

the reading agency

Participate: Involving young people

Why involve young people?

Library services have a crucial role to play in young people's life chances and in local authorities' delivery on Every Child Matters and Aiming High outcomes. This can only be achieved if services develop a youth-centred approach. A youth-centred service is underpinned by a staff culture which values young people's participation and which involves young people in shaping the planning, delivery and evaluation of services.

By working through the Participate Involving Young People module materials, you can enhance and validate staff skills in engaging young people and build on existing good practice within your service to develop services and spaces in partnership with young people.

1 Why involve young people?

“It’s really good that we’ve got the HeadSpace, because there is nothing to do for young people locally – you would be amazed how many young people come to the library on a Monday or Tuesday night now we have got our own space.” Khalid Amin, HeadSpace Haslingden

The government has adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child¹, and has reiterated its commitment to the involvement of young people through new statutory guidance and reports such as Every Child Matters, Youth Matters and the Children's Plan. One of the six key objectives of Aiming High² (the government's 10 year strategy for positive activities) is:

“empowering young people to increase their influence over... services... When young people are involved in the design and delivery of services, they are more likely to access them and sustain their participation.” Aiming High for Young People

For participation to be meaningful, it has to put young people's interests, needs and their voice at the centre. Participate is underpinned by the principles of Fulfilling their Potential³, the national change programme for libraries' work with young people; and the National Youth Agency's Hear by Right standards framework⁴.

Public libraries have a statutory duty to deliver relevant services to meet the needs of the whole community. As local authority providers, they are required to provide access to 'things to do' and 'places to go' for young people. In fact, libraries can help local authorities deliver broader Local Area Agreement targets around positive activities, particularly PSA 14, NI 6 and NI 110.

There are enormous benefits for your library service and for young people themselves.

2 Involvement and The Library Offer

“I'm not interested in your grand plans and strategies – I want to change things where I live my life.” Young person, County Durham

The need for libraries to be working towards more active participation of young people is also embodied in the national Library Offer to Young People which has been developed by the national Youth Libraries Board, including The Reading Agency. Youth involvement is at the heart of the youth offer, which states that young people should “expect libraries to offer:

Empowerment by:

- **Participation in shaping the future design and delivery of library services.**

¹ Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states: “young people have the right to express their views freely in all areas that they are involved in, and that these views should be listened to”

² *Aiming High for Young People: A ten year strategy for positive activities Implementation Plan*, DCSF, March 2008; pg 2

³ For more information about Fulfilling their Potential, visit www.readingagency.co.uk/young/

⁴ For more information about Hear by Right and to download the Hear by Right standards framework, visit <http://hbr.nya.org.uk>

- **The power to influence the allocation of funds and the selection of books and other resources.**
- **Volunteering opportunities with younger or older library users.**
- **The chance to be involved in staff appointments, creating content for library websites and accreditation for skills acquired.”**

Any library authority delivering the whole Library Offer will be improving the outcomes for young people in their area and meeting the government requirements set out in Aiming High. The Offer is also a key advocacy tool for libraries negotiating inclusion in LAAs and local Children’s Plans.

Full details of the Offer and resources including guidance notes, a PowerPoint presentation and briefings for Heads of Service can be downloaded from [The Reading Agency](#) website.

“Any authority that delivers the full national Library Offer to Young People is delivering Aiming High.”

Katharine Davies, DCSF Youth Task Force 2008⁵

3 Outcomes for young people

“One thing that builds confidence is the feeling that you’re being listened to. Here [at Haslingden] there is a feeling of satisfaction because we are listened to.” Young person, HeadSpace Haslingden

There is growing evidence both nationally and regionally, from sources such as Fulfilling their Potential and HeadSpace, that young people benefit from taking part in planning, running and evaluating activities. Understanding the outcomes for young people enables us to effectively market our opportunities to them.

Through being involved in library services, young people can:

- **meet friends and have fun**
- **develop personal and social skills, such as confidence, imagination and presentation skills. Reading, taking part in library activities and volunteering in the library service all give young people opportunities to develop crucial life skills.**

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- **improve their educational and life chances. Reading and library activities enable young people to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence and provide opportunities for work experience.**
- **become active citizens in their local community. Libraries can give young people the chance to express their views, make decisions about local services and understand how organisations and communities work.**
- **feel valued and empowered. Involving young people in your service gives young people the experience of being listened to and contributing positively to their community. Libraries also provide access to information and support that can help young people to make effective decisions.**
- **improve their local services. Young people can have a positive influence on your service; thus creating a space that they are more likely to use and promote to their friends.**

“This isn’t mentioned in the strategy, but a really important reason for getting involved is friendship. People often just come here to speak to somebody. It’s somewhere you can come to talk about what you’ve done during the day.” Young person, HeadSpace Haslingden

3.2 Outcomes for Library Services

“I don’t usually like libraries – I am heavily dyslexic and I usually find them off-putting, outdated and not really for me – But what I liked about HeadSpace Folkestone was that I’m not looking for information in a place that feels unfamiliar or off-putting. HeadSpace is a nice, free-flowing place to sit down and get information – it’s run by young people for young people.” Mark Clover, HeadSpace Folkestone

Taking a youth-centred approach has also been shown to improve the quality and take up of library services and enables services to deliver the Library Offer to Young People (2008)

Youth-centred library services are:

- **Responsive. Services become more accountable, responsive and in touch with young people’s needs; with development based on actual rather than perceived need.**

- **Vibrant and modern.** Young people bring fresh ideas and creative approaches to services, policies and democratic processes, challenging long-held staff views.
- **Attractive.** Young people's input results in more modern, vibrant spaces where young people feel relaxed and encouraged to take part in reading activities, to make repeat visits and bring their friends. A modern youth-led space will attract new users, including those from excluded groups.
- **Free, safe and welcoming.** Young people can contribute to acquiring relevant, inspiring and informative resources and creating a positive environment for all users.
- **Active and engaging.** The input of young people leads to opportunities for formal and informal learning; citizenship and community engagement, volunteering opportunities and other positive activities for young people.
- **Confident.** Library staff understand their customer's needs and are confident in their ability to provide a positive service to young people.

Clearly, so long as you put in the groundwork, involving young people in your service will bring benefits for everyone involved.

For advice on how to prepare your service for working more consistently with young people across your service, look at the next section in Involving Young People: Developing Youth Participation.