

Participate: Values and culture

Introduction

Many library services have demonstrated effective involvement of young people in one-off projects at ground level but have failed to effect long-term institutional change. For the involvement of young people to be meaningful and sustainable, a top-down approach needs to be adopted, with senior managers leading the way. The next step is to create an overall strategy which is underpinned by an accepted set of values. A youth-centred culture can only be created by a youth-centred management team who are working from the same set of core (youth-centred) values.

In developing the values and culture of our service, we can learn a great deal from the youth sector. The National Youth Agency's *Hear By Right* framework and Hart's *Ladder of Participation* are both tools which are widely used (within and beyond the youth sector) to assess the level and quality of young people's involvement and to help organisations to improve their practice.

In this section of Making Change Happen, you can find out more about some of these key tools and also some of the practical steps that you can take in order to make your youth-centred service a reality.

1. Hear By Right

Hear By Right is the standards framework developed by The National Youth Agency for the active involvement of children and young people. The Participate programme is grounded in the core values of Hear By Right. In order to successfully involve young people in your service, these values need to be embedded at the heart of your authority.

Core Values of Hear By Right

Children and young people's participation is a visible commitment that is properly resourced

- There is visible commitment to the principle and practice from senior managers
- Participation is built into the organization and reflected in its strategic planning services resources and communication
- Relevant staff have the opportunity to develop the attitudes and skills to work effectively with children and young people

Children and young people's involvement is valued

- Children and young people are treated honestly and their contributions are taken seriously
- Feedback to children and young people about the effects of their involvement is prompt and clear
- Children and young people's participation is recognized and celebrated

Children and young people have an equal opportunity to participate

- All children and young people have the right to participate in decisions that affect them
- Children and young people feel welcomed and valued and are not discriminated against or prevented from participating effectively on the grounds of ethnic origin, language, religion, culture, disability, age, gender, sexuality or location
- Care and time is taken to ensure children and young people facing the greatest barriers to getting involved are aware of and can take up opportunities to have their say
- Relevant training and support are provided to children and young people so that they can contribute effectively
- Information is available to children and young people in good time and is accessible, jargon free and culturally appropriate

Policies and standards for the participation of children and young people are in place evaluated and improved

- What the organization is trying to achieve and the intended benefits are clear from the start
- Children and young people evaluate the process and changes that result from their point of view and help apply lessons learned
- There are agreed quality standards and codes of conduct for working with children and young people to ensure their participation is safe and sound.

2. Defining Participation

The word 'participation' can be used to describe a wide range of young people's activities and degrees of involvement. In the context of youth involvement however, simply taking part in an activity is not deemed to be true participation as the young person has not contributed to any decision-making processes.

The NYA has established a [Hear By Right website](#) where you can find out more about the standards framework and find a range of tools to assess and improve your engagement with young people. The [mapping and planning template](#) is a good starting point to help you to define the participation that is currently going on in your service. It will also show you ways in which you can work towards improving and extending young people's participation. See section 3 of this document for more information about this.

To assess the nature of young people's involvement and as a guide to how its quality might be improved; we also recommend using Hart's Ladder of Participation (below). Hart's Ladder is a recognised tool for assessing the quality of young people's participation and for moving it in a more positive direction. It was developed by sociologist Roger Hart as part of a major critique of then current practice in youth participation and a guidance manual for future work. For libraries, Hart's Ladder provides a quick and easy reference point to help you to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your current youth involvement strategies and a guide to how they can be improved.

According to Hart, at levels 1-3 of the Ladder, there is no real participation of young people as these activities do not empower or share decision making with young people. Levels 4-8 encompass different degrees of participation, with the very deepest participation being seen at levels 6-8.

You may find that different activities operate at different levels across your service. This isn't necessarily a problem; however we would recommend that you review services regularly against the Ladder of Participation and consider how you might change your approach to improve the quality of participation - especially if your activities are at levels 1-3.

Bear in mind that it is not always possible or appropriate for all activities to operate at the highest levels. However it is important that across your service young people are able to make an informed choice about how they wish to participate in activities. We strongly advise that (amongst your range of provision) you should be providing opportunities for young people to participate at levels 4-8.

Hart's 'Ladder of Participation'

8. Youth-initiated, shared decision-making with adults – young people initiate and manage projects / actions and share decision making with adults, using them as mentors and advisors. These projects empower young people while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults.

7. Youth-initiated and directed – young people initiate and manage projects / actions. Adults are involved only in a supportive role.

6. Adult-initiated, shared decision-making with youth – adults initiate and manage projects / actions and share decision making with youth.

5. Youth consulted and informed – adults initiate and run projects / activity, but young people give advice on projects or programs designed and run by adults. Children and young people are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults.

4. Youth assigned but informed – adults initiate and run projects / activity, but young people understand the reasons for projects / activity, know who makes the decisions, are assigned a specific role and have a chance to participate once they understand.

3. Tokenism – adults initiate and run projects / activity. Young people may be consulted but have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate

2. Decoration - adults initiate and run projects / activity. Young people are used to help or "bolster" a cause in a relatively indirect way. They may have an understanding about projects / activity, but have no say in how they are organised.

1. Manipulation - adults initiate and run projects / activity. Young people have no understanding of reasons for projects / activities. Young people may be used, but are not considered true stakeholders.

3. Demonstrating values for working with young people

Hear by Right, developed by the National Youth Agency, is based around the Seven S model for organisational change: Shared values; Strategy; Structure; Systems; Staff; Skills and knowledge and Style of leadership. Each of these standards includes indicators which must be met.

We have adapted this model for Participate in order to help you to put your values into action. The key actions listed below underpin successful provision for young people. In particular, actions that build the quality of the relationship and better communication between staff and young people are fundamental.

Hear By Right 7 S Model

Style of Leadership

- A high profile champion, with clear remit and enough seniority to manage change
- Annual report identifying and celebrating progress in promoting participation
- Published service level agreements or compact with partner organisations that reflects commitment to young people
- Joint events and training with partners promoting young people's active involvement
- Positive publicity and media coverage
- What do young people say about how this standard is being met? What are their priorities?

Skills and Knowledge

- Budgets for training and capacity building for participation
- Training programmes for staff
- Young people involved in developing, delivering and evaluating training
- Partners involved in developing, delivering and evaluating training
- Accreditation scheme and records about young people's active involvement
- Policy on young people's access to information

Staff

- Relevant job descriptions and person specifications include promoting young people's participation
- Induction processes for key staff include promoting young people's participation
- Recruitment and selection and induction involves young people in key appointments relevant to them
- Staff appraisal specifically covers active involvement work

Systems & Structures

- Consultations with young people about developing policy and procedures, including those about access
- Identifying specific spend on active involvement
- Protected budgets for young people themselves
- Published suggestions, compliments, complaints and appeals procedures
- Examples of what's changed, with evidence from young people themselves
- Celebration of successes and appropriate accreditation
- What's Changed tool used for planning participation work leading to change
- Partnerships with relevant professionals who work with young people especially those at risk of exclusion

Shared Values and Strategy

- Audit active involvement of young people
- Published strategy in style, language and distribution that's accessible
- Action plan and timetable for organisational development
- Vision or mission statements referring to involvement of young people
- Success criteria or performance indicators relating to involvement of young people

4. Outcomes for young people

Establishing the appropriate values and culture for young people's participation can have far-reaching consequences. Embedding the core values of Hear By Right in your service will provide the basis for practical service improvements that engage young people more deeply. If you begin to offer participation opportunities at the higher levels of Hart's Ladder, young people from all social backgrounds will:

- feel valued and listened to
- have opportunities to take part in positive activities and volunteering
- share power with adults
- shape the services that they want to use

Overall this will result in young people who:

- have higher self-esteem
- take responsibility for their own lives
- contribute positively to society

Projects like HeadSpace are evidencing these outcomes for young people. For details of specific outcomes for young people in relation to key policy agendas, see the Making Change Happen document *Policy and Context*.