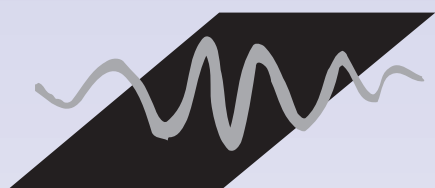


# Building user involvement

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A step-by-step guide to involving  
users in youth information,  
advice, counselling and  
support services

Carolyn Mumby



*youth*  
ACCESS

To Information, Advice and Counselling

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Carolyn Mumby

**Building User Involvement**

A step-by-step guide to involving users in youth information, advice, counselling and support services

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# Introduction

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“The belief is in change, that given the right conditions to be understood, valued and respected in a genuine, caring relationship, young people have the resources to develop personally. The recognition is, however, that this is often not enough, that empowerment involves challenging structures to allow young people to participate.”<sup>1</sup>

Bombarded with images and ideas through advertising and marketing, young people’s expectations and aspirations are often raised, yet all too frequently they are denied the social and economic means to realise them. Young people often feel they are not listened to and that adults with power to make decisions on their behalf are out of touch. Many do not show a great deal of interest in established party political structures, and along with a good proportion of the adult population remain disenfranchised.

Young people’s services can do much to redress the balance of power in a society where social policy is more often occupied with young people as the problem, rather than as a valuable resource or potential solution to difficulties. Many assumptions are made about what young people think or want and adults often claim the right to make decisions for them on the basis that young people are not mature enough to take responsibility for themselves. These assumptions, coupled with the difficulties of negotiating the transitions from dependence to interdependence can leave many young people alienated and marginalised.

Developing a culture of user involvement in young people’s provision can begin to redress young people’s experience of services and the adult world. Agencies which commit to processes of involving their users also start to acknowledge that young people are not a homogeneous group and have to recognise the effects of class, gender, race, culture, sexuality, disability and geographical location on young people’s expectations and opportunities. A strategy to involve young people in the services and decisions that affect them will also focus on supporting the development of communication and relationship skills that can enable young people to feel empowered.

The field of young people’s information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS) has traditionally consisted of agencies seeking to offer accessible and responsive services to young people. Many of these agencies already have a culture of listening carefully to young people’s concerns and of working with them to help them make their own decisions. Youth Access’s core values and principles (see page 48) already embrace some of the key principles of user involvement. The Youth Access values emphasise the importance of respecting young people and the voluntary and collaborative nature of young people’s use of services provides the foundation for consultation and empowerment. In addition, the Youth Access ‘Core Principles’ stress the centrality of young people and the commitment to responding to their needs.

“Building User Involvement” has been written to help share current good practice in YIACS by drawing on the experience of a number of Youth Access agencies and by highlighting the lessons learned from organisations in related fields.

# 1 . What is user involvement?

In this publication user involvement is seen as a continuum that begins with consent and ends with control. (See Diagram below).

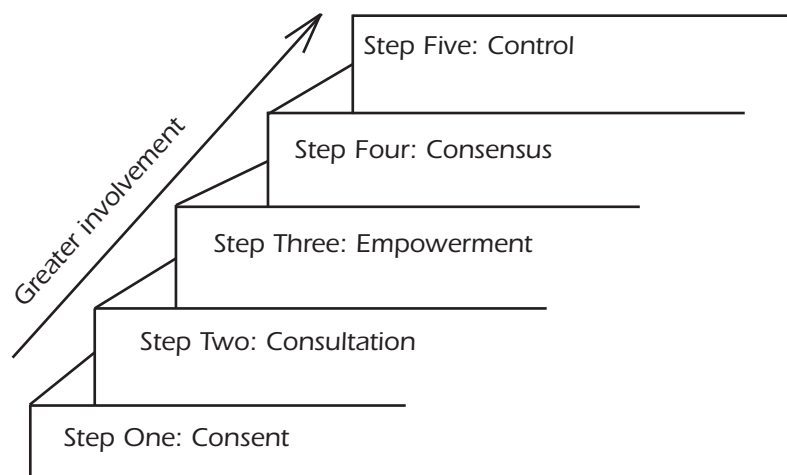
equality of influence and suggests that all or a majority of those involved must agree a decision between them.

Consultation with young people is a collaborative process within which you seek the views, opinions and advice and take into account their feelings, interests and insights about the services that your agency provides. Through more active participation young people may become empowered to have more formal influence on decision-making and change within your agency. User involvement could ultimately mean handing over power completely to young people.

It may be useful to think about where your agency's decision-making is positioned on the continuum of user involvement . Are you taking a user sensitive or a user-led approach or something in between? Is your purpose in involving young people to improve the quality of services (the consumer model) or to give young people more influence and control regarding the services they use (the democratic model) or both? It may be that different parts or functions within your agency involve young people in different ways and to a different extent. The questions in Checklist I on Page 4 will help you explore how far you are on the continuum.

Where you are on this continuum will reflect how you make decisions within your organisation. Charles Handy outlined 3 types of decision-making that take place within an organisation<sup>2</sup>:

- i You make decisions on behalf of other people with the authority that they have vested in you, i.e. they **consent** to you making the decision on their behalf.
- ii Decisions are made following **consultation** with others and their opinion or view may inform or influence your decision-making.
- iii You make decisions by **consensus**. This implies an



A Continuum of User Involvement

## CHECKLIST I: WHERE IS OUR ORGANISATION ON THE USER INVOLVEMENT CONTINUUM?

### Consent

- Do young people who use your agency expect that you will make all the decisions about the services that you provide?
- Do you always inform young people about the changes you are making?

### Consultation

- Do you encourage young people to make suggestions and/or complaints about your services?
- Do you seek young people's views e.g. through surveys and questionnaires or interviews?
- Do you have ways of involving young people in routine evaluation of your services?
- Do you inform young people about changes that you are making following consultation with them?

### Empowerment

- Do some of the adult-initiated pieces of work in your agency share decision-making with young people?
- Does your agency have a user group made up of young people that is regularly consulted and feeds in to management processes?
- Do young people get actively involved in activities within your agency for example fundraising, making presentations, etc?

### Consensus

- Do you have young people on your management body?
- Do young people initiate pieces of work within the agency?
- Are young people invited to have a voice in planning services?
- Are young people involved in recruitment processes?

### Control by young people

- Do young people initiate and lead pieces of work in your agency?
- Are young people in the majority on your management body?
- Do young people make strategic decisions within your agency?
- Do young people make decisions about allocating resources within your agency?

# 2. Why involve users?

---

## 2.1 EXPLORING MOTIVATION FOR USER INVOLVEMENT

### 2.1.1 Why does your agency want to involve young people?

It is important that you and other stakeholders, including young people, are clear about why your organisation wants to involve users. Are you seeking feedback from young people or wishing to move further on the user involvement continuum? For example, as a funding requirement of the organisation you may be driven to gather feedback, but this process is likely to be more thorough and effective if the staff involved have a clear sense of ownership and an investment in the outcome. You may therefore find it useful to involve the different stakeholders in your agency in considering the questions in Checklist II, Page 7.

### 2.1.2 What motivation might young people using your service have to get involved?

As well as thinking about the organisation's reasons for involving young people, it is important to think about why young people may want to get more involved. These can include:

- frustration or dissatisfaction with the service.
- appreciation or satisfaction with the service.
- a sense of wanting to repay the organisation for the service they have received.
- a desire to contribute to the service and to have influence in shaping its development.
- wanting to have involvement in working together with other young people and adults.
- recognising that involvement could contribute to their personal and professional development.
- feeling strongly about a particular issue and seeing your service as potentially relevant and able to address it.
- wishing to have more power and influence.

## 2.2 THE BENEFITS

### 2.2.1 Benefits for your organisation

#### Improving access to your services

Consulting and involving young people enables your agency to:

- assess the suitability of your services for different user groups.

- find out answers to questions like "What opening hours suit the clients best?" "Why is there a low rate of return following counselling assessments?" "Why do young men use the service less than young women?" "Why are our users predominantly white young people when black young people make up 60% of the local population?"
- target specific client groups to whom you wish to ensure better access.

#### Developing more responsive services

Monitoring and getting feedback from young people helps your agency to:

- assess whom the service is reaching and how it is being used.
- check that services are meeting needs.
- ensure that the content and style of services are relevant to young people.
- highlight gaps in services.
- find out how users experience the service.
- gather information to support fundraising and marketing.

#### Improving your performance

Measuring levels of client satisfaction in terms of both process and outcome means that:

- you will have some clear evidence upon which to base changes in attitudes and practice.
- your agency can demonstrate responsiveness and raise its credibility.

#### Informing planning and development

Evidence gathered from the involvement of young people can be used to:

- inform managers and the management body in service planning.
- highlight the necessity of introducing new services
- prioritise services, for example when responding to a reduction in resources.
- strengthen your agency's ability to campaign
- help develop policies
- bring new energy and ideas to the organisation

#### Increasing accountability

Involving young people will strengthen your accountability to:

- your management body.
- funders.
- staff.
- other agencies referring to or being referred to by your agency.
- young people themselves.

#### Supporting staff

By involving young people your agency will be in a better position to:

- identify the support and professional development needs of staff more accurately.
- provide greater job satisfaction for workers who are motivated to improve services for young people.
- identify strengths and achievements of workers, as well as areas for improvement.
- ensure that workers gain adequate recognition for their work with young people.
- enable your staff to continue to develop more insight into young people and their needs.

#### **2.2.2 Benefits for young people**

By asking young people for feedback and responding to it, you are providing them with the opportunity to:

- share both their frustration and their appreciation of the service.
- recognise that their views, opinions and ideas are valued.

- see that their opinion or actions can make a difference.

If young people are encouraged and supported in getting more closely involved with your service they can benefit from:

- services which are likely to improve and become more “young people friendly”.
- an increase in confidence, self-esteem, experience and skills.
- developing relationships with other users.
- developing a sense of belonging within the agency.
- preparation for further participation in civil society, i.e. becoming empowered to have their say and take action.

#### **2.2.3 Benefits for funders**

Involving young people provides your funders with evidence of:

- levels of user satisfaction.
- the extent to which your agency is providing a responsive service.
- strengths in your service.
- how your agency is identifying and working to address areas for improvement.

#### **2.2.4 Benefits for the wider community**

Involving young people in your organisation can contribute to the development of your local community, as well as civil society. As young people become more empowered and included, they are less likely to suffer the disenfranchisement of an excluded group and are more likely to make a positive contribution to society and help to strengthen our democratic system.



## CHECKLIST II: WHY DOES OUR ORGANISATION WANT TO INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE?

- Reflect on the culture and values of your agency, what do they say about the need to involve young people?
- Are you involving young people because an external stakeholder (e.g. a funder) says that you should?
- Aside from meeting funding or contractual agreements, what exactly do you as an agency want from increasing the involvement of users?
- If you need to gather feedback is it about the level of satisfaction with the service or with the outcome of the intervention, or both?
- Will your consultation do more than record the experiences of young people? Are you open to new ideas and hearing young people's opinions and advice?
- How will you use any feedback you gather?
- Have you consulted with young people about how or why they might wish to be involved?

# 3. Preparing to involve young people.

## 3.1 PREPARING TO CONSULT YOUNG PEOPLE

### 3.1.1 Develop a culture of listening to and valuing young people

The way you view young people and engage with them can provide a crucial foundation for user involvement. If young people feel that they and their opinions are respected, they are more likely to offer you feedback or respond to consultation exercises. It is important to remember that user involvement can happen both formally and informally in your organisation.

Sometimes ideas grow out of informal conversations with young people (See Case Study, Page 36). It is often informal relationships that provide the positive foundation for finding out what young people really think about your service. Staff who listen to young people on a daily basis have probably gathered a good deal of anecdotal evidence about what young people do and do not like about your service. Taking the time to chat to young people often produces opinions and ideas that may not otherwise surface. As well as talking to young people in reception and in other individual or group situations, you may be able to gather young people's views through detached and outreach work. Be creative and flexible in your approach and try to make user involvement a genuine part of the culture of your organisation – do not miss out on young people's views just because they are not expressed in a formal structured environment.

#### Tips:

- ☞ Recognise the importance of how you view, communicate and build relationships with young people both informally and formally.
- ☞ Recognise young people's different abilities to make a contribution.
- ☞ Make consultation a genuine part of the organisation's culture rather than just a one-off exercise.

### 3.1.2 Identifying your user groups

It is important that you take an inclusive approach to the involvement of young people; ensuring that all have the opportunity to be heard and make a contribution to your service. An effective way to

identify your user groups is by gathering information through monitoring. Monitoring is a process whereby relevant information is collected in a regular and systematic way. The information collected is collated and analysed in order to assist in reviewing and evaluating the service you provide. See Section 6 on monitoring and evaluation.

### 3.1.3 Building on young people's motivation for giving feedback

Young people, as users of the service are more likely to give feedback if you are clear about why you are asking for their views and what you are going to do with the feedback when you have got it.

#### Tips:

- ☞ It is better to get feedback for a specific period of time, in response to a particular question. Then let users know what you have done and why. This is much more effective than gathering feedback continuously for its own sake. A paper exercise, which does not include a transparent process of review, evaluation and/or action, is likely to attract cynicism and apathy from both staff and users.
- ☞ Before consulting users it is good practice to provide clear information about the purpose of consultation, how you will use the information gathered, details of the timetable and decision-making process and how you will give feedback on the outcome.
- ☞ Set a deadline for drawing-up proposals for change and publish an action plan.
- ☞ Young people using the service frequently or in an ongoing way are likely to have a greater stake in the organisation and will usually be easier to motivate to give feedback. Casual users may be more difficult to motivate and may need different incentives. However, it is important to stress that young people's feedback and involvement is not a condition of their use of the service.
- ☞ Have a sense of the benefits for young people in taking part either in giving feedback or being consulted or involved in aspects of the work.

### 3.1.4 Being clear about who you want to consult

There are many different users that you could consult. In deciding who to ask, you will need to be clear about the purpose of the consultation. See Checklist III on Page 11.

### 3.1.5 The focus and boundaries of the consultation

It is important to be honest with young people about the boundaries of their involvement and the sphere of their influence, since you may otherwise raise expectations that you cannot fulfil. It will be useful to consider how:

- You will help young people to be clear about the level of influence they can have.
- You will acknowledge other needs raised in the consultation process that you cannot meet and how you will communicate your reasons for not meeting them.

### 3.1.6 The resources you will need to get young people involved in consultation

If consultation is to be done effectively you will need to ensure that each method is properly resourced. See Checklist IV on Page 11.

#### Tips:

- ☞ Be aware that you do not need to rely on just one method, as different ways of asking will produce different sorts of information.
- ☞ However it can get confusing if you are trying to run too many consultations all at once, it is better to keep it simple and effective.

## 3.2 PREPARING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE'S FURTHER INVOLVEMENT

### 3.2.1 Getting started

A good starting point is to ask young people themselves how they would like to get involved. Following this consultation, you could work together to come up with a statement of purpose about the involvement project. Of course, this may be reviewed and changed as young people's involvement progresses. You will also need to get the views of other stakeholders in the organisation, such as the management body and staff, some of whom may be sceptical at first. Be reflective and open about your own point of view and biases; there may need to be a culture change in the organisation in order to ensure the conditions for maintaining the effective participation of young people.

#### Tips:

- ☞ Re-examine the values and culture in the organisation and look at how they might underpin user involvement.
- ☞ It is wise to ensure that there are a variety of ways that young people can get involved, otherwise they may be put off by the enormity of the task, or other commitments may prevent their participation.

- ☞ Let young people know that all the different levels of involvement are important and that whatever contribution they can make will be valued.
- ☞ You might start with getting feedback on a particular issue and then move gradually to more active involvement as young people's confidence and motivation grow.
- ☞ Start with a smaller piece of work that is less likely to require so much support and is more likely to be successful in the short-term. Small but effective changes can help to allay the fears of stakeholders and can provide a foundation on which to build more ambitious pieces of work.

### 3.2.2 Ensure that you are aware of and taking into account issues of equality.

Gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and geography are all factors likely to affect what young people are offered and how they access and use services. These issues will also have an impact on how young people feel about getting involved.

#### Tips:

- ☞ Think about the barriers to involvement that may face each group and look to consult with them to find out more.
- ☞ Think about the ways that different groups might need to be approached. You could talk to other relevant specialist organisations and existing user groups for example, e.g. gay and lesbian groups, disability projects, young men and women's groups, black groups etc. and discuss possible barriers and ways of overcoming them.
- ☞ You could also draw on the skills and contacts of detached youth workers and community representatives to engage those young people that may be marginalised and harder to reach.
- ☞ Another way to engage young people is to link up with schools, or projects working with young people who are excluded from school.
- ☞ You may need to get involved in awareness-raising and to make explicit contracts with the young people that are getting involved in order to ensure that equality of access is established and maintained.
- ☞ Be prepared to challenge prejudice and/or disrespectful behaviour towards any person or group.

### 3.2.3 Ensuring support for the project from the rest of the organisation

#### Tips:

- ☞ Get all the different stakeholders involved in looking at what is driving user involvement and what might restrain it? (This is sometimes called a

“force-field analysis).

- ☞ Reduce the risk of sabotage by making sure that all the issues that arise are fully explored before you move too far into involvement.
- ☞ Make sure there is a commitment to user involvement throughout the organisation, including the management body.
- ☞ Make sure adequate resources are set aside for the involvement project and keep reviewing these.
- ☞ Think about setting up an advisory group for the involvement project and make sure young people are represented. See Checklist V on Page 11.

### 3.2.4 Maintaining the momentum

There is a momentum within participation that can lead to young people making more of the decisions and taking more of the power.

“For adults in the process this can be a challenging experience, consciously surrendering control and trusting the outcome of the process which has been started. What we need to realise as adults is the rewards that come from the active participation of young people. Sometimes it is uncomfortable, sometimes there is conflict; but if, as adults working with young people, we believe in an inclusive and representative society, it is something we must stand behind and support.”<sup>3</sup>

User involvement can be hard to sustain. It may take a good deal of commitment and support.

Tips:

- ☞ Make sure the project is grounded in reality and is relevant to young people’s interests and concerns and aim to make it enjoyable and interesting.
- ☞ Involving users is a process requiring the building of trust; remember to take time to build the relationship with young people.

- ☞ Use staff and volunteers that have the appropriate skills and attitudes to work alongside young people.
- ☞ It would be most useful to have at least one staff member who is responsible for supporting the work on a consistent basis.
- ☞ Build in adequate time to support the project – the more you can do this, the greater the chances of building a strong foundation for the work.
- ☞ Provide young people with opportunities to develop confidence, offer them both informal and formal support, and if necessary training.

### 3.2.5 Supporting young people

Think about the kinds of support young people will need to sustain their involvement.<sup>4</sup>

#### Practical support

For example clear information, transport to meetings, child-care and expenses.

#### Personal development support

Help young people develop their self-esteem and assertiveness to enable their full participation.

#### Skills support

For example for speaking in committees or writing reports.

#### Equality of opportunity

Young people may need to have their awareness raised about equality of opportunity and how prejudice and discrimination operate to oppress and exclude different groups. They may need the support of ground rules.

#### Group work support

Young people may need support to develop their understanding of how groups work and to develop skills such as participating in and/or facilitating groups.

### CHECKLIST III: WHICH USERS ARE WE CONSULTING?

- Will you ask all the young people who use your service for feedback or a representative sample?
- Are you going to ask users of all services or seek feedback about one service in particular?
- Do you want to focus only on under-represented users?
- Are you going to try and get feedback from non-users who may be in your target group, but currently not using your agency?
- What might be the benefits and drawbacks of including indirect users e.g. referral agencies, parents and carers in the process?
- How do you know if there is equality and diversity among the group that you will be asking?

### CHECKLIST IV: RESOURCES NEEDED FOR DIFFERENT CONSULTATION METHODS

Review the resources you have available and the practical arrangements required for different methods e.g.

- Do you have an effective monitoring system in place?
- Are you looking for one-off or regular feedback?
- Do you have enough trained staff to carry out interviews?
- Do you need access to an independent researcher?
- Do you have private interview rooms?
- How will confidentiality be maintained?
- Do you have a postal budget to pay for sending out questionnaires?
- Do you have a budget for paying young people's expenses for attending focus groups?  
(For more details of the resources for different consultation methods see Section 4)

### CHECKLIST V: SUPPORTING AND INCREASING YOUNG PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT

- In what ways do the values and principles underpinning your organisation support the idea of user involvement?
- Have you drawn up a User Involvement policy? (See 6.3)
- How might the culture of your organisation need to change in order to support the greater involvement of young people?
- What do you intend to do to address the issue of equal opportunities for user involvement?
- Have you consulted young people about how they would like to be involved?
- How will you maintain the momentum of user involvement?
- What are your expectations about how young people are going to be involved?
- What range of options for involvement have you explored?
- How will you come to a decision about where to start?
- How will user involvement be facilitated?
- How will user involvement be consistently supported?
- How will user involvement be resourced?
- Is the existing environment appropriate to involvement or are significant changes needed?



# 4. Methods of involvement.

This section explores different methods of involving young people at each stage of the user involvement continuum as shown on Page 3. Each of the five steps: **consent**; **consultation**; **empowerment**; **consensus** and **young people in control** are considered. Some advantages and disadvantages of each method are outlined, whilst the tips point out ways to overcome the disadvantages.

## Step One: Consent

### 4.1 USERS TOLD ABOUT CHANGE

The very first step on the user involvement continuum is one that most organisations probably already do (certainly something that every organisation needs to do). This is to make sure that users know what is going on in the organisation and about changes that will affect them. However obvious this first step seems, it is worth taking time to review your publicity and methods of communication with users. See Checklist VII on Page 23.

Another way of communicating with users is to use a notice board in reception and/or in rooms where one-to-one work and group activities happen. However, it is common for notice boards to become overloaded and out of date. They recede into the background and people no longer really look at them.

You can minimise this risk by dividing the notice board (or have separate boards) into different sections each with their own clear headings. Examples include "What services does this organisation provide?" "How can you get what you need from us?" You might also have a section entitled "what's new", where you update users about recent decisions and ideas for improving the project. Make sure that someone within your organisation has the responsibility to ensure that the notice board is regularly checked and information updated.

## Step Two: Consultation

### 4.2 USERS INFORM CHANGE

The second step on the continuum involves consulting young people. The methods you choose depend on who wants to know, what they want to know and how they are going to use the information. Your choice will also be affected by whom you are asking and the resources and time you have.

Finding out the best methods for obtaining feedback from young people in your agency is likely to come through trial and error. What works well for one peer group at one time in your agency's development may not be so effective further down the line. So keep your decisions under review. You may find it useful to follow Checklist VIII on Page 23.

#### 4.2.1. Using a suggestion box

##### Description

A card or paper outlines questions and gives young people space to write their comments and/or suggestions. Young people are invited, either in person or through a prominent notice to post their ideas into the suggestion box. The box needs to be kept in a visible place for young people to 'post' their completed suggestions.

##### Advantages

- ✓ Easy to set up.
- ✓ Can be a permanent feature of the agency.
- ✓ Anonymous.
- ✓ Does not cost much in time or money.

##### Disadvantages

- ✗ The box can easily become a dusty and forgotten feature in reception.
- ✗ This is not a good method for young people that have literacy problems.

##### Tips:

- 🗨️ Ensure it is somebody's responsibility to empty the box regularly and record users views or suggestions.

- ☞ Have a clear process for analysing the feedback and feeding it into management and service reviews.
- ☞ Let young people know what the suggestions have been and how you have acted on them.
- ☞ One way of making the box a more lively method is to have a monthly theme and ask for views and suggestions related to it. At the end of the month make a display showing the different suggestions and what you intend to do as a result. You could ask young people to vote for various different options e.g. in relation to rearranging the reception area.
- ☞ Do not make the questions too complicated.
- ☞ Make the card/paper easy to fill in.
- ☞ Make sure all staff and volunteers in the agency know about the box and are clear how they might draw young people's attention to it and ask for their views.
- ☞ Staff may offer to fill in the cards with a young person's suggestions where it is clear that the young person has problems with literacy.

#### 4.2.2 Written self completion questionnaire

##### Description

This method involves using a printed questionnaire that can either be sent or handed out to young people to complete in their own time. One option for deciding on issues to cover in questionnaire is by identifying themes through a focus group. (See 4.3.2)

##### Advantages

- ✓ Less time consuming and therefore cheaper than interviewing.
- ✓ Allows a person to answer questions in their own time.
- ✓ Can provide anonymity.
- ✓ Useful for gathering straightforward information.
- ✓ Can reach a larger sample of clients.
- ✓ Useful for clients who would find it difficult to travel in for an interview.

##### Disadvantages

- ✗ Devising a sound methodology is a skilled task and ideally you would need to employ an experienced consultant to devise it.
- ✗ Tends to be a lower response rate than interview.
- ✗ Users may misinterpret the questions.
- ✗ Not easy to go back to the user for clarification of their feedback.
- ✗ Not suitable for people with language, reading and writing problems.

##### Tips:

- ☞ Include a stamped addressed envelope for the questionnaire to be returned to the researcher.
- ☞ Encourage young people to fill in questionnaires by explaining to them why you would like their views and explaining how they will be used.
- ☞ Use a prize draw as an incentive.
- ☞ Make the questionnaire simple and easy to use, avoid using jargon or complicated language and make sure the layout is clear.
- ☞ Make sure the print is in large enough to be read easily (RNIB recommend Arial font size 14).
- ☞ Use mainly closed questions e.g. Yes, No, Not sure, answers that can be ticked and try not to include more than three open questions.
- ☞ If you have agreement before hand, ring to chase up the respondents.
- ☞ Use degrees of satisfaction such as Good, Quite good, OK, Poor. (Using 4 options gives a better idea of people's satisfaction levels – if you use 3 options there may be a tendency for the answer to be given as the middle one).
- ☞ You could ask the young person to circle from a list. For example, four aspects of the service that are most important to them.
- ☞ If you want to use the evidence to compare responses from different groups of young people, ask the young person to indicate for example their age, gender, and ethnic origin and where they live.
- ☞ Look at survey forms that have been used successfully by other agencies, and where practical adapt them for your use.
- ☞ Be aware of the possibility of consultation fatigue. Do not just ask the same groups of young people over and over again.

#### 4.2.3 Questionnaires using drawings or cartoons

##### Description

One way of finding out what young people have thought of a session or think of the service generally is to use cartoons or drawings. Young people can select a facial expression from a series of cartoons of faces to show how happy (or not) they are with the services they have received. Another way of evaluating young people's feelings about a session, focus group or some other programme of involvement in the agency is to use a drawing depicting various characters taking up different positions in relation to one another and with clearly different emotional expressions. Pip Wilson's cartoon of blobby people in a tree is a well-used example from youth work.

##### Advantages

- ✓ Can provide a very immediate picture depicting

satisfaction levels.

- ✓ It is easy for the young person to complete.
- ✓ Gets around problems of literacy and language.
- ✓ Can stimulate further discussion.

#### Disadvantages

- ✗ It is limited in the amount of information it can communicate as a stand-alone exercise.

#### Tips:

- ✎ Think about using this method as a stimulus for further exploration and discussion with young people.
- ✎ Make the drawings interesting but not overly complicated.

### 4.2.4 Using computers to consult young people about services

#### Description

A programme can be developed that young people can use to give feedback on services.

#### Advantages

- ✓ User choice and variety can be built into the process of gathering information, which adds more interest for the young person.
- ✓ Animated characters can be used as hosts to talk to users and guide them through the process creating more interaction with the subject matter, and removing any need for external scrutiny of the process.
- ✓ Questions and instructions can be personalised with the user's name and words that describe individual circumstances so that they become personally relevant.
- ✓ Instructions, questions and responses can be repeated as often as the individual user requires, without comparison with others.
- ✓ For young people screens common in computer games can be used as background and to build in interactive features creating an environment that is often instinctively familiar and attractive.
- ✓ Young people can select screens, characters and other features as appropriate to their needs.
- ✓ Young people with learning difficulties or problems with literacy can participate more easily because the host characters speak and repeat questions.
- ✓ Computer technology also creates opportunities for young people with physical disabilities to participate independently.
- ✓ Young people are able to state more directly what they think so their responses are less open to interpretation than if someone else was recording their responses.
- ✓ New media approaches enable information to be

collected in a form that makes it instantaneously available for analysis. Individual reports can be generated immediately, and feedback provided if required. Collective or group reports can be immediately updated to provide the most current information.<sup>5</sup>

#### Disadvantages

- ✗ This method depends on the agency having access to computers, which may be a resource problem for some smaller organisations.
- ✗ Not all young people are computer literate or find the use of technology appealing.
- ✗ Some young people might prefer to engage face-to-face with another person so that they can discuss the questions and answers.

#### Tips:

- ✎ Sufficient expertise is required because programmes need to be properly designed in order to ensure that they are technically sound, can respond quickly and that they appeal to young people who may be used to quite sophisticated computer games.
- ✎ Get involved with an organisation that has experience and expertise in using new media approaches.
- ✎ Do not allow the "techno-fear" of some adults to squash the idea before you start.

### 4.2.5 Telephone interviews using an independent researcher

#### Description

If you are an agency that does a lot of your work with young people via the telephone, then telephone interviews may be an appropriate way of consulting them. They can be carried out as a follow up call, after asking the caller's permission to be contacted again.

#### Advantages

- ✓ The agency does not need to find the space for a researcher, as the interviews can be carried out from any telephone.
- ✓ There is an opportunity to pick up more information than from a questionnaire as people may make additional comments.
- ✓ If you are using an independent researcher the telephone protects young people's anonymity and may make it easier for them to give a full range of views.
- ✓ This method enables you to talk to young people who may otherwise find it difficult to participate e.g. due to lack of transport, a desire not to be seen walking into the agency, time difficulties etc.



### Disadvantages

- ✗ Some young people may have fears about confidentiality. They may worry that someone else in their home will pick up the telephone.
- ✗ You may catch people at the wrong time, when they are in a rush or preoccupied. This may influence the quality of their feedback.
- ✗ It can be hard to get hold of people – you have to be flexible about times and prepared to call back at specific times in the day or evening.

### Tips:

- ☞ If you are planning to do telephone follow-up interviews, think about how you negotiate the young person's agreement and how you will protect the young person's confidentiality if somebody else picks up the phone.
- ☞ Make sure that all staff at the agency are involved in the process of deciding what to do and when.
- ☞ Give workers written instructions regarding how to ask young people for permission and how to explain the research.
- ☞ Prepare an introduction for the person doing the call-back, including an explanation of their objectivity in relation to the agency.
- ☞ Make sure the person calling checks with the young person that it is a convenient time and is prepared to arrange another time to call them if necessary.
- ☞ Ensure that the young person's wishes are respected if they say they have changed their mind about being interviewed.
- ☞ Make sure the researcher is prepared to change the order of questions in response to the young person's answers.
- ☞ Remember to design the questions so that they can flow conversationally, rather than just being fired at the young person.
- ☞ Make sure the questions that have alternative answers are short enough to be absorbed and responded to.
- ☞ Even though the researcher stresses their independence from the agency, they still may be seen as the agency's representative and so they need to work in line with the agency's values.

## 4.2.6 Short face-to-face interview

### Description

This method is carried out by an agency worker at the end of the session with the young person.

### Advantages

- ✓ May get a high return, as most clients are likely to agree.
- ✓ Good for young people with low literacy skills.

- ✓ Good for young people who would switch off in response to form filling.
- ✓ The workers are more likely to have the skills needed to gain young people's trust.
- ✓ Young person may be keen to co-operate.
- ✓ Saves costs of an independent researcher.

### Disadvantages

- ✗ The young person may feel obliged to respond.
- ✗ The questions cannot cover what the young person thought about the quality of the advice or the outcome of the counselling or personal support given (unless the interview happens at the end of a series of sessions).
- ✗ The answers are more likely to be positive because the young person may not want to challenge or confront the worker, or because they may feel their future use of the service depends on giving a positive response.
- ✗ The workers may bias the answers because they themselves are not an independent researcher.
- ✗ Can cost a lot in staff/volunteer time.

### Tips:

- ☞ This method is better used to gather information that is about objective criteria regarding the use of the agency such as relevance of publicity and ease of access, rather than to gain evidence of subjective attitudes and opinions.
- ☞ Make it clear that young people have an option to answer and that it is not in any way part of the service.
- ☞ It may be helpful to involve someone with a research background to assist in creating systematic methods of recording and analysing what young people say. Researchers have useful skills to contribute to consultation in their commitment to asking clear questions in an appropriate way, and to recording what is actually said as accurately as possible. There are also recognised ways of analysing and writing up the material, which can be helpful. It is not necessary to turn the process into a research project in order to draw on these skills.<sup>6</sup>
- ☞ Make sure there is support provided for young people for whom issues may arise from the consultation e.g. when the consultation is about their need for counselling or in a sensitive issue such as sexual abuse.

## 4.2.7 Independent interviews following session with worker

### Description

This method uses an independent researcher to interview clients after their information, advice, and

counselling or personal support session.

#### Advantages

- ✓ Potentially a high rate of return.
- ✓ The interviewer is impartial.
- ✓ The young person has their impression of the session fresh in their minds.
- ✓ There is the possibility of asking follow-up or clarification questions.
- ✓ There is opportunity for dialogue and discussion.
- ✓ Useful way of eliciting the views of young people who have problems with reading and writing.

#### Disadvantages

- ✗ May be time consuming and costly.
- ✗ May be difficult to find an interviewer with the right attitude and skills to engage with young people and deal sensitively with any difficult emotions that may arise.
- ✗ May be difficult to find an appropriate available space within the agency.
- ✗ May be difficult to manage alongside the appointment or drop-in system.

#### Tips:

- ☞ Ensure that the workers understand and agree with the interview process.
- ☞ Brief them on how to explain the option of being interviewed to their clients.
- ☞ Make sure the clients can wait somewhere that feels safe and comfortable if there is a queue to see the interviewer, or try and stagger the interviews appropriately.
- ☞ Check the independent researcher's attitude and skills in relation to working with young people. Be prepared to offer introductory awareness raising or training if necessary.
- ☞ If using an independent researcher, draw up a clear brief with them that covers: what they are trying to find out; whether you want quantitative or qualitative information or both; the timescale and budget; what help they can expect from within the organisation; how the information should be presented.<sup>7</sup>

### 4.2.7 Peer interviews (See also Research as described in 4.2.8).

#### Description

A group of young people get involved in seeking the views of their peers.

#### Advantages

- ✓ Young people often have direct insight into the issues.
- ✓ They can shape the research design by drawing

on their own experience.

- ✓ They can learn and grow in confidence through their involvement.
- ✓ They may be less threatening and have more credibility with their peers, especially where disenfranchised young people's views are sought.
- ✓ User-led research is more likely to focus on those issues of concern to users.
- ✓ Young people have more ownership of the project.

#### Disadvantages

- ✗ Demanding of time and energy.
- ✗ Peer researchers need thorough training.
- ✗ The issues brought up in consultation may touch on painful issues for the peer researchers.
- ✗ Tendency for quite high numbers to drop out during the course of the research project due to other commitments.
- ✗ Needs lots of practical and emotional support.
- ✗ Do not assume peer researchers represent all young people.
- ✗ Some peer researchers may put off other young people who are very different from them.

#### Tips:

- ☞ Have a clear recruitment process.
- ☞ Build in training and support time.
- ☞ Have a clear contract with the peer researchers including the time commitment involved and any expenses that they will be paid.
- ☞ Make sure at least one worker is designated to support the peer researchers.
- ☞ Offer a small financial incentive to participants in interviews and focus groups.

An example of a peer research project can be found in "Time to listen"<sup>8</sup>, where young people using a Save the Children youth project in Bolton expressed concern to project workers about the quality of mental health services. A peer research project was set up, which trained and employed young people themselves as key researchers. The project was a collaboration between Bolton BYPASS, Save the Children, The Mental Health Foundation, the College of Health and the National Lottery Charities Board.

### 4.2.8 Research study

#### Description

We might talk about having researched a subject when we have done some investigation and come up with some conclusions. However, it is important to recognise that carrying out research is a profession in itself and that there are various rigorous features needed to make research credible in scientific, medical or academic spheres. They would include

randomised samples, a “control” group, and externally validated research methods. We do not propose to go into these features in detail, since research is not the primary focus of this publication and there are more appropriate resources available. If you wish to carry out this kind of research you would be best to approach someone with the appropriate expertise.

However, there are some aspects of research that can be used to good advantage when exploring user involvement.

- You might decide to carry out an evaluation using research methodology, rather than a piece of pure research.
- Market research can be used to extend monitoring and evaluation, for example to consult young people who are not currently using your service, or to focus on a particular part of the client group, for example young fathers.
- There are two basic kinds of research, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research asks “How many?” “How much?” “How often?” etc. Qualitative research explores what people feel, think, or believe e.g. about your service or about the kind of service they would want.

#### Advantages

- ✓ Using rigorous research methods may make your findings more credible with the external world.
- ✓ By taking a systematic approach you can find a great deal of evidence upon which to base decisions about needs, service development and resources.

#### Disadvantages

- ✗ Academic or scientific research is a specialist process and the methodology needs to be rigorous if it is to have credibility with external verifiers.
- ✗ It can be expensive.
- ✗ It may take a long time to process the results, particularly if you do it manually.

#### Tips:

- ☞ Allocate resources to the research work including money and staffing.
- ☞ Investigate the possibility of doing the research in partnership e.g. local colleges or universities may be interested in committing some resources or allocating a student on placement with your organisation.
- ☞ Obtain resources and where relevant training in research methods.
- ☞ Make sure the research is focussed and manageable.
- ☞ Check whether you can find some of the

information you need from existing sources. This process is known as “secondary research”. You could start with your own monitoring records or records of complaints and suggestions. Look at research that may already have been commissioned by the local Council or the Health Authority. You could also approach relevant national organisations.

- ☞ Decide on your research methods. Two general methods are Observation and Communication. Observation involves watching or recording people’s behaviour over a given period. For example, if you want to know how often young people use your computers you could decide that the staff member on duty records each time a young person uses them. Alternatively your observation may be to study existing records e.g. how and when do young men typically use the service. Communication involves asking questions. You could use any of the methods listed in this section.

#### KEY POINTS TO USING RESEARCH METHODS

- **Decide what you want to know and formulate appropriate and clear questions. (Use the tips on formulating questions in the section on Questionnaires).**
- **By piloting research questionnaires you will be able to test how far people understand the questions. You may also get some idea of the likely response rate and if you are interviewing, some indications of what is needed to support the interview process.**
- **There are different ways to decide whom to involve in your research. If you want a representative sample you could decide to select on the basis of any of the following:**
  - **The profile of your users e.g. gender, race, sexuality, age or place of residence etc.**
  - **The use of a service e.g. the number of advice enquiries on welfare benefits or housing.**
  - **Use of the service over a period of time. You will need to decide if you will involve everyone in this period or only those for a specific service e.g. advice or counselling.**
- **The selection of your sample will need to be carried out using an agreed method e.g. systematically selecting every fifth person on a database. Workers with knowledge of users should not do this.**
- **The decision about how many young people to ask will depend upon the type of research you**

are undertaking. In statistical terms, an adequate sample is one that is of sufficient size to allow confidence in the stability of its characteristics. The number of non-respondents can create an atypical sample and effect the outcome. The more variation in the people involved in the survey, the greater the sample required to ensure there are enough people in each category to make comparisons possible.

- Ensure that enough time is planned for the collation of the collected information. Ideally, use a suitable database to process the data and assist the production of results.
- If you want your findings to be used purposefully, then think about the most appropriate way to present them to your intended audience(s).

### Step Three: Empowerment

## 4.3 USERS INFLUENCE CHANGE

There is obviously some crossover between consultation and empowerment. You could argue that consultation is itself a form of empowerment in that young people's voices are listened to. However, we have chosen to focus on the following methods as more effective ways of empowering young people because they themselves can influence the direction of their own contribution and involvement through discussion and participation in groups.

### 4.3.1 Groupwork

A user group can be involved in a variety of ways within an organisation and at different points along the user involvement continuum. For example:

- an informal group that can be consulted by the agency.
- a formal body representing the views of young people.
- support and legitimacy for young people sitting on the management body.
- group offering input into consultation from/by other organisations.
- a promotion/outreach group to other young people, e.g. via schools and youth groups.
- peer education or support schemes (involvement in service delivery).

- a group to take action in the community.

A user group will require the support of a skilled group worker, a safe and accessible environment in which to meet and resources to allow it to take action. The workers will need to ensure that the group develops a culture that is open and welcoming to all young people rather than becoming a clique dominated by the most assertive young people.

Initially the group will need a high level of support in order to establish their identity and group norms. As they start to take on tasks, the young people will need help to develop skills and confidence. If the tasks carried out by the group are too simple they will get bored and membership will fall away. If the challenges are too great, and there is not enough training and support available, the young people may become discouraged and demotivated. Once the group is established, workers should aim for challenging activities, with a high level of support, or simpler activities with a high level of autonomy. A review mechanism will need to be established, perhaps using participatory evaluation (See 4.3.3).

### 4.3.2 Focus group discussion

#### Description

Users and/or ex-users or non-users are invited to a discussion about the service. A researcher may facilitate the discussion. You can use a focus group prior to devising a questionnaire for use in a wider survey. You may use the group to gain feedback on how relevant and understandable the questions are. Alternatively, the group may be used to find out more detailed opinions about aspects of the service, or to act as a consultative forum. For example, one use of a focus group might be to consider the job description for a staff post within the agency, or to collaborate on listing criteria for the person specification.

#### Advantages

- ✓ Young people have an opportunity to influence the direction of the discussion.
- ✓ Young people may be stimulated to speak and give their opinions by hearing other young people's views.
- ✓ Discussion can be more informal.
- ✓ This approach can be useful for young people who have literacy problems.
- ✓ You get to hear a number of views at one time.
- ✓ Young people have a real opportunity to influence the content of a piece of work.



### Disadvantages

- ✗ May be difficult to arrange.
- ✗ Perhaps those who come will be only those who have had a positive experience at the agency.
- ✗ You are limited in the number of views you can gain.

### Tips:

If you want to consult about a specific issue, bear in mind the following:

- ☞ This method may be easier where there is an established user group.
- ☞ The group needs good facilitation in order to keep the discussion focused.

### KEY POINTS TO CONDUCTING A FOCUS GROUP

- **Think about the incentives you might offer young people to encourage their attendance at a group e.g. expenses a prize draw. Be prepared to consider ways to reduce the barriers to their involvement e.g. provision of transport.**
- **Ensure you have a suitable venue where the group will not be disturbed. Think about practical matters e.g. disability access, use of interpreters, provision of refreshments.**
- **Preparing for the group:**
  - **Plan how you will record the session e.g. manual note-taker or tape-recorder and inform young people.**
  - **Be clear how long the group will last and communicate clearly the beginning and ending times.**
  - **Think about how you will deal with confidentiality issues e.g. child protection.**
  - **Plan your questions in advance and think through the kinds of prompts you might need to explore or move the discussion forward.**
  - **Be prepared for issues other than the topic to arise and your response options.**
  - **Be aware that the unexpected may happen!**
- **During the group session:**
  - **Cover the ground rules e.g. confidentiality, the right to be heard, respect for individual differences.**
  - **Explain the purpose of the group, how information will be used and the group's level of influence on the eventual outcome.**
  - **Keep the questions simple; actively listen to the answers and follow-up if necessary. You may need to ask the same question twice or in different ways, as some young people will**

**be uncomfortable speaking in groups about their needs or views or giving their opinions to adults.**

**- Make sure the discussion covers both the general principles, as well as the specifics of the matter(s) being discussed.**

**- If the group is dominated or inhibited by a particular individual or smaller group of young people, then think about having a follow-up meeting with those who may have been excluded.**

### 4.3.3 Conducting a participatory evaluation<sup>9</sup>

#### Description

A participatory evaluation actively involves those with a stake in the evaluation in the evaluation process. An example would be young people evaluating a piece of work relating to their involvement in an organisation. The ownership of the evaluation process is with the young people, with the organisation giving support. This means the design of the evaluation is flexible rather than pre-determined. Participation usually takes place during all phases of the evaluation. For example:

- planning and design.
- gathering and analysing the data.
- identifying the evaluation findings.
- conclusions and recommendations.
- disseminating results.
- preparing an action plan to improve performance.

While participants actually conduct the evaluation, one or more outside experts usually serve as facilitator i.e. act as mentor, trainer, group processor, negotiator, and/or methodologist. Assisted by the facilitator, the young people identify the evaluation questions they want answered. They then select appropriate methods and develop data-gathering and analysis plans. Rapid appraisal techniques are used to determine what happened and why. These methods might include interviews, focus groups, direct observation and mini-surveys. The young people (i.e. participants) meet together to negotiate a consensus on the evaluation findings, solve problems and make plans to improve performance. Consensus is reached on conclusions and recommendations based on the findings. The views of all participants are sought and recognised, with more powerful young people having a commitment to allow the participation of the less powerful. Developing a common understanding of the results, on the basis of empirical evidence becomes the building block

for action. There is an emphasis on learning through the process, as well as on assessing whether targets were achieved.

#### Advantages

- ✓ Young people themselves are involved in the evaluation design.
- ✓ Young people learn more about the piece of work and about other participants points of view.
- ✓ Young people learn about evaluation and develop transferable skills.
- ✓ Provides insight into why a piece of work is or is not working.
- ✓ Young people benefit from working as a team.
- ✓ Builds a shared commitment to act on evaluation recommendations.

#### Disadvantages

- ✗ Evaluation may be seen as less objective because they are carried out by participants with a vested interest.
- ✗ Not as useful in addressing technical aspects.
- ✗ Needs lots of time and resources to identify involve and support a wide range of young people.

#### Tips:

- ☞ Choose the participatory approach only when it is appropriate, for example when there are questions about implementation difficulties, or the effects of involvement on the participants or when information is wanted on young people's knowledge of the goals of involvement or their views of progress.
- ☞ Choose a traditional evaluation approach when there is a need for independent outside judgment or technical expertise, when stakeholders do not have time to participate or when such serious lack of agreement exists among participants that a collaborative approach is liable to fail.
- ☞ Be clear what the evaluation is for and who needs to participate.
- ☞ Hold a workshop to clarify the aim of the evaluation and its scope and to define the role of the outside facilitator and the participating stakeholders.
- ☞ Be clear about the time involved and devise a clear schedule for the evaluation.
- ☞ Train the participants in basic data collection and analysis.
- ☞ Ensure that less confident participants are heard and feel empowered.



#### Step Four: Consensus

## 4.4 USERS SHARE IN DECISION MAKING

### 4.4.1 Users represented on committees and planning groups

#### Description

Young people may be represented on for example the management group or on smaller sub-groups such as those looking at fundraising or outreach work. They may alternatively have their own young people's group that feeds decisions into the management group. This method can be used for specific decision making such as staff recruitment.

#### Advantages

- ✓ Allows a young person to have more influence and control with regard to specific services.
- ✓ Potentially increases a sense of ownership and pride in the service by the young people.
- ✓ Prepares young people for participating further in civil society.
- ✓ Informs the understanding and decision making of adults on committees and planning groups who may otherwise have made incorrect assumptions about young people's views or abilities.
- ✓ May highlight the training and support needs of adults who would also benefit from the resources designed to enable young people to participate.

#### Disadvantages

- ✗ Young people may be seen as a token presence only.
- ✗ One (or a few) young people cannot be seen as representing all young people's views.
- ✗ Only certain types/groups of young people may feel confident enough to take up a place on a committee or planning group.
- ✗ Supporting young people onto committees can be time-consuming and resource heavy.
- ✗ Young people may have other commitments or priorities that militate against regular attendance at committees.

#### Tips:

- ☞ Be clear about why you want young people on your board of management.
- ☞ Think about what it is you want to achieve and

how having young people represented on the management body would help.

- ☞ Remember that just appointing one or two young people to the management body does not mean that they can represent the views of all young people.
- ☞ Remember that members of the management body are not supposed to represent a constituency, but should be working for the good of the whole organisation.

#### KEY POINTS FOR INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE ON COMMITTEES AND PLANNING GROUPS

- Ensure you are clear about the legal position of young people under 18 on management groups. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has developed “Youth on Board” a free ‘tool kit’ to encourage young people to become trustees of charities.
- Encourage a range of young people to get involved, You may want to consider reserving specific places on a committee to ensure members reflect different groups of users. Work with agencies or professionals to secure the involvement of other young people e.g. gay, lesbian and disability groups, agencies for homeless young people, Social Services to identify “looked after” young people.
- If young people are to be involved in your management group, make sure this is not tokenistic or sets them up to fail. Provide each young person with appropriate induction and ongoing informal support. You could also offer them the opportunity to shadow a more experienced member of the Committee, but only if the member or officer concerned is genuinely interested in helping the young person to learn and participate.
- Offer training and support before young people are expected to work with adult groups e.g. making a presentation at a conference, attending a council meeting, They could be offered role-playing situations where adults might find it hard to give them power.
- Avoid the use of jargon and unnecessary protocols. Ensure that in meeting young people are encouraged and given time to speak about their concerns and suggestions.
- Give young people the same respect as other members and do not patronise them by

pretending that their ideas or suggestions have greater significance than they actually have.

- Whilst being clear about the roles, purpose and boundaries of the management group, also be prepared to examine its current structures and working methods. Do not assume that young people are the ones that necessarily have to adapt, you need to be prepared to take a risk and let go of some of your safety structures.
- Be prepared that young people may be more transient in their membership of the management body. Make sure that their contribution is properly acknowledged when they leave.
- Some adult members of the management group may sabotage young people’s involvement, find out their concerns and try, if possible, to find a way to resolve these.
- Aside from the formal management body, think creatively about other committees or planning groups to involve young people in. Do not assume young people are not interested in being involved.
- Remember, it is important to let young people make mistakes and to give them support and help them evaluate and learn as they go along.

Step Five: Young people in control

#### 4.5 USERS MAKE OWN CHANGES

##### Description

This may either involve young people being the majority on the management body, or may mean that they have complete responsibility for initiating and delivering some or all of the service. For example young people may act as peer supporters to other young people using the service. (See Case Study on Page 41).

##### Advantages

- ✓ Young people are often idealistic and have a fresh approach, enthusiasm and energy.
- ✓ The service has the credibility of being run by

young people for young people.

- ✓ The young people managing the service are more likely to be closely connected with the issues facing users of the service.
- ✓ Young people are able to gain the experience of delivery and management.
- ✓ Young people become role-models for other young people using the service.
- ✓ Young people may be more prepared to challenge existing structures and protocols.

#### Disadvantages

- ✗ The young people managing the service may have trouble holding boundaries with other young people using the service, particularly if they are already known to them.
- ✗ In having more control in running services young people are likely to undergo a lot of personal growth. Sometimes so much so, that these young people begin to be seen as different and as such unrepresentative.
- ✗ Young people sometimes find it harder to recognise legitimate constraints and structures and to work within them.
- ✗ Young people may find it hard to sustain consistent involvement due to other commitments and the transitions that they are going through.

#### Tips:

- ☞ It is important that when young people are operating as a more experienced and confident group, they make sure they keep in touch with and consult other young people in their locality. One way of doing that is to run mini-sessions in local youth clubs to develop youth forums.
- ☞ It is useful to ensure that there is a mixture of young people involved bringing different experiences. As some develop confidence from success, they can be good at encouraging and influencing others who may be less confident or enthusiastic.
- ☞ Help young people network so that they do not become too territorial about their own organisation.
- ☞ Make sure you provide training on issues such as confidentiality.
- ☞ Look at how you can ensure continuity. Age and life experiences mean young people often vary in their ability to make commitments. Some projects for example have found that the younger age groups are more able to sustain involvement as they are going through fewer external changes in terms of education and employment. You may wish to involve older young people in peer training or as mentors and supporters.
- ☞ Make sure that if young people are delivering services that they are line managed and given appropriate casework supervision. There is obviously as much need for support and accountability as there is with any staff member or volunteer.



## CHECKLIST VII: PUBLICITY

- Are young people welcomed and kept informed by reception and first line staff about services and changes that are happening?
- Does your agency's publicity leaflet carry up to date information describing:
  - the services that you offer?<sup>10</sup>
  - how to make contact?
  - opening times?
  - confidentiality statement?
  - equality of access statement?
  - location and access?
  - your complaints procedures?

## CHECKLIST VIII: WHICH CONSULTATION METHOD SHALL WE USE?

- Do you have a good overview of the different consultation methods and how they might include or exclude different young people?
- Do you have sufficient knowledge of your user groups and any differences in their access to the various services you offer?
- How might different access routes and young people's levels of engagement in your services e.g. young parents in a regular support group or drop-in users, impact on your choice of consultation method?
- Do you have sufficient information about your non-users and can you identify other local groups that they may be using?
- Do you have the resources to invest in building effective relationships with these other groups?
- Will your chosen consultation method get in the way of or have a negative effect on young people getting the help they need from your service?

# 5. Constraints & difficulties.

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Some of the constraints and difficulties listed below have fairly obvious remedies – the solution is implicit in the description of the problem. For example, if staff are not consulted about increasing users involvement they may resist change. Therefore it is important to spend time on a proper consultation exercise involving the staff team (See 3.2.3). Some of the constraints may highlight training and support needs for the staff or management body. Other solutions can be found in Section 4, which describes the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of user involvement. Look at the tips for each method for more detail of how to overcome some of the potential constraints.

It can be tempting to use difficulties as an excuse not to progress, particularly if it is clear that the involvement is limited in terms of how far it can go in the immediate future. Most agencies are already at least on the early stage of the continuum of user involvement. It is important to move forwards step by step, building on and improving what is already in place, rather than setting yourself up to fail through aiming for something too ambitious too soon.

## 5.1 THE AGENCY

- Much of the work that goes on in youth information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS) is of a sensitive nature. It may be difficult to consult or involve young people who present in crisis or for counselling. This does not mean that consultation cannot happen. However, care needs to be taken in relation to when and how you ask young people for feedback.
- Ensuring high levels of confidentiality is usually a priority in YIACS and this boundary needs to be addressed and maintained when involving young people more closely in the delivery and management of services.
- Current funding of YIACS is often patchy or insecure and can result in a lack of resources to carry out independent research or support young people's participation.
- There is a danger of tokenism when consulting and involving young people, particularly when it is funding driven.
- Lack of follow through, including not taking time to involve young people in finding solutions, or identifying initial problems can mean that user involvement has only a superficial impact.

- There is a danger that "participation may be used to conceal either the exercise of power by manipulation, or an abdication of responsibility"<sup>11</sup>.
- There may be a conflict of interest between different parts of the organisation.
- Rigidity in the agency's structures may tend to stifle innovation and change.
- Management body members may feel threatened by young people's greater involvement, particularly if it means that some of them may need to step aside to make room for young people's representation.

## 5.2 STAFF

- If previous consultation and involvement has been tokenistic with clients being asked their opinion but nothing changing, there may be cynicism to be overcome by staff and young people.
- Staff may feel that expectations of change have been raised before and not met due to funding issues and they may be reluctant to raise expectations again.
- Staff may feel overwhelmed and reluctant to engage in something that is going to be demanding or create more change at a time when they feel overloaded.
- Staff may feel that an increase in user involvement has been imposed on them without taking account of their feelings and views about it.
- Staff may be reluctant to consult and involve young people because they themselves feel unheard and disenfranchised.
- Staff may feel threatened by the possibility of hearing negative feedback about services that they work hard to provide, often under difficult circumstances.
- Staff may already feel that they know what needs to change and do not feel the need to ask or involve young people.
- A fear of being intrusive may limit the extent to which staff encourage young people to give their views.

## 5.3 YOUNG PEOPLE

### 5.3.1 Confidentiality and trust

- Young people may mistrust things being recorded including their feedback and views on services.
- Young people may feel constrained to give positive answers within consultation exercises because they

assume a negative response would affect their ability to continue to access a service on which they depend. This is particularly likely when they have no other choice of service.

### 5.3.2 Motivation

- Young people may not feel motivated to give feedback because they are not sure what it will achieve. This is particularly likely if they have had previous experiences of tokenistic consultation which either led to no changes, or changes that were not communicated to them.
- There can be problems associated with consulting non-users of the service who may be harder to reach and who may be less motivated to take part.

### 5.3.3 Conflict of Interest

- Young people may not be satisfied with the “quality” of advice they have been given, not because it is inaccurate or inappropriate, but because it may not be what they wanted to hear.
- Young people are in a process of transition. Other commitments and priorities may affect the consistency of their involvement.
- Involvement can be dominated by one particular peer group, which can contribute to excluding other young people.
- Some young people may need to “move on” from their experiences of using the project and may not want to be contacted six months after their counselling has finished for example.
- Some users of the service may have developed particular relationships with staff in the agency, for example that of client and counsellor. Care needs to be taken with boundary issues and the client and counsellor need to agree a strategy for how they may relate differently outside the boundaries of the counselling relationship (see Case Study on Page 36).

### 5.3.4 Specific constraints

There may be particular constraints attached to consulting certain groups of young people. For example it can be hard to consult young people in rural areas, where they are dispersed over a wide geographical area and have poor access to transport. There may be cultural or language barriers to be overcome. Young people with difficulties around learning and communication may find it harder to have their say. It can be hard to ensure that marginalised views are given a fair hearing.

“Consultation normally happens with those who are in the system and often with those for whom the system works. Therefore research can be

skewed to maintaining the services rather than identifying the needs of those outside the service. Young people generally are less likely to be consulted and those whose life is in chaos, who don't fit the system, don't get their voices heard at all”.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst there may be difficulties to be overcome in order to increase the young people's effective involvement in your agency, it is important not to be put off before attempting to resolve the issues. It is easy to assume that some difficulties are pertinent only to young people, when in fact adults who get involved with services on a voluntary basis may have the same issues. For example, members of a voluntary management body may have competing commitments or a lack of confidence or skills in certain areas.

Effective user involvement is an ongoing process. It can take a long time to become an established part of the agency and it needs proper support in terms of money, space, worker time and energy.

# 6. Formal structures that underpin involvement.

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Formal systems and structures help to ensure that user involvement is integrated into the design delivery and evaluation of services for young people.

## 6.1 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation help underpin any process involving users. Monitoring helps to answer questions about who is using the service, why, what for and when. In consequence it also identifies those not using your service. Monitoring helps you to:

- identify your users.
- compare them against the make-up of the local community.
- identify their patterns of service use or non-use.
- assess the outcomes.

In order to establish a profile of your users you will need to keep contact recordings. Some agencies record every contact whether by telephone, letter, drop in or appointment and keep records detailing some or all of the following: age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, employment, care or ex-care, single parents, area of residence etc. If you record the length and nature of the contact and the pattern of their use (e.g. which service they are accessing and how) as well as the presenting issue, you can begin to determine why they are using the service and for what and when. It is useful to ask how users heard about the service you offer. You may decide to record every contact on an ongoing basis, or to conduct sample surveys at different points.

Information collected through keeping statistics, case recordings, feedback from users and through processes such as management and case supervision contribute to the overall evaluation of a service. Evaluation of this information helps you make judgements about how effective and efficient your organisation is and helps you to assess your performance against your agency's aims and values. This in turn helps to identify not only what you are doing well, but what needs to be improved.

## 6.2 QUALITY STANDARDS

Consulting and involving users is a theme that can be found running through many quality frameworks and initiatives. The drive for quality is evident across private, public and voluntary sectors. Standards of service outline what users can expect from a quality service.

### 6.2.1 What do we mean by "Quality"?

A common definition of quality is something that is consistently fit for its stated purpose, performs to agreed standards and is responsive to the needs of its users. Having quality standards and a quality system in place can help your organisation look at what it is aiming to do, what it is actually doing, measure and assess its effectiveness and create systematic or continuous improvement resulting in better services to its users.

In practice, quality means doing something that is:

- needed by users, to a standard they require
- well run
- assessed and improved
- shown to make a positive and measurable difference to users
- improved again and again in order to achieve the very best results<sup>13</sup>

### 6.2.2 The case for Quality

YIACS need to be:

- Responsive
- Recognised
- Resourced
- Reviewed and improved

If services are to be responsive to the needs of their users, they must have a way to establish what those needs are and how best to meet them. Clearly organisations need to be recognised by the young people they are trying to reach, by other agencies, parents and carers that may wish to refer young people to them, and by funders who need to have a clear understanding about what they are aiming to do. Services also need to be properly resourced, both in terms of funding and in terms of staff support and training. Finally they need to be involved in a continual cycle of review and improvement.

### 6.2.3 Youth Access Quality Standards

The Youth Access standards are specific to the needs of YIACS. There are standards and practice guidelines on fifteen key aspects of YIACS work. They include management, the support and supervision of staff and volunteers, young people's access to and the delivery of specific services as well as the steps needed to ensure good practice in case recording, referral, monitoring and evaluation.

The standards are accompanied by a package of self-assessment materials emphasising the importance of consulting all the stakeholders in the agency, including young people. The materials ensure that it is more than a “tick box” exercise carried out by a manager; a truer more complete picture can be gathered because all the people in the agency are contributing to the self-assessment. In 11 of the 15 standard areas there are specific questions focussed on asking the young people who use the service about their views on the quality of what is on offer. These questions provide an excellent framework for consulting young people and ensure that consultation is an essential part of a quality service.

### 6.3. POLICY AND PROCEDURES TO SUPPORT USER INVOLVEMENT

#### 6.3.1 User involvement Policy

In the Youth Access standards, a User Involvement policy is one of 3 key policies underpinning the standards. The intention is not to be prescriptive about what level of involvement an organisation should have but rather to emphasise that there is a requirement to have thought about and to be clear about where the organisation currently stands.

A User Involvement policy is one way of making clear the extent and limits of user involvement in your organisation and what you are aiming towards in the longer term. Youth Access requires user involvement policies to encompass the following:

- young people’s entitlement and responsibilities as the users of the agency’s services.
- how young people are consulted on services.
- how young people can make complaints.
- how user’s views are integrated in quality assurance, planning and decision-making processes.
- young people’s involvement in recruitment and selection.
- young people’s representation in the management, planning and delivery of the agency’s services.

It is important that policy is developed in a consistent and inclusive way within the organisation and that consultation is a central feature in the process. Your organisation may already have a method for drawing up policies and this needs to be clear and consistent.

#### 6.3.2 Complaints and Suggestions

One way of empowering young people in your organisation is to make sure that you have an effective complaints and suggestions policy and procedure in place. Complaints and suggestions need to be welcomed – they are often the catalyst for change

and can draw your attention to previously unnoticed areas for improvement in your practice. You will need to make clear the different routes that users can use to make suggestions and complaints.

A written complaints policy is a clearly expressed statement of intent about how your organisation will conduct itself in relation to complaints and suggestions.

A written complaints procedure is an up to date statement of how things are done and readily available to all those who need to know. It should include clear information about how a complaint will be managed, including the level of confidentiality in the process. You could start with a sentence such as “If you feel you have been treated unfairly or discriminated against in any way, or if you are unhappy about the service you receive from us...”

- You will need to give an outline of what your organisation will do, including the timescales.
- You may also wish to outline the complainant’s right to have someone else present in any meeting to act as his or her advocate and support.
- The procedure should include clear steps. It should invite users where possible to talk informally about any difficulty with the person who is the source of their complaint. However young people may find this difficult, so offer an alternative person.
- If the complaint is unresolved the next step would be for the complaint to be addressed to someone in a management role in the organisation. Their contact details should be included in the complaints procedure.
- If the complainant is not satisfied, the next step would be to go to the level of the management body (or their representatives).
- It is also useful to have a further step, if the complainant is unhappy with the way in which their complaint has been handled. This would be an appeal to an external body; perhaps a professional association related to the service the user is complaining about, or a relevant funding body.
- The complaints procedure also needs to have clear links to the organisation’s grievance and disciplinary procedure, for example where a complaint against a worker is upheld.

#### Acknowledging and recording complaints

Resolution of complaints needs to happen effectively on an individual level.

- Complaints need to be acknowledged, perhaps with an immediate letter reiterating the steps you will follow.
- Letters to complainants informing them of the



outcome also need to be sent.

- You will need a place to record complaints and how they were resolved. The record should include all complaints, even those resolved at an informal level.
- There should be a procedure for quarterly analysis of records showing the number of complaints and suggestions, the time taken to resolve complaints and the corrective action taken.
- The management body and staff should review complaints and suggestions annually.
- An analysis should be made of how complaints and suggestions have caused changes in working practices, and any actions taken should be detailed in reports and minutes.

Tips:

- ☞ All staff will need to be trained and supported in dealing with complaints so that they do not react defensively.
- ☞ All complaints should be brought to supervision, even if they have been successfully resolved. The staff member may have missed something in their response, or may need further support if they have felt attacked by a complaint.

### Make sure users know about the complaints procedure

All users of your service should have their attention drawn to your complaints procedure.

- You may choose to display it in on a poster in reception, or include it in a leaflet giving more details about your service.
- It is also a good idea for the staff in the organisation to draw young people's attention to it when they first start to use the service.
- If you already have a complaints procedure in place, you may wish to use a focus group of young people to look at it and give feedback, for example on clarity and accessibility of language.

## 6.4 CHARTERS

A charter is a written statement of rights and can be used to clearly set out what young people are entitled to receive from your service.

For example many agencies have written a list of the rights and responsibilities of users of their service and usually publicise them as a poster on the wall or in a leaflet. It is important to draw young people's attention to their rights and responsibilities and this can often be done through an informal conversation.

Some local authorities have developed young people's charters outlining their rights to work in collaboration with local councils.

## CHECKLIST IX: FORMAL STRUCTURES SUPPORTING USER INVOLVEMENT

- What information does your organisation currently collect about user groups through monitoring and evaluation?
- Does your organisation monitor service provision in order to ensure that users are being treated consistently and that no group is experiencing unfair exclusion?
- How is monitoring information fed into strategic planning within your organisation?
- Does your organisation publish the standards of service that it intends to provide so that users and other stakeholders can judge whether they are being met?
- Does your organisation have a User Involvement policy?
- Does your management body have an effective mechanism for ensuring that it understands the impact of its decisions on users?
- Does your organisation encourage and work with user-led organisations to plan and improve services?
- Does your organisation have a clear complaints procedure that is available to all your users and that sets out the way in which complaints can be raised, investigated and resolved?
- Does the procedure contain an independent, external element for complaints that cannot be resolved by the internal process?
- Does your organisation have a charter outlining the rights and responsibilities of users of your service?

# 7. Evaluating involvement and using the evidence.

## 7.1 EVALUATING USER INVOLVEMENT

Evaluation of user involvement is important to assess both the strengths and weaknesses of your approach and to explore what would improve upon it. It is also essential in order to define what was learned in the process. You may wish to ask yourself the following questions:

- How well have the methods worked?
- Has the consultation answered our original question?
- How might we do it better next time?
- Did staff and volunteers feel involved and consulted in the process?
- Did young people think it was a positive exercise?
- What are the the main findings and outcomes from the involvement?

For involvement that has moved beyond consultation, you may consider conducting a participatory evaluation (See 4.3.3). If you are using this method young people and other stakeholders will have contributed to the identification of performance indicators. Alternatively, you may want to use or adapt the following indicators to evaluate how well users have been involved:

- The attainment of clearly stated expectations.
- The level of drop out.
- The numbers involved.
- The materials tested with young people.
- Young people's satisfaction with the process and content of the involvement.
- The fair reflection of young people's voices in all written outputs.

## 7.2 PRESENTING THE FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATION EXERCISES

There is no point involving young people in consultation unless the results of the consultation are made available and they can see how any changes arising are to be implemented. There are various considerations to be taken into account in presenting findings, both to young people and to other stakeholders.

### KEY POINTS FOR PRESENTING THE FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATION EXERCISES

- **Think about your intended audience e.g. is it formal or informal, would a report be best, or a presentation, or a discussion in a staff meeting? You might write an article in a newsletter or create a poster or a handout.**
- **You will need to give brief background information about your agency, its aims and the context to the feedback exercise with its aims (what you set out to achieve) and objectives (what you did).**
- **Outline the methodology you used. Give an indication of the type of information you collected and how you collected it e.g. append a blank questionnaire to a report.**
- **Describe the number of young people taking part in the survey or study. If possible, give a breakdown of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnic background, area where they live etc. Give an indication of what percentage of the total users of the service was consulted.**
- **Highlight the findings e.g. the issues raised, or the total results to answers of specific questions.**
- **With quantitative questions give the total different YES, NO etc responses. You may wish to break the responses down into different groups if you have asked the young person to identify themselves e.g. in terms of gender, sexuality or race.**
- **Qualitative material needs to be organised under the different question headings and themes need to be noted. It can be useful to quote young people's actual comments. It is also important to mention any topics raised by young people that were not part of your original plans.**
- **Outline the plans for responding to the user feedback. Where feedback raises needs that you cannot meet, be clear about why you cannot meet the need at present, and be prepared to show how you intend to meet it in the longer term if you deem it is appropriate.**



- **Allow time for people to ask questions and give their opinions. Make sure any changes that you make to your service happen after they have been fully discussed within the staff team.**

### 7.3 ACTION PLANNING<sup>14</sup>

It is important to come up with an action plan for implementing the findings and evaluation in order to make sure they are not just left on the shelf but are fed back into your organisation to produce tangible results and improvement.

In setting the objectives of your action plan, you will need to ensure that they are consistent with your agency's values and purpose. Additionally, you will also need to ensure that you can secure both the commitment and resources required.

The objectives will need to be clearly stated, e.g. a x% increase on the numbers/groups of young people giving feedback on your service. In this example, you would need to set up systems that enable you to measure any increase within a particular period of time.

The following outline is a useful process to follow:

- i What is the action point? If the point is not clear, or if there is unresolved disagreement, the

action point may be to outline the need for further discussion and negotiation on this issue.

- ii What are the initial steps we need to take? (This may include further investigation of the option)
- iii Are there any major obstacles that we need to overcome?
- iv Do we have objective/s in mind and are they SMART? Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resourced, Time-bound
- v If you have several action points you will need to prioritise them, taking into account the current availability or the potential to acquire necessary resources. There are a number of ways of doing this and you could choose one or a mixture of the following:
  - On preference, the thing that you would most like to do.
  - A quick win that you can achieve quickly and that will give you encouragement.
  - Something that will have the most impact on the aims of the organisation or that fits in with your strategic plan for the year.
  - Focus on something that arises from an event in your environment or a pressing external development.
  - The introduction of something that is missing.
  - Address the underlying theme.
  - You may also wish to decide on the basis of your current available resources. Do you have the people available to work on this action point?

# Case Study One

Based on an interview with Permala Sehmar, Sheffield Young People's Centre

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## User Involvement in developing services and recruiting staff

NSPCC SHEFFIELD Young People's Centre offers information, advice and counselling to vulnerable young people. Groups of young people were targeted for a consultation exercise through a mailing and by going out and speaking to groups. Young people were invited to a meeting where they were told about the plans for the new centre and invited to make a wish list for the building. Groups were also taken to visit the site of the new building. The young people were introduced to the idea that there were many ways that they could get involved, one aspect being recruitment and selection.

Various young people put themselves forward for this and were invited to a meeting. The post being advertised was described to them and they were asked if there was anything that they would like to ask the candidate. Two panels were drawn up. One made up of professionals and one made up of four young people. Parents and Schools consented to the young people taking the day off for the interviews.

The young people decided that the best way for them to be involved was to have the candidates make a presentation to them on a prepared topic. One topic that was chosen was "How would you ensure young people's involvement in this centre". The young people's panel then worked out the criteria on which they would score the candidates, some examples included eye contact, arriving on time, using inclusive language, being aware of the diverse needs of young people and how they involved the young people in the process and to what degree.

A pre-meeting was held with the young people to talk through various aspects of the selection process, for example acknowledging that the

candidates may well be nervous, and how to put them more at ease. The presentations from candidates lasted 15 minutes and afterwards the young people asked questions on points of clarification. They then got together at the end and talked about their impressions of the candidates and matched their scores, deciding which candidate they would like to recommend to the professional panel. It had been agreed with the young people beforehand that they could only influence the final decision but not make it and that any difference in decision would need to be talked through. The two panels met to share information and feedback and then the professional panel met on their own to make the final decision. The professional panel agreed that when they fed back their decision to the young people's panel, clear reasons for the choice would be given.

The selection process has happened three times to date, and on all three occasions the young people's panel and the professional panel agreed on the same candidate that would be best suited to the job. Interestingly the young people's choice of best candidate for the job sometimes differed from the candidate that they had marked most highly in terms of who they could "relate to". Interview feedback was given to each of the candidates by a member of the professional panel who also passed on the young people's feedback.

At the end of the process young people were given a certificate as a record of achievement and vouchers for CDs as a thank you for their involvement. They were not aware that this would happen prior taking part. Feedback from young people was that they enjoyed being involved and that it was a very useful process in terms of their own learning about preparation for interviews.

One of the candidates for interview who was eventually selected gave her feedback about the process: "It was quite a nerve-racking prospect to face the young people's panel and it really made me think about user involvement before the interview. It also meant that I had to be creative in translating my ideas and make the effort to communicate without jargon". She felt that it was a good test of her approachability and ability to interact with young people.

After the process was over and the candidate selected, the project held a review meeting to ask young people about how they thought it had all gone. The young people said they had appreciated having a say and they had found the process interesting. They also said that they would have liked to ask other questions of the candidate, not necessarily directly relating to their presentation. They came up with the following three questions:

- 1 Why do you want the job?
- 2 Out of all your experience of working with children and young people what is the most memorable and why?
- 3 If a child or a young person came to you and said they had family problems, how would you deal with this?

The adults in the project were impressed with these questions and have decided to include them in the next round of interviews. They also decided that it would be useful for continuity to have 1 or 2 young people on the next panel from the last one, but to also have two new young people to ensure that it was not the same panel every time. They have plans to support peer training around recruitment and interview skills. They have decided that they will also include another pre-meeting to discuss the job description and person specification and see if young people want to input into them.

The project outlined the benefits as follows:

- Young people have a say.
- Young people learn new skills.
- Young people have ownership in a new project.
- Young people come up with good ideas.
- Young people feel valued.
- Candidates know that the organisation has a commitment to young people's participation and their motivation, commitment and skills around direct work with young people are tested in a real way through the selection process.

Difficulties and constraints:

- The process took a lot of time to organise.
- It was a long day. Young people were at different levels e.g. some found it hard to sit and listen – at times they were bored and restless and other young people found that annoying.
- Insufficient gender mix in the workers group meant a possible lack of role model for the young men taking part.

#### Tips:

- ☞ Plan the process well in advance
- ☞ Allow plenty of time
- ☞ Make sure that young people are aware of the decision making process
- ☞ Have breaks between interviewing candidates
- ☞ Make sure you support all the young people to feel OK and to deliver on the day
- ☞ Think about how you will acknowledge or pay young people for their involvement
- ☞ Ensure there are sufficient resources to meet expenses e.g. for travel and food.
- ☞ Think about how any disagreement between the panels might get played out in dynamics after the process has ended.

## Youth Participation

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR VOLUNTARY YOUTH SERVICES (NCVYS) is an independent national umbrella body, which represents and supports the interests of voluntary organisations working with young people.

Esta (herself a young woman of 24) came into post to take forward work emerging from the NCVYS Position Paper and Youth Participation Strategy, October 1999. This paper came out of a youth participation strategy-working group in April 1998, which was asked to make recommendations on:

- Developing a strategy for meaningful involvement of young people within NCVYS and its members
- Identifying appropriate support mechanisms for young people to participate in decision-making.
- Developing 'youth initiatives' with allied organisations e.g. The British Youth Council (BYC), Changemakers and the broader NCVYS membership.
- Encouraging the sharing of best practice and discussion of models of youth participation within the NCVYS membership.

Esta reconvened and expanded this original working group, which is seeking to make the language of the position paper and the structures NCVYS more relevant and appealing to young people.

Two projects have emerged from the strategy.

- 1 A scheme to give out grants to young people, via other organisations, to design and manage projects of benefit to the community.

This is a joint venture with Changemakers. The emphasis is on the personal development of young people through the process of taking part, and on promoting good practice in involving young people. This will occur through developing links with partner organisations and through facilitated training sessions, where the facilitator's role is to support young people. Celebration days are to be held for young people. Evaluation of the

scheme will be carried out through participatory evaluation, working in groups.

- 2 An awards scheme to Voluntary Sector Youth Organisations who have demonstrated good practice in Youth participation.

Esta worked with a group of young people to select the criteria for the awards. Young people planned the categories and the awards scheme. They were also involved in short-listing as a panel. They fed into standards work by Carnegie, Save the Children, and Ofsted/Citizenship. These young people had experience in peer education and also took part in a residential.

### Lessons learnt from involving young people

- A youth reference group brought together at a national level from the original pilots carried out publicity design for the first scheme. It proved hard for this group to meet consistently. On reflection it may have worked better to plan costs, times of meetings and travel on a local level.
- It was hard to keep the national group motivated when the work was not having a day-to-day impact on their lives. There was only so much going on to keep them interested. Despite this several young people did stay on board and the momentum picked up again.
- Having a larger group provided more flexibility. Older young people were more likely to physically move on from the group due to other commitments, whereas 14 - 15 year olds seemed more able to sustain their motivation and involvement.
- There were some problems on the residential between groups coming from very different places and because they felt intimidated by difference they tended to become aggressive. On reflection there was a need to work with individual groups first to build up some common ground. One group arrived late and therefore missed out on the first session. Sometimes the youth workers jumped in inappropriately to try and sort things out, rather than facilitating the young people to do it.
- Holding a residential in August meant that it was easier to get people together for longer.

- Following a presentation at NCVYS AGM a group of young people were invited to a meeting with a Member of Parliament at Westminster. The purpose of the meeting wasn't really made clear. In the pre-meeting, the young people were voluble, but in the meeting with the Minister they were reticent. He didn't really come towards them and the gap between the two camps proved too difficult to bridge. It would have been more effective if the purpose of the meeting had been agreed beforehand.

Esta has found that it has been very positive working with young people. "They are not stale and bored, they have enthusiasm and ideas, they like to have fun and have a laugh. They will plan something appealing to other young people. It also helps to keep the work grounded in reality. Adults often have other agendas e.g. concerns about funding, strategy etc. User involvement can be similar to Equal Opportunities - there is pressure to do it and the challenge is not to be tokenistic."

#### Tips:

- ☞ Focus on young people's interests in order to ensure they remain motivated.
- ☞ Start from something local and then work out to a national focus.
- ☞ It is important to make sure all young people are there at the beginning, e.g. of residentials, for contracting/getting to know each other. You may need to spell out some specific issues in the ground rules in relation to respecting difference.
- ☞ Have something quite concrete to plan for e.g. the celebration day. Young people can then tolerate more nebulous meetings.
- ☞ Think about disaffected young people and how to create a bridge for them into a wider group. Behavior problems and attitudes like homophobia pose additional challenges for bringing groups together and there is often not a budget for the kind of work that needs to be done on this.
- ☞ You need to work out roles beforehand with other workers and have a shared perspective.
- ☞ When young people are meeting with adults there is a need to address the power imbalance. It links with discrimination and the attitudes and behaviour of people in power towards young people. It is easy to label young people. It is important not to be patronising.



# Case Study Three

Based on an interview with Michelle Butler, A former user at Off Centre, Hackney. Now Michelle is the Co-ordinator of Matrix, the mental health user-run service.

## Self Help Groups & User Groups

OFF CENTRE is an advice and counselling project for young people based in Hackney in London. They are members of Youth Access and are currently registered as working towards Youth Access Quality Standards.

Michelle first used Off Centre as a counselling client in the mid-1980s and then again in the early 1990s. "I was aware of how different the culture was from psychiatric hospital – it was a much more facilitative process. I remember talking informally to the Director of the Centre about my experiences of being in hospital. He believed that people in hospital should have more power over the services they received and that they should be listened to with empathy and respect. This was quite different from the treatment I had received as a patient at the time. A number of us whilst patients had felt supported by each other and wanted to continue this support once we left hospital. We decided to set up a self-help support group for ex-users of statutory mental health services. However, we had nowhere to meet because the hospital refused to provide a room saying that no one would be responsible if things went wrong. The staff at Off Centre offered to provide the space for us to meet and they kept the Centre open so that we could meet in the evenings. This was the first time that I felt supported to become independent, instead of feeling forced out of or forced into using services.

My counsellor and I needed to ensure that the counselling sessions were not jeopardised by my involvement in the self-help group. We spent time talking about how to keep the sessions separate from the group and the importance of maintaining boundaries should we have any informal contact through my attendance at the group. It felt extremely important for me to be able to acknowledge that I could be feeling very vulnerable in sessions, but would be in a different 'role' for the group. This meant being able to develop the ability to sufficiently contain the difficult feelings I was experiencing at the time. I also had to be mindful of the part of me that longed to be near her in order to feel safe. We had already grappled with similar issues as part of the

counselling process and we had to ensure that this space was protected and the boundary between counselling and not counselling maintained. I found that being able to talk about the potential difficulties openly and in partnership enabled me to understand and appreciate how difficult it is to contain these feelings, not that they went away as a result.

The self-help group was for me the beginning of being able to take back some control over my life. We had spent a good deal of time discussing how we felt about being in the psychiatric system, the lack of alternatives for people in acute distress and the need for radical change. It was around this time that I was invited to chair the User/Practitioner group for mental health, which was based in Hackney. This group was set up to plan services in conjunction with managers, commissioners and users of mental health services.

**What were the difficulties you encountered with your involvement in the user/practitioner group, and what did you learn from your involvement?**

One of the inherent difficulties of setting up a user group is getting a cross-section of people involved that are representative of those who use services. In my experience, user groups can attract people who have no interest in either mutual support or the improvement of services and have a hidden and destructive personal agenda. In our group, we encountered somebody who was derogatory to others and seemed intent on taking power and destroying our organisation. At that time, we had no ground rules in order to deal with his behaviour democratically. We had to draw up rules retrospectively, which was much harder. We had to think about how to ensure people would respect each other, and that equal opportunities policies were effectively implemented. Finally, we had to ensure that the behaviour of some people did not prevent the involvement of others.

In terms of the committee, I had struggled to understand the language. There was a lot of jargon. I also wondered, "why do mental health professionals want our involvement?" – I wasn't sure of their reasons because they didn't make it very clear to us. No one had thought through what 'user involvement' meant in reality and what would need to change, both practically and ideologically.

It seemed as though if we came up with something that the senior planners and managers felt was a bit controversial they would say "Oh well you are not

representative". Sometimes we felt patronised and the only time we would be acknowledged was when we were attending conferences and workshops on 'user involvement'. I can still vividly remember the creeping feeling that used to go up my spine when some people attempted to talk to me. I did not exist as an individual I was Michelle the mental health user and therefore either liable to explode at any minute or deeply fragile at all times. Mental Health professionals were used to dealing with "patients" and by definition we were understood to be dependent. Their job was very much about containing and controlling crisis and 'undesirable behaviour'. I found it difficult to find my own power and authority in these conditions. There were practical issues for example; expenses were not paid up front which made it difficult for some people to attend meetings. No thought went into providing support or supervision to help us to work through the change of identity we went through from being on the receiving end to taking power and learning how to make decisions (I actually continued to get a lot of support informally from Off Centre). We also felt inhibited because they had chosen to bring us into their world rather than going out to meet us in ours.

#### What was it like to be a worker in the mental health system trying to involve and empower users?

When I first became a mental health worker I found that some of my colleagues were not interested in improving the quality of the service we were providing and resisted opportunities to change. I wondered how the service could become more client-centred. When I raised this issue it threatened the existing culture. There were many disagreements that centred on differing philosophies of care. I felt quite out on a limb. When I made suggestions people tended to say "Oh we've tried all that before" or "They are all mad – what can you do to really involve them?" They were used to forcing people into doing things, whereas genuine involvement felt impossible and dangerous. At this time I was training to be a counsellor and this gave me experience and the language to think about the dynamics of power. I began to form a growing awareness and appreciation of what it means to be a 'professional'. The change of identity from being disempowered and on the receiving end, and being seen as able and competent was a fantastic feeling. It did, almost imperceptibly at first, take me away from the reality of the clients I was working with. The feeling of responsibility and power I had changed everything. Clients', patients', service users were no longer 'my people' but 'them'. Their success/failure became a tangible example of my competence/incompetence. I realise that we are all caught up in this dynamic to varying degrees. Generally speaking, clients want to

be made better and professionals want to hang on the idea that they can get better. It feels safer than the knowledge that we very often don't have the answers. People still get sick, and sometimes they self-destruct, despite our best efforts. Who are we then?

Two years ago I was approached by my ex-counsellor who asked me if I would consider becoming a trustee at Off Centre. Initially we both thought we might be doing something wrong. After all, I had finished my counselling and had moved on. So why go back? What could I bring to the committee that someone else couldn't? We found ourselves back in the same place talking about the boundaries again. I remember struggling with thoughts such as 'you are asking yourself to be your ex-counsellor's boss'. What if she is completely different outside of the counselling room? What if she is disliked as the manager of the service what would that mean? or 'Does this mean that I cannot have a bad day now that I am a trustee?' These thoughts seemed irrational and silly to me, but they had a strong presence all the same. I did feel honoured to be asked and it was another tangible example of the empowering and facilitative philosophy underpinning the approach at Off Centre. Once on the committee I felt uncomfortable about the change of identity that I had taken on. I felt that it was impossible to get away from the fact that I was the 'ex user' on the committee. I resisted sitting on the 'user involvement' working group, I wanted to be in the fundraising group. I ended up on both. Over the past two years the relationships have slowly changed and have become far more equal. I no longer feel like I am the ex-user sitting on the committee. However, I feel committed to and passionate about the organisation. I do not believe that I would feel quite the same way had I not used the service.

A little over a year ago, I started work for the Health Authority as a development worker setting up a new project called 'Matrix'. This is run by and for people using mental health services in Haringey. The project was set up to significantly change the focus of services and develop user involvement. We are beginning to undertake user-led research and offer opportunities for people to support and help themselves. We are providing, via the development of a website, a database of local services that service users can access directly. We are also providing training to service users and we are helping users to consult with service planners, managers and budget holders. The project is now 8 months old and the volunteers are beginning to run the project on a day-to-day level. They have been instrumental in setting up the organisation and developing a strategy for development. Without them the organisation cannot exist.

Doing this job has placed me in the middle of two very different positions. I am no longer a service user or a service provider and I do not fit into either anymore. Not being 'anywhere' feels liberating and very uncomfortable simultaneously. Because I am not tied down to any particular fixed position, my identity is no longer invested in either position. In effect I take up a third position. This is a very interesting and challenging place to be. It also feels like an impossible position in many ways. On the one hand it is very powerful to be in a job where my experiences as a service user are a crucial part of what I do and the philosophy of the project. It no longer feels like a stigma. On the other hand it can be very difficult to witness so many service users in so much distress and not be able to wade in and sort it all out on their behalf. My position can be experienced as threatening for other service users and workers because I am challenging the relationships people have to one another and the way we think about who we are as service users and service providers. This challenges everyone.

More than ever before I now realise that mental health needs are often inextricably linked with poverty and discrimination. Attempting to involve current users of mental health services can be extremely difficult. People need to have their basic needs meet

before they can think about involving themselves in changing conditions for others. It can be difficult to listen to what people are saying because what you hear is hard. You need to be prepared to manage anxiety and uncertainty and be prepared not to have all the answers. Given this, I still believe that user involvement should be fundamentally about helping everyone to imagine a future where mental health services are empowering, empathic and challenging. Service users should be able to come away with renewed hope for the future. They should be able to feel confident about what they are capable of achieving and proud of what they have survived. They should feel able to walk into an uncertain future with courage. They should feel that they have been listened to and understood. When I stopped being a client at Off Centre this was how I felt. This was what made it possible for me to move on. I am saddened by the fact that there are not enough 'Off Centres' in this world.

Lastly I want to leave you with the thought, the paradox really, that sometimes things change so that they don't have to change. If we are not mindful of this then we risk keeping people where they are, perpetually on the receiving end of inadequate services that service users did not ask for and do not want.



# Case Study Four

Based on an interview with Vivien Regan, Faces in Focus London.

## Volunteering and youth action for young people

FACES IN FOCUS (FIF) is a young people's information, counselling and volunteering project in South London. They work across several London boroughs with young people, many of who are from disadvantaged communities. FIF have been inspired to involve young people via their volunteering project both through their membership of the National Federation of Youth Action Agencies and through the Volunteer Development Worker's attendance at Youth Access's user involvement training in 1998. "I was particularly encouraged by the realisation that there were different levels of involvement that we could explore".

The Development Worker has facilitated the involvement of young people in many different ways, both in FIF and in other local organisations. It has been particularly useful that the youth action project is under the same roof as the counselling and information services. One example of a young person's involvement was a young woman who initially attended FIF for counselling. She became part of the youth action project and set up a community project for young people. She then joined the management committee and is now providing support to a new initiative supported jointly by young@now and FIF. This is the development of a

youth management group whose broad aim is to manage the Volunteer Development Worker.

In thinking about the support needed for young people to function well on the management committee it was recognised that the volunteer adults also needed support. Initially, the workers thought they would train the young people separately from the adults but then realised that it may be more effective if the two groups were trained together as part of equipping everyone and breaking down the barriers.

### What constraints and limitations of user involvement did you come across?

"At first the young person on the management committee felt like a token young person. I worked with her very closely on this and through being able to talk and be listened to she gained the confidence to take more of an active role".

"One young volunteer in the project had a difficult situation regarding confidentiality and whether or not to say what they knew about a situation. One of his friends had come to the project for advice and he knew about this. Later on a group of their friends were talking about how this person was doing nothing to help his situation. In order to protect the young person's confidentiality, the volunteer chose not to tell them that the friend had attended the project .

However later the young person concerned was angry with him, saying "Why didn't you tell them that I have been trying to get some help!"

### Tips:

- ☞ You do not have to adopt either the polarity of "You can do whatever you want" vs "only work to our (hidden?) agenda". You need to rigorously think and question. Talk with the young people about what you aim to enable them to do/not to do.
- ☞ You need to be clear about the limits of young people's decision making. There needs to be a bottom line about what can be changed e.g. staying with the values of the agency and the type of service provided.
- ☞ We give all young people who volunteer a very long and thorough induction. We provide both formal supervision and we also take informal opportunities to offer support and to share spontaneous reflection on the skills that they are developing. It takes time to build the relationship.
- ☞ Young people's involvement and empowerment is a process. Ask young people as they go along what is working and what direction they think the project should take rather than deciding up front exactly what is going to happen.

# Case Study Five

Based on an interview with Patricia Lynsky from the Youth Empowerment Team at young@now

## Young person-led youth democracy

**YOUNG@NOW** focus on young person-led youth democracy. They believe that young people have their own unique contribution to make to communities and that they have a right to be involved in the development and management of provision made on their behalf. Young@now go into agencies and work with them, matching their time with the time given by a worker from the agency concerned. This means that there is a commitment from both organisations and that the work is potentially sustainable. The emphasis is on sharing a bank of skills and on networking to help facilitate understanding of and support for the project.

Young@now have found that the young people involved in empowerment programmes usually become successful and vibrant. They become known to adults and are often asked to be involved in other agencies e.g. as guest speakers or as a group of young people who can be consulted about policy changes. A lot of personal growth is involved for young people in the process of their involvement. Sometimes so much so that the young people begin to be seen as different and as such unrepresentative e.g. "These are not ordinary Downham kids". They can be seen as an elite group and in this way become a victim of their own success. Similarly once a group is established they can become the one group that adults consult with. It is important therefore that when the young people are operating as a more experienced and confident group, they make sure they keep in touch with and consult other young people in their locality.

### Tips:

- ☞ Be prepared to gently challenge young people's lack of involvement. Start small, pick something very relevant to young people that they have a good chance of influencing and work outwards.
- ☞ It is important to do some personal development work with young people and to make sure that they are well informed about the context before launching them into situations. This will mean that the young people are confident and realistic. For example before a delegation of young people attends a meeting in Council Chambers, they will need to know who controls the budget and what constraints the Council operate under.
- ☞ When consulting young people things need to happen quite fast. Feedback is as important as the consultation itself.
- ☞ Help young people develop the confidence to network with other relevant agencies and organisations, so that they are not just dependent on your agency for support.
- ☞ Ensure that there is a mixture of young people involved; bringing different experiences. Some develop passion from success and can be good at encouraging and influencing other young people who may be less confident or enthusiastic.
- ☞ Whilst nobody wants young people's involvement to be tokenistic, even if it doesn't go very far in terms of influencing change, it is nevertheless a valid experience for young people and something they can put on their CV.
- ☞ It's useful to have the attitude that recognises that you won't ever change everything, but that this is not a good reason not to try and change anything.
- ☞ Look at the relevance of the current structures that you operate – don't assume that young people need to be the ones to change in order to fit in.
- ☞ Work with any adults who seem to be sabotaging the process. They may be misinformed or feel that their concerns have not been recognised.

# Case Study Six

Provided by David Moore, Project Manager at Ealing Youth Counselling and Information Service

## Youth 2 Youth

### The telephone and email helpline run by young people for young people

#### History

Youth 2 Youth (Y2Y) is an innovative partnership project for young people run by Ealing Youth Counselling and Information Service (EYCIS), part of Ealing Youth Service and MIND in Ealing & Hounslow Ltd., a mental health charity. The Y2Y telephone helpline went live in October 1997, and then in 1998 the service was extended to include e-mail (accessed via the Y2Y website) to reach the many young people who prefer to communicate via the Internet.

#### The service

Young volunteers aged between 16 and 21 are trained to provide a supportive, confidential, telephone and e-mail service for young people under 19 with emotional difficulties who find it hard to communicate with adults and/or prefer their own age group. If a caller wants additional help, they are given information about other appropriate services.

#### The young volunteers

Since Y2Y's inception, young people have been involved directly, deciding on the name, consulted about publicity and development plans, writing articles, giving presentations and providing a representative to Steering Group meetings.

The helpline and e-mail service is exclusively staffed by the young volunteers, supervised by a qualified youth worker and counsellor throughout service operating hours. They receive travel expenses.

Since its start in October '97, there have been 55 females on the helpline rota, and 15 males. Although Y2Y asks only for an initial commitment of 3 months, many have to stay much longer, and 11 have been with the project since the beginning.

The trainer/supervisor has a relaxed, supportive approach, which together with the team spirit on each shift has been fundamental in securing on-going

enthusiasm for and commitment to, the Helpline. A number of volunteers have asked for Y2Y references, e.g. for Duke of Edinburgh Awards, UCAS forms. Volunteers are encouraged to take part in Youth Achievement Awards a national scheme designed to recognise young people's achievements.

Beth, a Y2 Y volunteer writes about answering telephone calls:

**"For Youth 2 Youth we trained in active listening skills which helps us to answer telephone calls and e-mails. We get a variety of calls ranging from relationship issues to serious mental health problems. When we are on the phone we try and empathize with the caller in a caring way, and show them that we are listening carefully to what they say. Rather than give them any advice we just listen to them in the hope that this will be reassuring and make them feel less isolated. I usually try to encourage callers to ask themselves questions. I believe that when they think about their answers this helps them to make their thoughts clearer in their own mind. It can be very difficult to have to put the phone down after talking to a caller for a long time. Not knowing what happens to that person can be frustrating. Although Youth2Youth can be challenging and occasionally even upsetting, it is very rewarding to feel that you have made a difference to how someone is feeling – sometimes you can even hear a change in the tone of the caller's voice from negative to positive. It's really encouraging when people call or e-mail us back thanking us for our help and wanting to talk more it is reassuring that we are a worthwhile cause. After our shift we talk about the evening's calls and emails with our supervisor, discussing what we thought we did well and what we could have handled better. In this way we learn from the other volunteers' experiences as well as our own."**

Ben, a Y2 Y volunteer writes about answering e-mails:

**"As well as telephone calls, Y2Y also answer e-mails and though they can be similar, a different approach is often used. Concerns raised in e-mails vary from girl/boyfriend trouble, relationship difficulties with parents to depression and self-harm. Because you are not in a conversation, e-mails can be easier to answer**

**though it can sometimes feel strange to be replying to someone's problems, the pressure of knowing someone could be relying on you. However, I have a young person's point of view and this helps me to empathise with the different problems that young people have. Frequently, the real problem is not written in the words but is to be found by reading in between the lines. I do feel that I also gain from answering e-mails, because by understanding other people's problems, I can perhaps understand my own better."**

#### Recruitment and training of volunteers

Recruitment is organised by an Outreach Worker through distribution of posters and talks at local school assemblies and elsewhere, inviting potential volunteers to periodic recruitment evenings. All volunteers must complete a two day training in listening skills plus ongoing training when they are on the duty rota.

The volunteers are supervised throughout each shift, ensuring that they are running Y2Y and answering calls in an efficient and caring way. At times this can be challenging. When there are up to ten young people present between shift handovers it can become hectic. Volunteers are fully debriefed after each session by a supervisor who facilitates group discussions and spends time with each volunteer to allow them to explore their concerns and feelings.

As individual volunteers build trusting relationships with the Supervisor, some choose to ask for help with their own personal problems. Helping individual volunteers in a supportive, caring and confidential way is an important part of what each person can expect to gain from being a volunteer with Y2Y.

#### Monitoring and evaluation

Volunteers fill in monitoring sheets recording non-confidential information about each call (over 400 to date). Statistical information is obtained via Web Server Statistics about numbers of visits to the website, sources of e-mails etc. 1,260 e-mails were received and answered, and 17,194 visits made to the website.

On a personal level, volunteers receive informal feedback on their progress at each session via individual supervision and team debriefing sessions.

#### Future development

In December 2000, the organisation received a lottery grant which has enabled it to set up an Internet Relay Chat Service so that callers can chat one to one in confidence in real time with a volunteer via an Online Chat Room. This is as an alternative, not instead of, the current e-mail service whereby e-mails are answered when the volunteers come on duty. It is also hoped that funds will be raised to purchase BT Chargecards which may be given to young offenders, young people leaving care or other vulnerable groups to encourage them to seek help for their problems.

## Influences on the user involvement movement

### Youth and community work

Youth work has played an important role in the process of listening to and involving young people. From a theoretical and practical perspective they have been seen as “creators not consumers”<sup>15</sup> Youth work has sought to involve young people in a process of learning, rather than seeing them as empty vessels to be filled. It has recognised their role as co-creators in participative programmes of social education.

There is an increasing emphasis on young people and citizenship. In “Youth in Society”, Claire Hackett outlines how the community and voluntary sector have an important role to play in young people’s political participation. Hackett points out that young people often get involved in community groups, self-help groups and single-issue pressure groups and these groups tend to take account of differences and “offer real possibilities for participation and representation of young people’s interests”. She emphasises that “If these groups are to be truly representative of young people’s issues and concerns, they must engage with young people, listen to them and be prepared to involve young people in a meaningful way.”

The greatest driving force for young people’s involvement is the belief in the principle of empowerment. This is well summed up in the following extract from a youth work manual that shares ideas from existing community projects:

“ Young people are clearly visible as consumers and are targeted by advertising agencies and producers of a variety of goods but this visibility does not enable them to participate in their local communities, or have their contribution recognised and valued. Lack of participation is a form of social exclusion. The way forward demands a more positive attitude towards young people’s participation and recognising the part young people can and do play in their local communities. If we are unaware of the issues and problems that concern young people we cannot hope to devise strategies or solutions that will address their concerns.”<sup>16</sup>

### The community and voluntary sectors

There is a traditional focus on the centrality of the user and many organisations have campaigned to extend their users rights.

The Office of the Children’s Rights Commissioner for London has been set up by charities and children’s groups to protect and promote the rights and interests of young people spelt out in the United National Convention on the Rights of the Child. The aim is to help make the voice of children and young people heard in public decision-making. They have an Advisory Board of children aged between 9 and 16 recruited from all over London.<sup>17</sup>

Self-help groups, such as MindLink, a network of mental health service survivors, have also played an important role in empowering users of services. MindLink is a consultative body that ensures that users and survivors of mental health services have a direct say in shaping Mind’s policies and campaigns.

### Volunteering

There is a growing emphasis on the importance of young people participating as volunteers and various agencies work to encourage and support young people in this process. Millennium volunteers has raised the profile of volunteering amongst young people and funded specific local programmes.

- The Institute for Volunteering research set out to explore through focus groups young people’s views about voluntary work. Their findings were presented as a “wish list” for volunteering. “FLEXIVOL” served as an acronym for the elements identified as those most important for involving 16-24 year olds:<sup>18</sup>

**Flexibility** was given top priority, particularly in respect of flexible work and working times for volunteering.

**Legitimacy.** Young people’s view of volunteers is basically favourable but negative stereotypes persist. There is a need for more positive images and better information.

**Ease of access.** Most young people did not have much idea how to find out about volunteering opportunities. They need more information, encouragement and easy access points.

**Experience.** Young people want relevant and interesting experiences that will stand them in good stead in their personal and career development.

**Incentives** are important because of the competition for young people’ time and attention. Most prominent is the incentive of tangible outcomes in the form of a reference or a qualification, to validate



their experience and demonstrate their achievement to employers and others. In the absence of the main incentive for working - pay - the incentive of full payment of expenses would, at least, ensure that young people do not end up out of pocket.

**Variety** should be offered in the amount of commitment, the level of responsibility and the type of activity.

**Organisation** of the volunteering needs to be efficient but informal, providing a relaxed environment in which young people feel welcome and valued. This includes appreciation, advice and support.

**Laughs** should not get left out of the picture because of young people's serious ambitions for self-development. Volunteering should be enjoyable, satisfying and fun.

### Working with User-led Organisations and other organisations with an emphasis on empowering young people

Another way of building user-involvement in your organisation is by forming partnerships with other groups led by young people themselves. For example a local youth forum or parliament. The British Youth Council will know what groups are happening locally. Another alternative is to contact The National Federation of Youth Action Agencies (NFYAA) promotes, develops, services and sustains the Youth Action network throughout England and provides developmental support for the establishment of new Youth Action agencies. Each member agency is independently managed and works with young people undertaking community action on issues that are both important to them and support disadvantaged groups.

### Young people's forums

The European Youth Forum has 88 members made up of national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations, which are federations in themselves bringing together approximately 10 million young people from more than 40 European countries. "It is led by young people and endeavours to serve the interests of young people from all over Europe, promoting their active participation in the construction of a common Europe and seeking to get young people involved in the shaping of a Europe based on the values of human rights, democracy and mutual understanding." <sup>19</sup>

The British Youth Council's development of youth councils nationally enables and encourages young people to express themselves and have a voice in local authority decision-making processes.

### Government initiatives

Many government initiatives emphasise the need to consult with and inform young people. Some may have direct relevance to your agency. In any case it is worth noting that it is important to build consultation into your service in order to be in line with current good practice, as well as to reap the benefits that it can bring to your agency and your users.

Government initiatives from 1997 have emphasized the importance of participation in the democratic process and have highlighted the detrimental effects of social exclusion. Coupled with this is an interest in developing an increasingly more businesslike relationship with the voluntary sector and a corresponding emphasis on customer care. These issues are embedded in Government policy and initiatives such as Best Value, The Community Legal Service, Connexions and Quality Protects. All stress the importance of consulting users, and some go further along the involvement continuum.

### Legislation

Legislation has also played a part in emphasising the need to listen to young people and to enable them to take more responsibility for decision-making. For example:

- The Children Act 1989 states that children's wishes and feelings must be taken into account when making decisions concerning their welfare.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1991 Article 12 states that the child has the right to express his or her opinion freely, and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child.
- The Gillick judgement 1989 "asserted that children who are competent to make a decision affecting their lives are entitled to do so". This ruling further clarified the decision-making relationship between adults and children.

Legislation has in some cases led directly to the growth of groups promoting the consultation of young people. Article 12 is a UK-wide children's rights organisation run by and for people under 18 years. It was set up in 1996 to promote Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### Funding and research

The Carnegie UK Trust is an example of a funding body that decided to enquire into the issues affecting young people and what can be done in partnership with them and others in supporting their transition from adolescence to independent adulthood.



Their research revealed “a tremendously complex and dynamic situation, with agencies struggling to cope with a very active government programme and the changing realities of young people’s lives”. They also recognised that “Although more bodies are encouraging young people’s participation, there is almost nothing in the way of support and development for the adult workers facilitating this, for instance, in the case of youth forums. This leads to workers feeling isolated and unsupported.” Moreover they noted: “There is a lack of published material about what types of consultation and involvement work best in different contexts, so knowledge remains trapped in the minds of practitioners.”

perception and performance and how you work with customer and stakeholder groups to improve results. The EFQM Excellence model is becoming quite widely used, not just in the private sector but in the public and voluntary sectors too. This may mean that your funders are familiar with it and may be looking at how you work to involve young people (as your clients or “customers”) in improving your service.

### Quality in the Voluntary Sector: The EFQM Excellence Model<sup>20</sup>

The Excellence Model is a framework that can be used by all sizes of organisation to assess and diagnose its performance. One of the aspects of quality that it emphasises is “Customer results”. Young people as users of YIACS are obviously key customers. The model helps you to ask relevant questions about how you collect information from your customers about

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- <sup>16</sup> Edited by Gowan S., Visible Voices - young people's ideas annual (2000), Community Links
- <sup>17</sup> [www.londonchildrenscommissioner.org.uk](http://www.londonchildrenscommissioner.org.uk)
- <sup>18</sup> Gaskin K., What young people want from volunteering - research bulletin (1998) Institute for Volunteering Research
- <sup>19</sup> Bulletin of the Commission of the European Communities Supplement 4/93, Social Europe - Towards a Europe of Solidarity: Combating Social Exclusion
- <sup>20</sup> See Reference 14

# Other useful resources

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## Youth Access publications:

- Rayment B and Grove J., Getting Started (1997)
- Rayment B., Confidential - developing confidentiality policies in youth counselling and advisory services(1994)
- Stott K., Ensuring Accountability in the counselling process (1998)

## Other Publications:

- The peer support training programme initiative, Waltham Forest 1995-98. Final Evaluation Report. National Children's Bureau.
- Power to the People - Feature on User Involvement (NCVO News) August/September 1999
- Involving Users: Improving the delivery of benefits. Service First Unit. March 1999.
  - ISBN 0 7115 0375 3. Telephone: 0345 22 32 42
- Involving Users: Improving the delivery of healthcare. Service First Unit. March 1999. ISBN 0 7115 0377 X
- A guide to user feedback methods. London Borough Grants Unit.
- "All those in favour". NYA Young People Now. April 2000
- "Promoting young people's involvement in decision making" NYA Youth Policy Update. April/May 2000
- "Youth Part – mapping young people's involvement in local democracy" NYA Youth Policy Update. April/May 2000
- Voices Unheard. Young people at the beginning of the 21st century. Editor: Roger Frost. NYA. Youth work Press. ISBN 0 86155 229 6
- Mental Health Promotion – A quality framework, HEA 1997
- Creators not consumers: Rediscovering social education, Smith, Mark, Youth Clubs UK. ISBN 090709502X
- Youth on board: getting young adults involved in decision-making. NCVO. Available free by ringing (020 7713 6161)
- What young people want from volunteering. Institute for Volunteering Research.
- The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering. Institute for Volunteering Research, 1997
- Position paper and Youth Participation Strategy. NCVYS, October 1999.
- "Participation" (R26) for further list of reading, NYA 1995

## Connexions Documents

- Learning to Succeed White Paper, DfEE, 1999
- Bridging the Gap report, Social Exclusion Unit, 1999
- Connexions: the best start in life for young people, DfEE, 2000
- Connexions service: prospectus and specification, DfEE 2000

## Useful websites

- National Children's Bureau. [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk). One of aims is to promote participation and young citizenship. List of interesting consultation and participation projects.

# YOUTH ACCESS

## STATEMENT OF CORE PRINCIPLES

- ◆ Young people are central to the service and member agencies are committed to responding to their needs.
- ◆ Member agencies believe that young people have a right of access to quality information, advice and counselling services.
- ◆ The basis on which young people are able to make use of a service is made clear to each of them individually and a contract is agreed where appropriate.
- ◆ Member agencies of Youth Access aim to empower young people and treat them with respect based on an understanding of their individual culture and background.
- ◆ In all aspects of their work, member agencies of Youth Access aim to counter the oppression and discrimination faced by young people.
- ◆ Member agencies of Youth Access are working towards equality of access for all young people for whom their service is designed.
- ◆ Member agencies of Youth Access take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety and well being of young people and workers in an agency.
- ◆ Member agencies of Youth Access are committed to ensuring their workers are competent to perform the range and depth of duties offered by the agency and provide a framework for staff development that includes support, supervision and training.
- ◆ Member agencies of Youth Access are committed to establishing and maintaining procedures for monitoring and evaluating the service they provide.



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