



West Berkshire Children
& Young People's Trust

Participation Toolkit

June 2010

"children and young people feel valued and experience participation as a positive process."



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Introduction

This Participation toolkit has been developed on behalf of West Berkshire Children & Young People's Trust to support any professional in developing their knowledge and understanding of involving children and young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of services.

Any professional that works directly or indirectly with children & young people has a responsibility to ensure that children & young people are listened to and that their views are acted upon, where appropriate, when making decisions which affect their lives.

This toolkit sets out the principles, guidance and best practice that will enable any professional to actively involve children and young people in effective, sustainable and meaningful participation. It takes you through the different levels of participation and the standards framework that you can use to monitor and assess your development.

This toolkit is a new resource which will be added to over time with new information and good practice examples from local organisations.

If you have any comments or you would like to share your good practice then please contact:

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VISION *of West Berkshire Children & Young People's Trust*

West Berkshire Children & Young people's Trust aims to ensure that all children & young people are given the opportunity, skills and support needed to actively participate in the design, delivery and evaluation of the services that they receive.

West Berkshire Children & Young People's Trust recognises that children & young people cannot be fully safeguarded or provided for if we do not develop a variety of opportunities to listen to and act on what children & young people have to say.

We must make sure that we develop and embed a culture of participation across the Trust so that all children & young people are encouraged and supported to express their views - regardless of race, culture, religion, faith, language, sexuality, disability or personal circumstances.

Involving children & young people in decision making is fundamental to the work of West Berkshire Children & Young people's Trust. The Trust are committed to upholding children & young people's right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives and will strive to embed a new culture of participation into everyday working practice.

Meaning of Participation

Children & young people's participation in decision making is not just about taking part. It is the process in which children & young people are asked what works, what does not and what could work better so that their voice can influence decision making and bring about change.

Children and young people's participation is relevant to both personal and public decision making; we must make sure that their voice is heard in shaping their own lives, where they live and the services that they use.

There are many ways to actively involve children and young people in participation and there are different levels of power & influence that children & young people can have over decision making.

To be involved in meaningful participation children and young people should be provided with information that is appropriate to their level of understanding and have support, when needed, to help develop their views and ideas. Participation requires a real commitment from professionals to share power and be honest about the limitations of children & young people's involvement.

Examples of Young People's involvement in Decision Making:

- Reviewing & Updating Policies
- Recruitment & Interview Panels
- Plan & Deliver Training
- Mystery Shoppers
- Young Trustees
- Youth Forums

Participation Background

On April 19th, 1991 the UK government signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and ratified it on December 16th that same year, placing a positive obligation on all organisations to fulfil and uphold children's rights. The UNCRC is an international treaty that gives children & young people additional rights to ensure that they are able to participate fully in all matters that affect them. Every five years the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, Switzerland checks what the UK government is doing to make sure that children and young people's human rights are respected and protected.

The government has made a clear commitment to children & young people's participation which can be seen in the growing shift in UK legislation and policy, for example:

Every Child Matters 2004,

The Children Act 2004,

Youth Matters 2005

Aiming High for young people 2007

Locally, West Berkshire Children & Young People's Trust have formally adopted the UNCRC in the Children & Young People's Plan 2009-2011, making Article 12 a priority to ensure that all children and young people have the opportunity to be involved in decisions that affect them.

Article 12 of the UNCRC states that 'All children & young people have the right to express their views in all decisions that affect their lives and for those views to be taken seriously'

Participation may be an obligation for organisations but it also brings with it many benefits for them, young people, and the wider community.

Benefits of Participation

Benefits to children & young people:

- A voice & influence
- Increased confidence & self belief
- Better awareness of how organisations work
- Empowerment
- Improvement of life chances
- Development of new skills; presentation, language, group & creative skills

Benefits to organisations:

- Services & policies are designed, delivered & evaluated based on actual needs rather than presumed.
- More cost effective
- Increased access and use of services
- Children & young people bring a new perspective and fresh ideas about services
- **Happy customers**

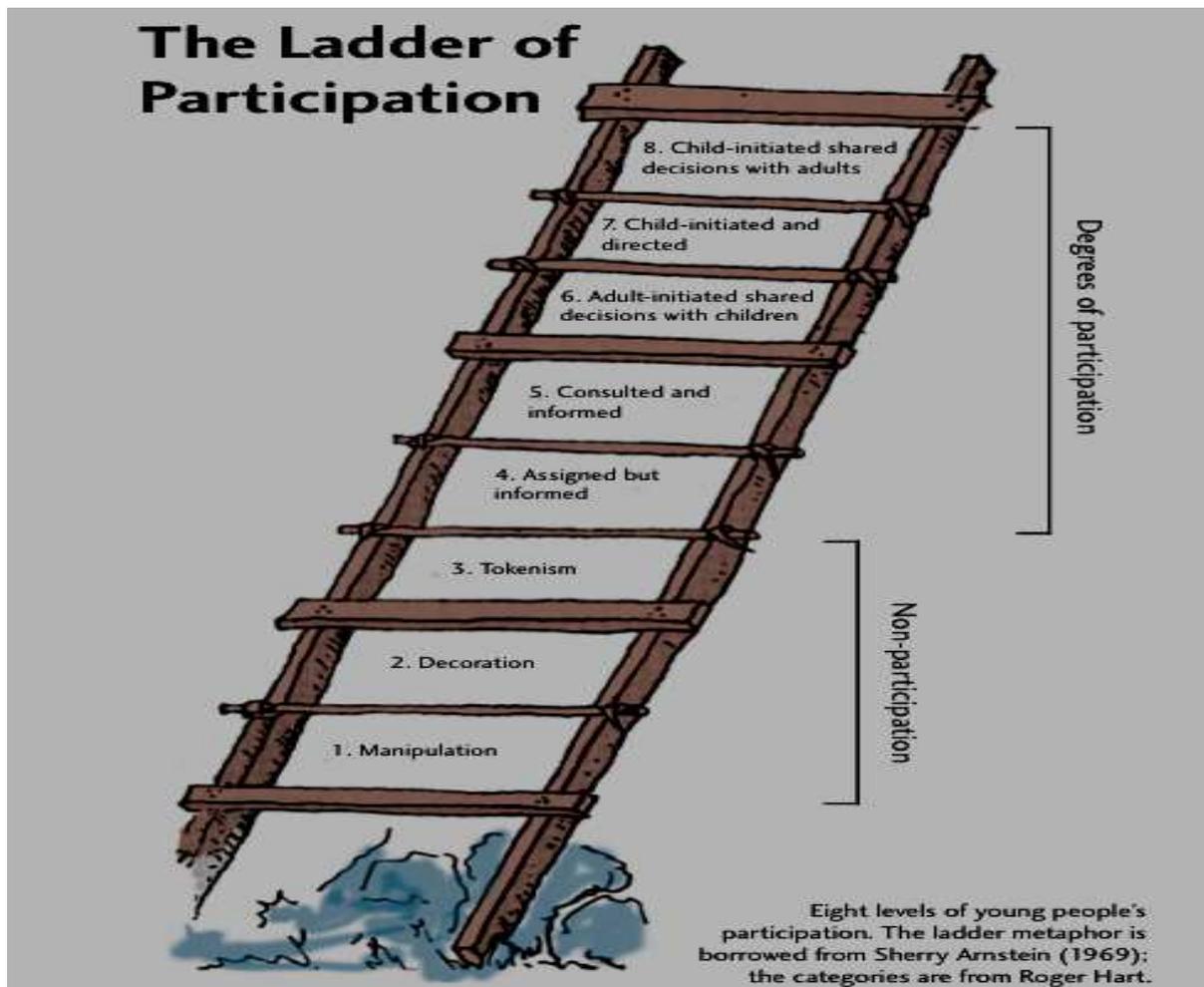
Benefits to the wider community:

- Can reduce Anti-social behaviour and crime
- Build stronger, cohesive communities
- Break down barriers & improve intergenerational relationships
- Enhance democratic processes

Level's of Participation

Many organisations will find that quite often they work **for** children & young people rather than **with** children & young people. In decision making this way of working can prevent inclusion of children & young people by creating barriers to participation.

Roger Harts 'Ladder of Participation' is used widely to provide a visual representation of how the different levels of children & young people's involvement in decision making can vary. The ladder has eight rungs that represent the different levels of control and influence that children & young people may have over decisions - the higher the rung the greater the level of control that children & young people have.



In Hart's model, the first three levels focus on non-participation: Manipulation, Decoration and Tokenism. At these levels children & young people have no control over what they do or how they participate. Involving children & young people at these levels is **not** participation.

Examples of Levels 1-3: Manipulation, Decoration and Tokenism:

- Children & young people are guided into agreement on decisions that have already been made for them.
- Questionnaires for children & young people that do not provide the reasons why they are participating, how the information will be used and provide no feedback.
- Participation is not valued and is a box that is ticked when necessary. (This may include no budget or resources allocated for the participation of children & young people)

The next five levels of participation on Hart's model are all forms of participation that can empower children & young people and enable them to influence decisions that affect their lives. Harts ladder shows that children & young people's power and control over decision-making increases as you climb each rung and is a useful metaphor to show that you only need to climb the ladder as far as it fits the job in hand.

Organisations will be best placed to identify children & young people's abilities and decide which appropriate level of participation is suitable for the differing tasks that children & young people can be involved in.

Levels 4 - 8

4- **Assigned but Informed**

Adults decide on the project and identify specific roles that children & young people can take part in. Children & young people are fully informed and understand why they are being involved and how their involvement will influence the outcomes.

5- **Consulted and Informed:** children & young people's views are taken into account

Children & young people are consulted on the design, delivery and evaluation of the project set up by adults. Children & young people are given the appropriate information relevant to their age and development so that they are fully aware of how their input will be used. Following the consultation children & young people should be given feedback on what has changed as a result of their involvement and are aware of how to address any concerns they may have if they feel that this is not a true reflection of what was said.

6- Adult-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Young People: children & young people are involved in decision making.

Adults initiate the project and share the decision making with children & young people as equals. Power sharing as equals with children & young people requires careful planning and preparation to ensure that children & young people are equipped to handle the responsibility. Children & young people feel valued and know that their views will influence decision-making.

7- Youth-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Adults: children & young people share power & responsibility.

Children & young people initiate projects and choose to share the decision making with adults as equals. Children, young people & adults work together to ensure that participation is accessible for both. Young people feel empowered and get to learn new skills and knowledge from adults.

8- Youth -Initiated and Directed: children & young people make autonomous decisions.

Children & young people initiate and direct how the project will be carried out and are in control at all stages of the decision making process. Adults role is to support children & young people if and when needed but do not take the lead.

It is important to acknowledge that the level of children & young people’s influence will also vary depending on the culture of participation that your organisation has or is working towards.

Method of Young People’s Involvement	Level of Influence
Mystery Shopper	5 – Views are taken into account & acted upon
Interview/Recruitment Panel	6 – Young people are involved in decision making
Young Trustee	6 – Young people are involved in decision making
Youth Forum	7/8 – Young people share power & responsibility and make autonomous decisions

Participation Principles and Guidelines

P PARTICIPATION requires a commitment to share power with children and young people as equals and requires their opinions to be of inherent worth to adults.

A ARTICLE 12 (UNCRC) underpins all participatory work and places a positive obligation on organisations to ensure that all children & young people have the opportunity to be involved in decisions that affect their lives and for their views to be taken seriously.

R RESPECT what children & young people have to say and be aware that their opinions may differ from your own. Children & young people have the right to choose whether they would like to be involved in participation and should not feel pressurised to take part. Children & young people have the right to have their opinions kept confidential. It is good practice to ask their permission if you would like to share this information.

T TRAINING on participation for all those involved is key to implementing safe and successful participation. Those leading on participation work should have the right skills, resources and support to actively involve children & young people in decision- making. All workers involved in children & young people's participation must be CRB checked and carry out risk assessments prior to their involvement to identify & reduce any risks.

I INCENTIVES & REWARDS will let children & young people feel their contribution is appreciated, that they are valued and are not being exploited. Be clear & consistent about when and how rewards will be received.

C CAPACITY BUILDING for children & young people to develop their skills and knowledge is essential to make change happen. Children & young people have evolving capacities and may need support to help express their opinions and to enable them to take part in a variety of involvement methods.

I INFORMATION should be child friendly, jargon free and be made available before, during and after participatory activities so that all children & young people understand the process and are able to make informed decisions. It is essential that prompt feedback is given so that children & young people are aware of how their voice has influenced decision making.

P PLAN exactly how you are going to actively involve children & young people in the decision making process and ensure that their involvement is in keeping with their best interests and protection in mind. Participation requires adults to be honest with children & young people about the limitations of their involvement.

A ACCESSIBLE participation for all children & young people requires staff to identify and tackle any barriers that may prevent inclusion such as the building, time, place, style of meetings, language & transport.

T TIME to reflect on progress made on participation will identify good practice and areas that need improving. Ensure that staff, children & young people are able to celebrate their achievements.

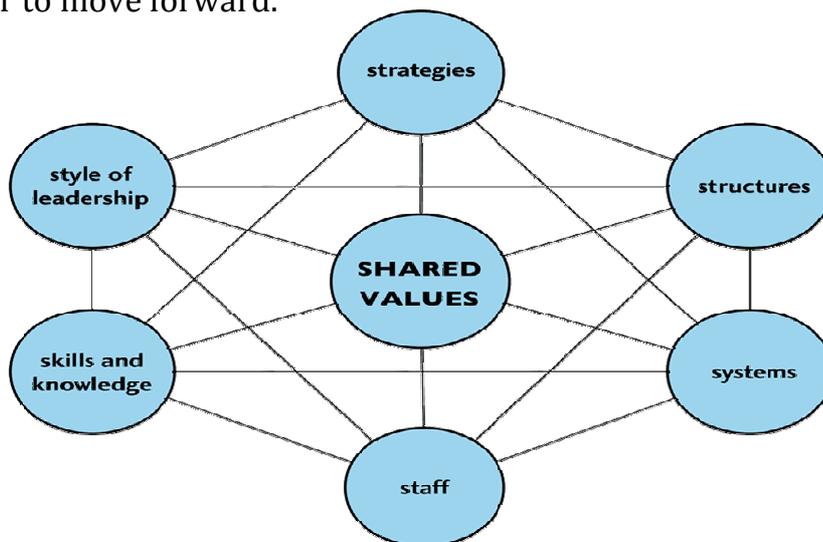
I INFORMAL & FORMAL METHODS of involvement will enable a range of children & young people to access in ways they feel comfortable with. Safe, fun and enjoyable participation will help children & young people have a positive experience.

O OBJECTIVES for all participation should be the improvement of **OUTCOMES** for children & young people, including those that are the most vulnerable or in need.

N NEVER involve children & young people in tokenistic participation. The West Berkshire Children & Young People's Trust recommends that all organisations adopt the Hear By Right standards framework to safeguard against tokenism and to ensure that all children & young people are involved in effective, meaningful participation.

Hear By Right

Hear by Right is a nationally recognised framework used for increasing the voice and influence of children & young people within organisations. The framework is made up of seven standards (Shared Values, Strategies, Structures, Systems, Staff, Skills and Knowledge, Style of Leadership) that form a practical, evidence based model of how to achieve change in an organisation, showing how each relies on the other to move forward.



Hear By Right relies on self assessment and will enable you to map your current level of children & young people’s participation against the standards and will then strategically develop a plan for improvement.

Hear By Right is used for any organisation that provides a service directly or indirectly to children & young people and is widely used by Councils, Primary Care Trusts, Schools, the Police, Housing Authorities and across the voluntary and community sector.

West Berkshire Children & Young People’s Trust have committed to using Hear By Right to embed good practice and to ensure that children & young people are involved in effective, meaningful and sustainable participation.

More information & downloadable resources can be found on the Hear By Right website: <http://hbr.nya.org.uk>

“A fundamental principle of our Plan is that children & young people have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them. To achieve and monitor this we will be making use of the Hear By Right framework which defines standards and indicators through which to measure progress. The overriding principle of Hear By Right is based on Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991)” West Berkshire Children & Young People’s Plan 2008-2011

Planning for Participation

Participation requires careful planning and preparation to ensure that children & young people's involvement leads to positive outcomes and that their views are used to influence organisational change.

The following are 4 practical steps to help you plan your participation project or activity.

STEP 1 - Avoiding tokenistic participation

To ensure that participation is safe, effective and meaningful it is important for professionals to ask themselves twelve questions before planning the active involvement of children & young people in decision making.

1. What are we aiming to achieve?
2. Where have we got so far?
3. What will children & young people get out of it?
4. Are we prepared to resource it properly?
5. Why have we not done this before?
6. Are we prepared to involve children & young people from the start?
7. Are we being honest with the children & young people?
8. What are our expectations?
9. Are we prepared to give up some power?
10. Are we prepared to take some criticism?
11. Do we recognise this is a long term commitment?
12. Are we prepared to build in changes long term and not just have a one-off event?

(National Youth Agency 2004)

STEP 2 - Children & young people are involved in decision making

- What involvement method will you use? Informal/formal or a combination of both?
- How much power & influence will children & young people have?
- Have children & young people given their consent? Do you need to get parent/carer/ teacher or youth worker consent? (Including media consent if necessary)
- Are workers CRB checked?
- Have you done a risk assessment?
- Do you need to arrange transport for children & young people to participate?

STEP 3 - Children & young people benefit from the participation process

- Are children & young people fully informed and understand what is expected of them? Are written materials child friendly?
- Is there advice & support available should children & young people need help in expressing their views?
- Are there opportunities for capacity building and training for children & young people to develop new skills and knowledge?
- Will children & young people feel valued, listened to, respected and empowered?
- How are you going to reward children & young people for their involvement?

STEP 4 – Children & young people’s views are acted upon and influence change.

- Has children & young people’s involvement led to any change or action being taken?
- Will children & young people’s views be fed back to management & into relevant decision makers structures?
- Will children & young people have more opportunities to be involved within your organisation?
- Will children & young people’s views be reflected, reviewed & evaluated?
- When & how will you give feedback to children & young people on how their views have been used to influence decision making?

Effective planning will help to identify and break down any barriers that prevent the inclusion of children & young people. Children & young people with disabilities are capable of being included in participation and may require special materials and assistance with communication, transport and access to venues. Advocacy may also need to be provided to ensure that the views of children & young people with disabilities are accurately represented.

Any organisation preparing to actively involve children & young people must ensure that they are fully committed, and have the appropriate resources (budget, rewards & incentives, staff, equipment, child friendly materials, transport –taxis and training) available for participation, so that is a successful and positive experience for all involved.

As with all participatory practice, any involvement by children & young people must be in keeping with their best interests and protection in mind.

Methods of Participation

Creative methods

Creative methods are a fun and engaging way to consult with children & young people. This type of method is suitable for most ages and is effective for engaging those that are hard to reach, less confident and less vocal than others. It is also suitable for children & young people with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Creative methods encourage children & young people to use their imagination and enable them to express their views and ideas in a way that they feel comfortable with. It is a great opportunity to understand and make sense of children & young people's experiences.

It is important to note that consent will need to be given by children & young people and parent/carers when photo and video images are taken to record views, activities and events.

Examples of creative methods:

- Drama
- Photography
- Arts & crafts
- Film work
- Poetry

There are many ways to actively involve children & young people in participation. Some methods are set out below along with some of their strengths and limitations.

Consultations

These are one-off or short term pieces of work that focus on a particular issue or planning proposal. Examples include; gaining children & young people's views on their main concerns and priorities; a topical issue or checking draft plans or policies with them. Consultations can happen through meetings, email or via the web. They can be supported by young people friendly summaries of consultation documents aimed principally at adults.

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted & focused • Time limited • Cost effective • Immediate relevance • Results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusive or unrepresentative • Lack of follow up • Lack of ownership • No momentum • Seen as a quick fix

1. Practice initiatives (task focused & time limited)

This might include commissioning a task, developing a joint initiative, or creating a partnership to undertake an agreed piece of work. Examples of this include children & young people undertaking research, training, allocating budgets, commissioning or reviewing plans.

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct impact • Working with adults as equals • Payment, vocational relevance • Use of knowledge and skills • Task focused and time allocated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patronised or dismissed by adults • Adults take over the results • Not rewarded properly • Opportunity to the few • Limited follow through

Website for children & young people

Websites can help children & young people access information about specific projects, plans, resources, funding, programmes or organisations. They can be used to pose questions and issues for debate and discussion, giving a means for direct, immediate feedback.

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential numbers involved • Multi-purpose • Building on existing resources • Fun and engaging • Children & young people involved in the web design • Used through schools & youth clubs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs dedicated and skilled input • Specific and adequate budget • Extensive publicity to make it known • Exclusive • Needs commitment to use information and give feedback • Adults views gained unintentionally

Large scale event

Rather than only drawing on the interest of the few, involvement of children & young people may include a larger event for a wider range of groups. This may give more freedom and flexibility in influencing and shaping ideas, priorities and direction. The event can also be used for the children & young people to elect representatives to be on a smaller advisory or committee structure.

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More inclusive• Shared identity and purpose• Fun and energy• Accountability• A lot of work quickly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparation & planning• Time & money• Raises the stakes; higher risk• Needs good follow up• Needs commitment to actions

Advisory or reference groups

A group of children and young people (perhaps with adults) advise and inform those planning, delivering or reviewing a piece of work, or who manage a team or organisation. There is a series of meetings over a period of time during the lifetime of the project or programme.

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Influencing development• Ownership• Representative• Established and ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time consuming and drawn out• Rubber stamp• Irregular meetings and attendance• No authority

Network of groups

There is a network of strategically linked groups of children & young people meeting regularly with a support worker. Operating from their own territory and on their own terms, the children & young people are helped to give their views on policies and services or to raise their own issues. These issues are then taken forward by the support worker.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link and support hard-to-reach groups • Regular, consistent involvement • Safe, familiar environment • Ongoing for reviewing change 	<p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy on staff support time • No direct authority • Must keep short chain of communication • Change may seem remote
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Parallel structures

A youth body is set up to run alongside the adult-led decision making processes to provide advice, or act as a sounding board. Examples include a shadow committee at any level in an organisation.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected membership and mandate • Confidence and authority • Influencing organisational policy • Reserved places on committees 	<p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What real authority and power? • Divisive • Poor range of representation • Fractures from adult organisations
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Committee places

Children & young people are elected or selected to be part of committees. There may be specific spaces reserved for them. Young people may be trustees of the organisation.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct access to governance • Long term influence • Knowledge and expertise • Continuous input • Overcoming misunderstandings • Required change in attitudes, representing significant cultural shift for an organisation 	<p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not treated as equals • Tokenism • Used to represent views of all young people, rather than in own right • Demanding of skills and commitment • Pressure to be seen to be successful • Lose touch with peers • Significant resources, staff support
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(Hear By Right: Setting Standards for the Active Involvement of Young People in Democracy)

How to Involve Children & Young People in Staff Recruitment

There are many different ways to involve children & young people in the recruitment and selection of staff. Some organisations may choose to pick one approach and build in the involvement of children & young people, as their culture of participation increases.

- Job descriptions
- Person specifications
- Job adverts
- Short listing
- Form a panel, design questions, interview candidates
- Induction

Children & young people **will** need training and support so that they are fully aware and understand the whole recruitment process. Children & young people will also need to be informed about equality, diversity and equal opportunities so that all candidates have a fair chance of success.

Key points to consider are:

- **Time-** Time constraints may affect the level of children & young people's involvement, realistic timescales so young people are aware of how long the process will take, Are times of interviews appropriate for children & young people?
- **Informed-** Children & young people are clear about their role and the influence that they will have over the recruitment process. Children & young people are informed, briefed, and well prepared for interviewing. Candidates are aware that children & young people will be involved in the process.
- **Transport, consent, refreshments and breaks** are in place for children & young people.
- **Feedback-** Children & young people should receive feedback on how their involvement has influenced the final decision and outcome of interviews.

Children & young people should not be given access to completed application forms or any private information about candidates, e.g. references/CRB checks.

How to Involve Children & Young People as Mystery Shoppers

Actively involving children & young people as mystery shoppers is a great way to evaluate services and to find out if children & young people are treated equally and fairly as service users. Mystery shoppers act as a customer and are asked to carry out a number of tasks, reporting back on their experience.

Young mystery shoppers are able to assess services by using a range of different exercises; visits, telephone calls, e-mail enquiries & internet research.

Young mystery shoppers assess:

- How they were greeted
- What the building looked like inside
- Were staff polite? Did they listen and help appropriately?
- Accessibility

Children & young people will need training, support and clear information so that they fully understand what is expected of them and learn how to observe, experience and evaluate services. Role playing and acting out scenarios will help to build children & young people's confidence in assessing services and make them aware of how to handle different situations.

Key points to consider:

- **Time** – To train & support young people
- **Information** – All Information and training materials will need to be child friendly
- **Training** – detailed training on how to observe, record and report information objectively
- **Incentives & rewards**- how are you going to reward children & young people for their involvement?

Organisations must have systems in place to ensure that children & young people's assessments of services are fed back and acted upon by management. As with all participation activities, children & young people must be given feedback and an explanation if for any reason changes cannot be made.

Useful References, Resources and Web Sites

Badham, Bill, *Hear By Right: standards for the active involvement of children & young people*, The National Youth Agency, Local Government Association, www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright

Fajerman, L at al, *Children are Service Users Too: A guide to consulting children & young people*, Save the Children, 2000

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West Berkshire Children & Young Peoples Trust, *Children & Young Peoples Plan 2008-2011*, 2008

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