterprise Department

Cavan County Council, Farnham Street, Cavan

Cootehill and Ballybay Adolescent-Friendly Health Project

White Star Complex, Cootehill, Co. Cavan

Donegal Youth Council,

Letterkenny Public Services Centre, Neil T. Blaney Road, Letterkenny, County Donegal

Dublin City Comhairle na nÓg

Civic Offices, Wood Quay, Dublin 8

Health Service Executive

North Western Area, Health Promotion, Aras Slainte Chluainin, Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim

ISPCC

20 Molesworth St, Dublin 2

Monaghan County Development Board

Monaghan County Council, Market Street, Monaghan

National Association for Youth Drama,

34 Upper Gardiner Street, Dublin 1

National Children's Office

St. Martin's House, Waterloo Road, Dublin 4

Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative

An Cosán, Kiltalown Village Centre, Jobstown, Tallaght, Dublin 24

Tullamore Family Support Project

Barnardos, c/o Head Office, Christchurch Square, Dublin 8

Voice of the Child Project

Pavee Point, North Charles Street, Dublin 1

Youth Health Service

73 Shandon Street, Cork

APPENDIX 4

USEFUL CONTACTS

National Children's Office, St. Martin's House, Waterloo Road, Dublin 2.

Telephone: (+353 1) 418 0582 Email: nco@health.gov.ie Website: www.nco.ie

Children's Rights Alliance, 13 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2.

Telephone: (+353 1) 405 4823 Email: info@cra.iol.ie Website: www.childrensrights.ie

National Children's Resource Centre, Barnardos, Christchurch Square, Dublin 8.

Telephone: (+353 1) 4549699 Email: ncrc@barnardos.ie Website: www.barnardos.ie

National Youth Federation, Resource Centre, 20 Lower Dominick Street, Dublin 1.

Telephone: (+353 1) 8729933 Email: info@nyf.ie Website: www.nyf.ie

Save the Children, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD, England.

Telephone: (++44 207) 703 5400 Email: enquiries@scfuk.org.uk Website: www.savethechildren.org.uk

Department for Education and Skills,

Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ, England.

Telephone: (++44 845) 6022260 Email: dfes@prolog.uk.com

Dynamix Publications Ltd. (A creative training co-operative)

2nd Floor, Salubrious Passage, 55 Wind Street, Swansea AS1 1EG, Wales.

Telephone: (++44 1792) 466231 Email: dynamix@seriousfun.demon.co.uk

Website: www.seriousfun.demon.co.uk

National Youth Council of Ireland, 3 Montague Street, Dublin 2.

Telephone: (+353 1) 478 4122 Email: info@nyci.ie Website: www.youth.ie

Combat Poverty Agency, Bridgewater Centre, Conyngham Road, Dublin 8.

Telephone: (+353 1) 670 6746 Email: info@cpa.ie Website: www.cpa.ie

Office of the Ombudsman for Children, 94 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2.

Telephone: (+353 1) 475 8300 Email: oco@oco.ie Website: www.oco.ie

ISPCC, 20 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

Telephone: (+353 1) 6794944 Email: ispcc@ispcc.ie Website: www.ispcc.ie

National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE, England.

Telephone: (++44 207) 843 6000 Email: library@ncb.org.uk Website: www.ncb.org.uk

APPENDIX 5

USEFUL PUBLICATIONS

Understanding and Developing Children's Participation: A Short Guide.

Barnardos (2004)

Participation, Spice it Up

Dynamix Ltd, Save the Children UK

Building a Culture of Participation, Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation. Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., Cronin, K., and Sinclair R. Research Report and Handbook. Department for Education and Skills Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ, England.

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Department for Education and Skills Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ, England.

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Taking the Initiative: promoting young people's involvement in public decision making in Ireland.

O'Leary, E. (2001) Carnegie Young People's Initiative.

Available from the National Youth Council of Ireland, 3 Montague St., Dublin 2.

Hearing Young Voices. Guidelines for consulting children and young people in relation to developing public policy and services in Ireland.

McAuley, K., & Brattman M., Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative

Available from the National Youth Council of Ireland, 3 Montague St., Dublin 2.

Involving Young People in the Recruitment of Staff, Volunteers and Mentors.

National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakely St, London EC1V 7QE, England.

Learning to Listen, Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People.

Children and Young People's Unit, Available from DfES, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ, England.

APPENDIX 6

SAMPLE PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

For Participation in the (name of event) of the (Name of organisation)

This parental consent covers the regular meetings of the _____ working group over the period of its term of office. Any exceptional travel or residential trips will require an additional form to be completed by the parent/guardian.

NAME OF CHILD/YOUNG PERSON: _____

ADDRESS: _____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____

GENDER (circle as appropriate) Male Female

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER(S) _____

NAME OF SCHOOL / ORGANISATION: _____

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

(Please mention any medical conditions, special needs or dietary requirements)

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN

1. NAME _____

Daytime phone number: Code _____ Local no. _____

Home phone number: Code _____ Local no. _____

Mobile number: _____ Email: _____

2. NAME _____

Daytime phone number: Code _____ Local no. _____

Home phone number: Code _____ Local no. _____

Mobile number: _____ Email: _____

IN CASE OF A MEDICAL EMERGENCY:

In the event of illness or accident, I give permission for medical treatment to be administered where considered necessary by a suitably qualified medical practitioner. If I cannot be contacted and emergency hospital treatment is required, I agree to any written form of consent required by the hospital being signed on my behalf by a staff member. However, I understand that every effort will be made to contact me as soon as possible. In an emergency, I can be contacted at the following telephone numbers:

I agree to allow the child named above to attend meetings of the _____ working group of the *(name of organisation)* during the period _____ to _____. I understand that there will be suitable supervision while the young people are in the care of the *(name of organisation)*. I understand that the proceedings may be photographed/videoed and used for promotional purposes.

Signed: _____ Name (block letters) _____
(Parent/Guardian) *(Parent/Guardian)*

Signed: _____
(Young person)

Address: _____

Date: _____

Phone no: Code _____ Local no. _____












Relationship to Child/Young Person: _____







APPENDIX 7

SAMPLE SAFE PRACTICE/CHILD PROTECTION STATEMENT

The following guidelines are adapted from the Guidelines used by the National Children's Office. Each organisation working with children/young people should develop their own guidelines to suit their organisation.

Safe practice is essential in our work and we have put in place the following procedures to govern our work with children and young people:

-  All staff members are aware of the good practice guidelines and are familiar with the overall child protection policy of the office;
-  Parents of children involved with our work are also informed of our guidelines and procedures;
-  The Office has appointed a 'Child Protection Officer' to deal with any complaints or issues arising which concern the safety or welfare of any child/young person who attends any events or meetings organised by the office. This person is appropriately trained and familiar with the procedures to be followed in the event of an allegation or a suspicion of child abuse;
-  The Office has put in place an anti-bullying policy;
-  The Office has put in place a complaints procedure;
-  When organising events/meetings for children/young people or their attendance at events/meetings, the following information/documentation is requested in relation to each child/young person attending the event/meeting:
 - A Parental Consent Form;
 - Contact details for the family/guardians, including emergency contact numbers;
 - All relevant medical information;
 - Information relating to any special needs which the child or young person may have in terms of access, diet, language assistance, etc.;
-  An appropriate ratio of adults to young people is put in place for each meeting or event;
-  All adults working with young people directly, including those providing overnight supervision, will have received Garda clearance;
-  Staff and facilitators show respect and understanding for the rights, safety and welfare of the children and young people;
-  Inappropriate behaviour/language by the children/young people will not go unchallenged;
-  A system is in place for recording any incidents or accidents;

-  A clear system of registration and departure of participants is in place at all events;
-  We will make every effort to ensure that during events, the physical surroundings will be comfortable, fully accessible and appropriate for the work being undertaken;
-  Employees and volunteers should not take one young person alone in a car on journeys. Where this is unavoidable, it should be with the full consent and knowledge of the parents/guardians and a senior member of the staff;
-  While we recognise that sometimes it is appropriate for staff to work on a one-to-one basis with a child or young person, staff/volunteers should not spend excessive amounts of time alone with an individual child/young person. Where an adult needs to meet with a child/young person alone, the door should be left open and another adult informed of the meeting;
-  There should be no unnecessary physical contact between an adult and a young person. Physical contact should only be in response to the needs of the child and should be appropriate to the age and the level of development of the child;
-  We respect and promote the principles of equality and diversity and work with all children in a culturally sensitive way within the context of the Irish Constitution and law and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.