

Young People's Active Involvement and Participation



This briefing is one of a series to support youth information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS) to develop policies in:

- Equality & Diversity
- Active Involvement and Participation
- Confidentiality

Youth Access will require YIACS to have these policies in place as part of new full membership criteria from April 2008. The policies are minimum criteria for service standards and underpin 'Youth Access Quality Standards for YIACS'.*

The purpose of this briefing is to offer a guide to the context and content of a policy on Young People's Active Involvement and Participation (AIP). It is not intended as a detailed analysis of the issues surrounding involvement and participation, but it will point you to other resources.

What is young people's active involvement and participation (AIP)?

'Active involvement' and 'participation' are often used interchangeably and mean more than simply taking part in an activity. AIP includes young people identifying needs, exploring solutions, making decisions and planning action. AIP works best when an agency visibly commits to, values and properly resources young people's right to participate and has a policy and standards in place which are regularly reviewed and evaluated.

What are the benefits?

For young people

- Recognition that their views, opinions and ideas are valued and can make a difference.
- Increased confidence and self esteem and the development of experience and skills to support greater independence and empowerment in other activities.
- Opportunities to share appreciation and frustrations of the service.

For YIACS:

- More responsive policy and service delivery through a better understanding of how to reach and meet the needs of different groups.
- Better understanding of the gaps in their own provision and in that of others.
- Informed planning and development based on actual rather than assumed needs.
- Increased accountability to the management body, funders, staff, other agencies, partners and young people themselves.
- Better information to support staff development and service improvement.

For other stakeholders

- Improved evidence to funders about young people's satisfaction levels and how you address strengths and weaknesses and sustain service quality.
- Contribution to community cohesion as young people's increased personal resources and raised aspirations enable their participation in their wider community and local democracy.

* For details of all publications referred to, go to the 'Useful reading and contacts' section at the end of this briefing

Why do we need a policy?

Young people's right to express their views and have these taken into account in any matter affecting them is enshrined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK in 1998. Thus, young people's involvement and participation in the services they use is no longer an optional extra. It is central to the current policy agenda affecting all public services for young people and is at the heart of Every Child Matters: Change for Children Programme, Youth Matters and the National Service Framework for Children and Young People. The policy guidance is also backed by legislation such as the Children Act 2004, securing the development of Children's Trusts.

The agenda has been given further momentum through the appointment of the first Children's Commissioner, who acts as an independent voice for young people, examining matters concerning their well-being and taking up concerns on their behalf.

Where do we start?

- Your agency needs to embed and sustain AIP in a policy, which includes meaningful consultation and negotiation with young people on the design, delivery and evaluation of the services affecting them. It means involving them from the outset in policy development.
- You need a whole agency commitment, including positive attitudes, skills and resources and the capacity to build AIP into all your working practices.
- You need to consider if existing conditions enable the equal participation of all young people. Can you go the extra mile to maximise participation for all? What training and support for both staff and young people is required?

TIP: see *Building User Involvement* (pp. 12-23) on consent, consultation, empowerment, consensus and young people's control; see *Hear by right* (p13) on strategies for involving young people*

How do we define the purpose and parameters of a policy?

You will need to identify:

- Why you want to involve young people and the potential benefits to your agency.
- What your agency's culture and values say about the need to involve young people and how you secure equality and diversity in all aspects of your work.
- How young people are currently involved, any constraints and difficulties where improvements could be made, as well as any limitations.
- The resource implications for your policy, including the skills and attitudes of all staff; the limitations of current resources and areas for further development that can be linked to your fundraising strategy.
- How you are to involve young people in the development of the policy right from the start - including any constraints and ways these might be overcome.

TIP: see *Hear by right* (pp. 1- 9) and *Building User Involvement* (pp. 3-11 and 24-25) on involving young people, what works best, where you are on the ladder of participation. See *Involving Children and Young People* on what is involvement?, preparing for participation, the constraints and difficulties.*

Which activities can we involve young people in?

Your policy needs to consider:

- Planning and organising – for example, identifying needs, planning training, developing user-led projects.
- Doing and delivering – for example, advocating for other young people, campaigning, recruiting staff.
- Checking, reviewing and learning – for example, evaluating performance and results, gathering the views of other young people, appraising staff.

- Providing ongoing input and feedback – for example, suggestion boxes, self completing questionnaires, computer games, peer or adult interviews and research.
- Be clear where there may be areas young people cannot be involved.

TIP: see *Hear by right* (p9) and *Building User Involvement* (pp. 20–22) on the tasks young people can be involved in.*

How can we secure safety and diversity and maximise the contribution of all young people?

Building the skills, knowledge, confidence and capacity of all young people is crucial to their participation. Your policy needs to consider:

- How information, training and/or support for AIP promote diversity and inclusion, including ability and confidence levels and how you involve young people in the design and delivery of information and training.
- Ways young people are helped to understand the aims, expectations and benefits of involvement and how the measurement of benefits is clear to both the agency and young people.
- The language and other specific barriers to participation e.g. use of jargon, English as a second language and what will you put in place to reduce these barriers.
- What needs to be in place to secure young people's safety, e.g. any transport costs, adult to under 16s ratios etc. and how this relates to standards.
How your work methods and processes, including feedback, offer honesty and respect to all, together with mechanisms for valuing and celebrating participation and learning.

TIP: see *Hear by right* (p12) on ways to make sure involvement is done in a safe and sound way and is consensual.*

How do we build staff capacity?

All staff need to support young people's active involvement and appreciate its benefits both for their own area of work and for the whole agency. Your policy needs to consider:

- How you translate this commitment in your recruitment and induction procedures and in the ongoing professional development of staff.
- How staff are supported to listen to young people and use their learning to inform their practice.
- If you have dedicated staff on AIP, how you ensure their work is integrated into the whole agency's activities.

TIP: see *Hear by right* (p16) on staff supporting active involvement and *Building User Involvement* (pp. 24-25) on constraints and difficulties.*

What other structures and systems should be linked to our policy?

These need to be accessible, flexible and easily renewable to ensure young people's involvement in design, delivery and evaluation. Your policy will need to consider:

- How you monitor the profile of those young people actively involved in your agency and how you use the information.
- How you gain feedback on the standards of your services, e.g. through using the *Youth Access Quality Standards* self assessment tools.
- The ways you monitor, assess, review and improve your practice and policy on participation, e.g. by using the *Hear by right* standards.
- How you set out your agency's attitude to AIP in your agency's publicity information about young people's service entitlement.
- How you link your agency's general planning and review cycle to include and develop AIP.

* For details of all publications referred to, go to the 'Useful reading and contacts' section at the end of this briefing

TIP: see *Hear by right* standards framework (p11) and standard on structures (p14); *Building User Involvement* (pp.26-29) on monitoring, standards, complaints and charters; and the Youth Access Quality Standards.*

What will support the implementation of the policy?

Promoting young people's participation and making it happen requires a number of resources. Your policy will need to identify:

- The financial and human resources needed to ensure you can carry out your policy commitments.
- Who will be responsible for providing leadership on AIP and how they will report on progress.
- How you will manage your commitments to young people when the pressure is on and finances are tight.
- How you manage conflicting views between young people, staff, committee and partners. The backing required from any other stakeholders/partners.

TIP: see *Hear by right* (pp.17-18)

Useful reading and contacts

Resources

Ahmad, Y., Dalrymple, J, Daum, M., et al (2003) *Listening to children and young people 2003*. Bristol: University of the West of England

Badham, B. (2004) *Act by right: skills for the active involvement of children and young people in making change happen*. The National Youth Agency

Badham, B., Wade H., et al (2005) *Hear by right: standards for the active involvement of children and young people*. The National Youth Agency

Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., K., et al (2003). *Building a Culture of Participation: involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation*.

Street, C., Herts B., et al (2005) *Putting participating into Practice*. Young Minds

Mumby, C. (2001) *Building User involvement: a step by step guide to involving users in youth information, advice, counselling and support services*. Youth Access

National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (2002). *Keeping it Safe: a young person-centred approach to safety and child protection, standards and guidance*

National Youth Agency (2005) *Involving Children and Young People – an introduction*

Youth Access (1999) *Youth Access quality standards for youth information, advice, counselling and support services*

Shepherd, C., Treseder P., et al (2002) *Participation – spice it up!* Save the Children

Sinclair, R. (2004). *Participation in practice: making it meaningful, effective and sustainable*. *Children and Society* (special issues on Children, Young People and Participation), 18 (2) pp. 106-108. For more information visit: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/jhome/4805>

Websites

DfES: <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk>

National Children's Bureaux: <http://www.ncb.org.uk>

National Council for Voluntary Youth Services: <http://www.ncvys.org.uk>

National Youth Agency: <http://www.nya.org.uk>

Youth Access: <http://www.youthaccess.org.uk>