

# the reading agency

## Participate: Involving Young People

### Developing youth participation

Involving young people requires commitment and careful planning for your service. Rushing into work with young people can lead to tokenistic developments and failed relationships with the very people you were seeking to engage.

In this section, you will find guidance to help you prepare the ground for young people's participation. By working effectively with staff and youth partners and by considering the critical success factors identified below, you will ensure that young people's involvement is strategic, effective and sustainable.

#### 1 Preparing your service

Any involvement of young people begins with the involvement of staff. From senior management to front-line staff, all personnel need to understand why your service seeks to involve young people, and be involved in making it happen. Making changes to the way in which your library service works with young people requires careful planning. The Participate module Making Change Happen will help you to prepare your staff for working in a new, youth-centred way.

Hear By Right – Standards for the active involvement of children and young people, provides the tools for local authorities to examine their practice and to work with young people to improve and develop services. Standards are crucial from the outset, providing your service with guidelines for planning your programme of involvement, as well as helping you to assess what has been achieved.

Participation Works also provides free guides which you can download to help with your planning. In particular, their key document Listen and Change provides useful information on working with young people to shape services.

For more information on Hear By Right see [www.hbr.nya.org.uk](http://www.hbr.nya.org.uk)

For information on Participation Works see [www.participationworks.org.uk/](http://www.participationworks.org.uk/)

## 2 Critical success factors for youth participation

“I have been involved since 2002 along with the other three original Bookpushers (Nicholas, Ben and Frances) – the four of us have helped to come up with the idea, and since then have been working to get others to support it, we are so enthusiastic and proud about it going national it’s a great reward for our work.” Amber Morgan, HeadSpace Buxton

Jumping on the bandwagon of involvement without thinking it through can lead to a lack of real commitment to young people, with one-off projects that are not followed-through and conflict with organisational procedures.

Experience developed through HeadSpace and Fulfilling their Potential projects demonstrates a number of factors critical to achieving positive, sustained engagement of young people.

Most important is having the shared commitment and support from staff at all levels. Effective involvement, training and briefing of staff (including the whole senior management team) can ensure that all staff are 'on message' and enthusiastic about making change happen. In addition there are several other issues to consider:

- **Involving young people in the earliest stages of planning, delivery and evaluation. From the outset, ask yourself: “Could young people be doing this?” For example, young people can be involved in evaluating the current library service; in consulting about the changes that need to be made and in training library staff.**
- **Developing routes for young people's involvement to progress and deepen. Start slowly with pilot projects, ensuring that you have sufficient time and resources to follow up the lessons learned. Ideally young people should be able to progress from providing feedback on services to initiating projects and working as volunteers.**
- **Assessing the service and staff development needs that come with involving young people. This might have implications for staffing, training, budgets, procedures and library resources. For example, there's no point in engaging young people with web-based projects only to realise later that your system blocks the pages that they want to look at.**

If your work with young people is going to be successful, you need to be honest with yourself about your motives for involvement and what you're aiming to achieve. To help you as you start out, see the Twelve Tough Questions for the Adults at the end of this document. Library authorities that have taken the time to work through these issues have achieved fantastic results with young people. With time and careful planning, there's no reason why your authority shouldn't do the same.

### 3 Partnership working

“The Youth and Community Service is committed to supporting the HeadSpace initiative in Lyme, where such a facility has been identified as being particularly needed, and where it is felt that it would greatly contribute towards enhancing a more positive perception of young people as being an integral, responsible and valued part of their community.”

Arthur Woodgate, Senior Youth Worker, Dorset

Experience and research have consistently shown that libraries are most effective in involving young people when they work in partnership with other youth sector partners. Youth partners have:

- **experience in working with young people that we can learn from**
- **contact with new audiences of young people who may want to get involved**
- **resources (such as funding) that we can benefit from**

In order to ensure that partnership is effective, we need to be clear about how our work can benefit young people and the agencies they work with. We also need to agree on shared objectives. Youth workers will be particularly keen on supporting initiatives that give young people real power to make change and that develop young people's personal, social and educational skills.

Key partners who can support you to increase the range and depth of young people's involvement include:

- National Youth Advocacy Service
- Participation Workers Network
- Regional Youth Work Unit
- Youth Parliament
- National Youth Agency
- Local authority integrated services for young people, including Directors of Children's Services

- V – national agency developing volunteering opportunities for young people  
More information about Partnership working is available on the Making Change Happen section of the Participate website.

#### 4 Twelve tough questions for adults

The National Youth Agency has developed twelve questions to help organisations examine their intentions and intended outcomes. See [www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright](http://www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright) .

1. What are we aiming to achieve?
2. Where have we got to so far?
3. What will children and young people get out of it?
4. Are we prepared to resource it properly?
5. Why have we not done it before?
6. Are we prepared to involve children and young people from the start?
7. Are we being honest with the children and 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 as a long-term commitment?
12. Are we prepared to build in changes long-term and not just have a one-off event?