Greater Manchester's Children and Young People's Voice and Participation Framework

youth focus NW
Improving the lives of young people

Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Public and voluntary sector services across Greater Manchester (GM) want to make GM the best place to grow up and grow old. If this is to be achieved, we know that it is important for people to feel valued, listened to, and have the opportunity to play an active part in their communities.

There is a desire for services to be informed by the voice and lived experience of children and young people (CYP from herewith), starting from where they are in relation to their own feelings and views. CYP come with strengths and abilities and have their own values and principles that form the starting point for engagement. You can tell so much about a place as to how well it brings up and connects with its children and young

The aim of this framework is to:

- Provide a shared model that describes how we will involve and engage children and young people.
- Promote the use of a common language.
- Describe how we will strengthen the Voice and Participation (V&P from herewith) initiatives taking place across Greater Manchester for CYP.

It is important to highlight that this document is a framework, it is not a "How to" guide. It is our recommendation that all V&P initiatives are created alongside and in partnership with the CYP you are trying to engage. This framework covers the age groups of 0-18 years and up to 25 years for SEND along with Health.

Introduction

So what do we mean by Voice and Participation?

The word Voice has many meanings and interpretations. For the purpose of this framework, it is the method as to how CYP express their views, feelings and wishes.

The word Participation also has many meanings and interpretations. For the purpose of this framework:

"Participation is the process by which individuals and groups of individuals can influence decision making and bring about change"
(Adapted from Treseder P. 1997)

Why is it important to get it right?

CYP tell us that effective V&P work enables CYP to become partners and leaders in their own learning, to help them gain influence over issues they are concerned about and to positively engage them with civic society.

In GM we believe that all CYP have the right to have their views, wishes and feelings taken into account when decisions are being made about their life. These decisions could be about their family, school or life in the community.

This right is protected under Article 12 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has been adopted into United Kingdom legislation, such as the Children's Act 2004, and services and agencies have a duty to comply with this right.

Contents

Section 1

Section 1A: This Framework is Rights Based

This framework is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC). There are a number of important articles of rights in the UNCRC that underpin rights based V&P work. These are:

- Article 12: Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

- Article 13: Children have the right to get and share information as long as the information is not damaging to them or others.

- Article 14: Children have the right to think and believe what they want and to practice their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Parents should guide their children on these matters.

- Article 15: Children have a right to meet together and to join groups and organisations, as long as this doesn't stop other people from enjoying their rights.

- Article 16: Children have a right to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life, their good name, their families and their homes.

- Article 23: (children with a disability) A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community. Governments (Public Sector Services) must do all they can to support disabled children and their families.

- Article 24: (health and health services) Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

- Article 31: Children have a right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of activities.

Explore all the articles within the UNCRC here

Section 1B: The Underpinning Principles

The Framework is underpinned by the following principles, which recommend that all processes in which children and young people are listened to, heard and participate (in person or online), must be:

• Transparent and informative – children and young people must be provided with full, accessible, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information. They must be told about their right to express their views freely, their right to have their views given due weight, and how their participation will take place, its scope, purpose and potential impact.

- Respectful – children and young people should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities, and their views should be treated with respect. Adults also need to understand the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of their lives.

- Relevant – the issues on which children and young people are asked to express their views must be of real relevance to their lives, enabling them to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities. They should also be asked to address issues they themselves identify as relevant and important.

- Child friendly – all environments and working methods should be adapted to children and young people's capacities. Resources must be available to ensure that they are adequately prepared and given the necessary confidence and opportunity to contribute their views. Different levels of support and forms of involvement (according to age and evolving ability) are needed

- Inclusive (non-discriminatory) – participation must be inclusive, avoid patterns of discrimination, and ensure opportunities for marginalised children. Consideration must be given to ensuring that children enjoy equal access to the digital environments necessary for online participation. Children and young people are not a homogenous group – it is essential that equal opportunity is provided for all individuals within that group, so that all voices are heard. Every effort should be made to ensure that programmes are culturally sensitive and free from discrimination.

- Supported by training – adults need preparation and support to facilitate children and young people's participation. This includes listening, effective cooperation and knowing how to engage with their evolving capacities.

- Safe and sensitive to risk – in certain situations, expressing their views may put children and young people at risk. Adults must take every precaution to minimise the risk of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequence of participating. This includes the development of a clear child protection strategy, which recognises the particular risks faced by some groups and the extra barriers they encounter. It should also pay particular consideration to the risks in the digital environment if children are participating online. Children and young people must be aware of their right to be protected from harm and know where to go for help. Investing in working with families and communities is important for building an understanding of the value and implications of participation, and for minimising the risks.

- Accountable – follow-up and evaluation is essential. This includes informing children and young people on how their views have been interpreted and used and, where necessary, giving them the opportunity to challenge and influence the analysis of the findings. Feedback on how their participation has influenced any outcomes is essential. Participation should be monitored and evaluated, where possible, with the children and young people themselves

Section 2

Section 2A: Background on the Lundy Model of participation / Why GM has adopted the Lundy Model

The Lundy Model was developed by Laura Lundy, Professor of International Children's Rights at the School of Education at the Queens University of Belfast. Her model, detailed in a 2007 publication in the British Educational Journal, provides a way of conceptualising a child's right to participation, as laid down in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is intended to focus decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of provision.

The Lundy Model is based on four key concepts (Space, Voice, Audience and Influence); these are now used and adopted by national and international organisations, agencies and governments to inform their understanding of children's participation, generating a sea-change in global understanding of child rights-based participation for both policy and practice.

Section 2B: The GM model, the list of questions to ask ourselves

The Lundy Model has been adopted across GM to act like scaffolding as we create an environment where CYP have mechanisms in place to have their voice heard. As this framework is based on children and young peoples rights It is the responsibility of services to provide CYP with the opportunities to have their voices heard, it is not the responsibility of CYP. Our long-term aim is to embed a culture where CYP voice is part of every day practice, not bolted onto service design and delivery as it develops, or even worse, at the end.

Section 2

The GM Lundy Model of voice and participation:

A safe space- Somewhere children and young people can think and share their ideas.

A voice/view- So CYP can express their feelings and wishes in a way that suits them.

An audience- So what CYP say is listened to by the right people at the right time.

Influence- So CYP can shape services within the city region.

Impact- So Great Manchester can be the best place to grow up and grow old.

Section 2

It is important to recognise that GM has a long standing history of CYP V&P and we are not beginning from a low start point. Therefore, we hope that this framework goes some way to create a better understanding, improve coordination, forge consistency and produce evidence that V&P makes a difference to the lives of CYP. This is why within this framework we have made one tweak and installed one addition to the model, following feedback from both voice workers and young people.

- The tweak is the addition of views to voice/views. This is in response to feedback from staff who support non-verbal CYP.
- The addition is the inclusion of impact as a fifth key concept. This is because we want to ensure that V&P makes a measurable difference to CYP, services and communities. It is debatable whether Impact should be present throughout all the themes, rather than stand alone. As we are at the start of the journey to establish the model we want to make it explicit with a vision of Impact becoming implicit as we go forward.

Below, we have set out a number of key considerations and questions when thinking about Space, Voice, Audience, Influence and Impact.

Space
How: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children and young people to express their views. It is important to remember that our children and young people are all different and may want or need to participate in different ways.

Questions to ask ourselves: Have CYP views been actively sought? Was there a safe space where CYP can express themselves freely? Have steps been taken to ensure all CYP can take part?

Section 2

Voice

How: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children and young people's views.

Questions to ask ourselves: Have CYP been given the information they need to form a view? Do CYP know that they don't have to take part? Have CYP been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

Audience

How: Ensure that children and young people's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen.

Questions to ask ourselves: Is there a process for communicating CYP views? Do CYP know who their views are being communicated to, does that person or body have the power to make decisions?

Influence

How: Ensure that children and young people's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate. It is important that we explain clearly when decisions made about them are different to what they said they wanted. For participation to be meaningful we must listen to the voices of a wide range of children and young people.

Questions to ask ourselves: Were CYP views considered by people with the power to make change? Are there procedures in place to ensure that CYP views are taken seriously? Have CYP been provided with feedback explain the reasons for decisions taken?

Impact

How: Ensure that V&P initiatives are making a difference. Effective V&P initiatives take time and resources. Don't bother asking for CYP to be involved if you don't know why you are asking, and what change can be made through their engagement.

Section 2

Questions to ask ourselves: What difference are the V&P initiatives making for young people, practice, services and strategy? How are services accountable to CYP? How do you know? How do you collect and share what CYP are saying? Do you measure the journey of V&P? How do you log and store the outcomes of engagement?

Section 2C: How to follow up on children and young people's views and give them feedback; The four F feedback process:

Lundy recommends a four 'Fs' feedback process:

• Full- Provide comprehensive feedback to children and young people outlining which of their views were accepted, which were not accepted and the reasons for these decisions. This feedback should also note who is implementing their views and what is happening next.

• Friendly: Feedback or responses given by decision-makers to children or young people needs to be in a format and language they understand. They need to be informed about the findings of a consultation or survey and about how their views were given due weight.

• Fast: Children and young people quickly grow up and move on from things they are involved with, so decision-makers need to give them feedback acknowledging their contribution, outlining initial progress and giving information on next steps as soon as possible. This applies to all key stages and developments.

• Followed-up: Decision-makers need to provide ongoing feedback and information to children and young people throughout the policy- or decision-making process. The timing of this should be agreed with CYP.

Section 3

Section 3A: Considers what CYP participation is (and isn't)

According to UNICEF, CYP Voice is motivated by four different modes, these are described as:

1. No participation or unethical – In most societies, the majority of adolescents have little or no opportunity to express their views.

2. Consultative – Adult initiated, Adult led and managed: lacking possibility for children/adolescents to control outcomes. Recognising the added value children / adolescents perspective, knowledge and experience can contribute.

3. Collaborative – Adult initiated, involving partnership with children / adolescents; enabling children/adolescents to influence or challenge both process and outcome. Allowing for increasing levels of self-directed action by children / adolescents over a period of time.

4. Child/youth-led – This issues of concern being identified by children / adolescents themselves. Adults service as facilitators rather than leaders. Children and adolescents controlling process and outcome.

No service for CYP will admit that Mode 1 is acceptable, therefore Modes 2-4 may be appropriate in different contexts, providing they are Rights Based and comply with Lundy's elements of space, voice, audience and influence (in GM Impact is included). In practice, many child/youth participation projects or programmes use all three modes of participation (2-4). So, for example, it may begin with adults consulting young people, after which adults and young people work on some aspects together and young people lead on other aspects on their own.

Section 3

Section 3B: Examples (mechanisms) of formal, informal and non-formal participation

Alongside this framework, it is important to note that V&P work presents itself through different mechanisms; identified in this context as formal, informal and non-formal. Within Greater Manchester, there is a diverse range of work ongoing to offer opportunities for CYP which reflects the use of these different mechanisms of participation in practice. This framework does not seek to promote one form over another it is intended to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each mechanism, in order to help practitioners choose the most appropriate one to use in their work. Below we outline each of the three mechanisms, describing them and identifying what they can look like in practice as guidance for practitioners to draw upon.

Formal

Description: This is any model where young people are in a structured system, whereby there are expectations that the work being done includes formalised representation procedures such as selection processes. This can often be rigid in its approach, but offers accountability, opportunities for service design, scrutiny or representation. Within Greater Manchester, the Combined Authority and GM Health and Social Care Partnership recognises the importance of formal forms of V&P and supports this ongoing.

What does this look like in practice?: Often associated with the public sector but it is strongly represented in the voluntary sector as well. Examples can include; youth councils, young people being on boards or steering groups, young inspectors' programmes and Youth Combined Authorities.

Section 3

Informal

Description: This focuses on campaigning or community action; CYP may be attracted to these opportunities as they feel a connection to the cause or to the host organisation. Activities in this context are often theme/issue based and are often supported by those in the voluntary sector. These can be responsive and engage young people and staff quickly, however, they can disappear as quickly as they appear.

What does this look like in practice?: Across Greater Manchester there is a handful of organisations that deliver Informal V&P activities under the heading of young people's voices e.g. Reclaim.

Non-formal

Description: Work that is self-started by young people and often responds to social injustice. Social media is often a strong tool in growing these movements with young people often responding to, and coming together through a 'call to action'. This form of V&P is not always interconnected to formal and Informal as it sits outside of adult structures. Like informal, Non-formal can disappear as quickly as it appears.

What does this look like in practice?: Global examples include Extinction Rebellion and Black Lives Matter; in a local context, Youth Strike 4 Climate Manchester

Section 4

Section 4A: Top tips

Adults have a responsibility to advise children and young people on effective ways to be realistic about their expectations. It is important to be honest about the level of your own authority and explore ways to engage with decision-makers who have more authority or power to effect change.

CYP do not always get the results they hope for. However, there are positive examples of young people using their agency to explore ways to make an impact following the failure of a first attempt. Adults can play a key role in encouraging children and young people not to give up by helping them find other avenues to have their voice heard.

Be knowledgeable of the process for policy design. Don't over promise and don't underestimate the time it takes to push through changes in policy. Occasionally, the young people who start the debate become too old to complete the change.

Don't be restricted by the tokenism debate. Understand that there are always niggles, anxieties and tension in V&P.

Try not to fall into the trap of being competitive or dismissive of other V&P initiatives. V&P is for everyone no matter of background. It is the responsibility of services and adults to meaningfully engage CYP from all backgrounds. This may mean that extra effort is made by adults to engage CYP from lesser heard communities.

Section 4B: Resources list

There are so many tools to choose from. In GM we haven't spent time in creating our own CYP voice tool box; we recommend the resources below are explored, however, there are many more as well:

Participation Strategy / Planning Check list / Evaluation Check list

Lundy Training – Contact Youth Focus North West

Youth Work and Voice

BeeWell

Health

SEND

References

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