



# family friendly INITIATIVE

## Consulting with Children and Young People

Produced by Imagineate

Funded by the SAC



### The Family Friendly initiative

Imagineate has received funding from the Scottish Arts Council to run the Family Friendly Initiative over two years. The aim of the initiative is to improve children and families' access to and participation in arts activities by encouraging and supporting Scottish art venues to become more child and family friendly.

### Consulting with Children and Young People

To ensure that our venues are meeting the needs of younger audiences we must involve children and young people in the decision-making processes that shape the venue. These guidelines have been designed to help develop effective and sustainable ways of consulting with children and young people.

These guidelines address the following questions:

1. How does the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child support consultation with children and young people?
2. Why consult? What are the benefits of consultation with children and young people?
3. What principles should underpin consultation with children and young people?
4. What are the barriers to consultation with children and young people?
5. What practical methods can be used to consult with children and young people?

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### How does the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child support consultation with children and young people?

The UN Convention spells out that all children have the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The UN Convention reflects the notion that children are equal citizens with equal rights in a world often dominated by adults and puts the onus on governments, policy makers, families, teachers, playworkers and anybody with responsibility for children to ensure their rights are upheld.

The UN Convention provides the foundation for advocating increased children's participation in decision-making:

*'Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'*

Article 12.1, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

## 2

### Why consult? What are the benefits of consultation with children and young people?

What are we trying to achieve through children's and young people's participation and why? Before we look at appropriate methods and some of the barriers to participation, it is important to understand the reasons we are doing it.

#### 1. The child's or young person's right to be consulted and to have their views taken into account

The starting point must be the child's or young person's right, as set out in Article 12.1 of the UN Convention (see above). Securing and protecting this right for children and young people we work with is the fundamental reason for working towards children's and young people's participation in decision-making.

#### 2. Understanding the child's or young person's wants and needs

Being consulted and participating in decision-making helps children and young people gain a better understanding of their own wants and needs, and how these can be expressed to adults.

#### 3. Making venues more responsive to their users

Children's and young people's participation enables our venues to meet changing needs, interests and preferences as defined by the users.

Introducing effective children's and young people's participation initiatives into our arts venues can have lasting and significant benefits for the children, the young people, for wider society and importantly, for the venues themselves.

#### 4. Developmental needs

The developmental needs of children and young people, particularly the need for responsibility, respect and recognition, and for new experiences, can be met in participation activities.

#### 5. Social and political education

Participation provides opportunities to acquire and practice the skills of debate, communication, negotiation, individual and group decision-making. It contains within itself the first steps of the political process.

#### 6. Children and young people as creators not consumers

Through participation children and young people are encouraged to be active creators rather than passive consumers. Provision of services for children and young people can thus become the agent of social change rather than one of social control.

#### 7. Participation in the wider society

Participation in decision-making at the level of a local arts venue offers the ideal starting point in preparation for participation in all the institutions of the wider society.

#### 8. Democracy

Participation in decision-making and in the management of a local organisation, seen to be open and accountable to its users, encourages democratic procedures and respect for the principles and ideals of democratic life.

## 3

### What principles should underpin consultation with children and young people?

#### 1. Allow enough time

Many children and young people (particularly those with disabilities) have little experience of making decisions and lack confidence in expressing their views. It is therefore important to allow time for children and young people to engage with the issue being discussed, to develop their understanding of choice and decision-making and to become comfortable and relaxed with the person facilitating their involvement.

Involvement should be an ongoing process instead of a one off event.

#### 2. Methods must allow children and young people to express their views freely without being 'put on the spot'

Children and young people are not always confident about giving their opinions so methods should be designed to encourage their participation without making anyone feel forced to contribute.

#### 3. Methods of involvement must be accessible to all taking part and in particular must respond to any communication needs

Adequate preparation is required to ensure that the consultation methods are pitched at the right level. It is also essential that children and young people with communication difficulties are able to take part.

#### 4. A wide range of children and young people should have the opportunity to participate

It is important to involve a broad range of children and young people. Too often those who are more difficult to reach or who have communication difficulties do not have their views sought or listened to.

#### 5. Ensure views are those of children and young people

Children and young people often feel most confident when they are with someone they know and those with complex communication needs may rely on an adult they know well to support them in giving their views. However care must be taken to ensure that the views expressed are genuinely those of the child or young person and are not influenced or misinterpreted by an adult.

#### 6. Be aware of sensitivities

Some children and young people may find certain issues difficult to talk about and it is vital that they are not put under pressure to do so. All children and young people should be made aware that they do not have to contribute and can opt out at any point.

# 4

## What are the barriers to consultation with children and young people?

### 1. Pre-conceived attitudes

The first, and often decisive barrier, is the attitude most of us have towards children and young people. Remember that if provided with adequate support and structure children and young people will demonstrate commitment and responsibility that belies their years and experience. Also do not assume that children and young people should have innate participation skills; they will need ongoing opportunities to develop and practice the skills of responsible decision-making.

### 2. Old habits

Traditional decision-making patterns form part of the "culture of the organisation", and this is not easy to change. New ways of reaching decisions may have to be developed, and old power-structures may have to be challenged.

### 3. Laziness

Any move towards genuine children's and young people's participation is bound to make demands on project staff. It is a lot easier not to bother (and it is always easy to think up a plausible excuse).

### 4. Jargon

Use of jargon can be particularly off-putting for children and young people, especially if they lack confidence or are unsure about our commitment to participation. In order to involve children and young people in decision-making we have to find a language that everyone is comfortable with.

### 5. Time and pressure

Many workers in the arts are already stretched to the limit by work demands. There is never a good time to take on a major new commitment.

### 6. Short-termism

Introducing effective participation is likely to take time. There may be slow progress or even apparent failures in the early stages as the culture of the organisation shifts and staff, children and young people gain the awareness and skills they need to handle participation confidently. If the commitment to participation is at all half-hearted, this may be the excuse to give up.

### 7. Fear

Involving children and young people in the running of a venue can seem like a step into the unknown. It may seem safer to leave things as they are, with a "responsible" adult making the decisions.

### 8. Lack of training

Participation requires a range of specific skills and a proper understanding of the issues involved. Training in participation skills is seldom available, and without adequate training it is no surprise that many are reluctant to tackle such a big challenge.

### 9. Lack of vision

A world in which children and young people are valued as equal members of the community, and where their views are recognised and respected in society, will be a very different world from the one we have now. Without a vision of how things can be different, it is easy to lose our way and give up in the face of adversity or opposition.

# 5

## What practical methods can be used to consult with children and young people?

There are numerous ways in which we can involve children and young people in decision-making in our venues. These include:

- **Conferences**
- **Interview panels**
- **Question time sessions**
- **Councils and forums**
- **Annual events**
- **Surveys**
- **Creating young advisors**
- **Speak out sessions**
- **Focus groups**
- **Work placements**
- **Inviting comments on budget allocation**
- **Inviting feedback on scale models of venues**

For children and young people to be genuinely involved in decision-making and planning it is essential that their participation is carried out in a way that enables them to fully understand the subject in question and to feel comfortable in giving their views.

This section offers ideas for making participation interesting and fun, through a range of methods that have been evaluated by children and young people. The following activities can be used to work with children and young people of various ages and can be adapted to suit the needs of particular groups, for example those with complex communication needs.



### Agree / Disagree

Place four signs around the room. The signs read "agree", "disagree", "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree". Read out statements or questions and the children or young people have to run to a label that best reflects how they feel.

### Balloons

Children and young people can draw their ideas on balloons and then decide as a group whether they release or pop an idea.

### Postcards

Children and young people write their ideas on post cards (free ones from bars) and put them in a suggestion box.

### Bead Boxes

Children and young people vote by placing a bead in a pot.

### Ideal / Worst

Draw around two volunteers on giant sheets of paper. One is the "World's worst..." the other "World best..." They then write and draw their ideas all over the sheets of paper.

### Speech Bubbles

Put up a picture to represent what you want feedback on. The children and young people can draw their thoughts and ideas in speech bubbles on the display.

### Freeze Frame

Get into small groups of about 5 to 7 people and challenge them to pose in a freeze frame of a scene. Give them a theme such as, "Young people enjoy themselves". They should use their imaginations to decide as a group what they are trying to depict and then devise a way to represent it as a freeze frame.

### Arty Mural

Set a topic or theme for the mural, for example "What children and young people in the area do in their spare time" or "the best playground ever". Then encourage people to express their views on that topic by drawing picture or creating a collage.

### Diamond Ranking

Set a question and have nine ideas for people to prioritise. Write each idea on a post it note and ask each group to arrange their nine ideas in a diamond shape with their priority at the top, two in second place, three in third place and two in fourth place and lowest priority idea at the bottom. They need to get a consensus as a group and can move the ideas around until they reach an order with which they all agree.

### Snot Fair

Draw a large picture of a miserable face, with a cold. The children and young people write what is not fair about a given subject on green snot shaped pieces of paper then stick these all over the miserable face.

### OHPs

Design OHPs reflecting the group's ideas on a subject and project it large scale onto the wall.

### Graffiti Wall

Hang large sheets of paper on a wall and invite the children and young people to write their opinions on the sheets in the form of graffiti.

### Ideas Avalanche

Set a topic for discussion and ask for suggestions. As people call out their ideas write them up on the flip chart. Once the avalanche of ideas is over you can discuss which ideas are most practical, whether any are impossible and which should be discussed further.

### Post-it Ideas Storm

Divide into groups and give each one some post-it notes and a pen. Write the question to be discussed up on a flip chart. Ask the group to write their ideas onto post-it note (one idea per post-it). Collect the notes and stick them on the flip chart, clumping similar ideas together for discussion.

### Dot Voting

Create a list of possible answers in response to a question or statement on a flip chart - for example, things children and young people do in their spare time. Leave space next to each answer. Give every one three sticky dots and ask them to place their dots next to three activities they do most often. You can all see immediately which activities are the most popular.

### Pop Quiz

A quiz in the style of those used in magazines is devised relating to the consultation topic, i.e. for each question the child or young person is given a scenario and three options A, B or C.

### Board Game

A board game is designed to match the chosen topic. Players roll a dice to move along squares and when they land on a particular square a card is taken. Cards contain questions relating to the consultation topic (open-ended, unfinished sentences and agree/disagree statements). Prize for the first past the finish line!

### Making A Rap

Children and young people produce a simple rap talking about their views, experiences and suggestions.





## Useful Publications

### UNICEF - The Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNICEF

Tel: 0870 606 3377 Web: [www.unicef.org.uk](http://www.unicef.org.uk)

ISBN 1 871440 11 4

### Article 31 Action Pack

PLAYTRAIN

Tel: 0121 449 6665 Web: [www.playtrain.org.uk](http://www.playtrain.org.uk)

ISBN 0 9519013 1 1

### Bored Meetings? Meeting Skills for Young Decision-Makers

A practical resource aimed at workers who have to convert policies on youth involvement into good practice on the ground. Bored Meetings? supports young people involved in group meetings i.e. management committees, youth fora, housing association groups, school councils and boards.

Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Partnership & Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council

Tel: 0131 555 5111 (EYSIP) or 0131 555 9124 (EVOG)

Web: [www.youthinclusion.org](http://www.youthinclusion.org)

### Participation - Spice it Up!

A user friendly practical toolkit for engaging children and young people in planning and consultations. Crammed with activities to make participation fun.

Dynamix Ltd 2002

Tel: 01792 466231 Web: [www.seriousfun.demon.co.uk](http://www.seriousfun.demon.co.uk)

ISBN 1 84187 062 5

### Re:action Consultation Toolkit

A practical toolkit for consulting with children and young people on policy issues in a systematic and inclusive way.

Save the Children 2001- Save the Children Scotland Programme

Tel: 0131 527 8200 Web: [www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

ISBN 1 84187 040 4EYSIP

### Action Research Toolkit

A practical guide to consultation with children and young people including techniques, preparation and analysing and using the findings to effect change.

Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Partnership

Tel: 0131 555 5111 Web: [www.youthinclusion.org](http://www.youthinclusion.org)

ISBN 0 9540397 0 X

### Having a Say!

Disabled children and effective partnership in decision-making. Philippa Russel, Council for Disabled Children 1998

Council for Disabled Children

Tel: 020 7843 1900 Web: [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

### Children in Scotland Publications

Children in Scotland offers a number of publications on participation. Use the following link and select 'participation' from the drop down menu to view the full list.

Web: [www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/pub\\_list.php](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/pub_list.php)

### General publications and websites

*The Family Factor*, written by Catherine Rose, published by East England Arts, 2002, t: 01223 500202,

*Family friendliness, audit of recent research and recommendations for the development of family audiences in the arts*, Pamela Pfrommer, Arts Council of England, 2002

*Family Friendly Final Report*, Arts About Manchester, 2001, t: 0161 238 4500, w: [www.aam.org.uk](http://www.aam.org.uk), [www.familyfriendly.org.uk](http://www.familyfriendly.org.uk)

### Websites

The Family Friendly Initiative  
[www.family-friendly.net](http://www.family-friendly.net)

Centres for Curiosity and Imagination:  
[www.curiosityandimagination.org.uk](http://www.curiosityandimagination.org.uk)

Engage - The National association for gallery education:  
[www.engage.org](http://www.engage.org)

Macrobert WOW project:  
[www.macrobert.stir.ac.uk/wow](http://www.macrobert.stir.ac.uk/wow)

Audience development website:  
[www.audiencedevelopment.org](http://www.audiencedevelopment.org)

Children's Museums website:  
[www.childrensmuseums.org](http://www.childrensmuseums.org)

Hands on Europe:  
[www.hands-on-europe.net](http://www.hands-on-europe.net)

### The Family Friendly Initiative

The Family Friendly Initiative is funded by the Scottish Arts Council to support and encourage arts venues across Scotland to be more child and family friendly. The Family Friendly Initiative will support venues through:

Training - conferences and seminars throughout the year

Advice and information - on all aspects of being family friendly

A website - for free and up to date access to advice and details of events

Visit the website at: [www.family-friendly.net](http://www.family-friendly.net)

Future Family Friendly Initiative Guidelines planned:

- Family friendly services and facilities
- Family friendly customer care
- Programming for families
- Marketing to families
- Providing for children with special needs
- Keeping your venue family friendly
- Others as requested by network participants