

Participate: Involving Young People

Youth involvement methods

Once you have prepared the ground for involving young people in your service, you need to think about which methods you will use to engage their interest. There are a whole raft of possible ways in which young people can take part in the library service, from basic involvement as service users to taking on roles as members of your library's advisory committees.

This section of Involving Young People will take you through the Participate Youth Involvement Model for developing young people's participation (below) and will help your service to make important decisions about the various types and levels of involvement that you will offer young people.

1 Introduction to methods of engagement

There are many ways in which young people can be involved in your service. As the Participate Youth Involvement Model shows, there are different degrees of involvement - from simply accessing targeted services through to sharing power and decision making for the service. To assess the quality of young people's involvement you may wish to refer to Hart's Ladder of Participation which is featured on the Participate website and considered in more detail in Making Change Happen.

According to the Participate Youth Involvement Model, young people are likely to be able to be involved in library services in the following ways:

A. Information

B. Consultation

C. Taking part in library activities

D. Volunteering: Service Delivery

E. Volunteering: Activism

F. Volunteering: Leadership

By working through the sections below, you will gain an understanding of the ways in which young people can be given a choice and a voice in how they access the library service and the level at which they are involved.

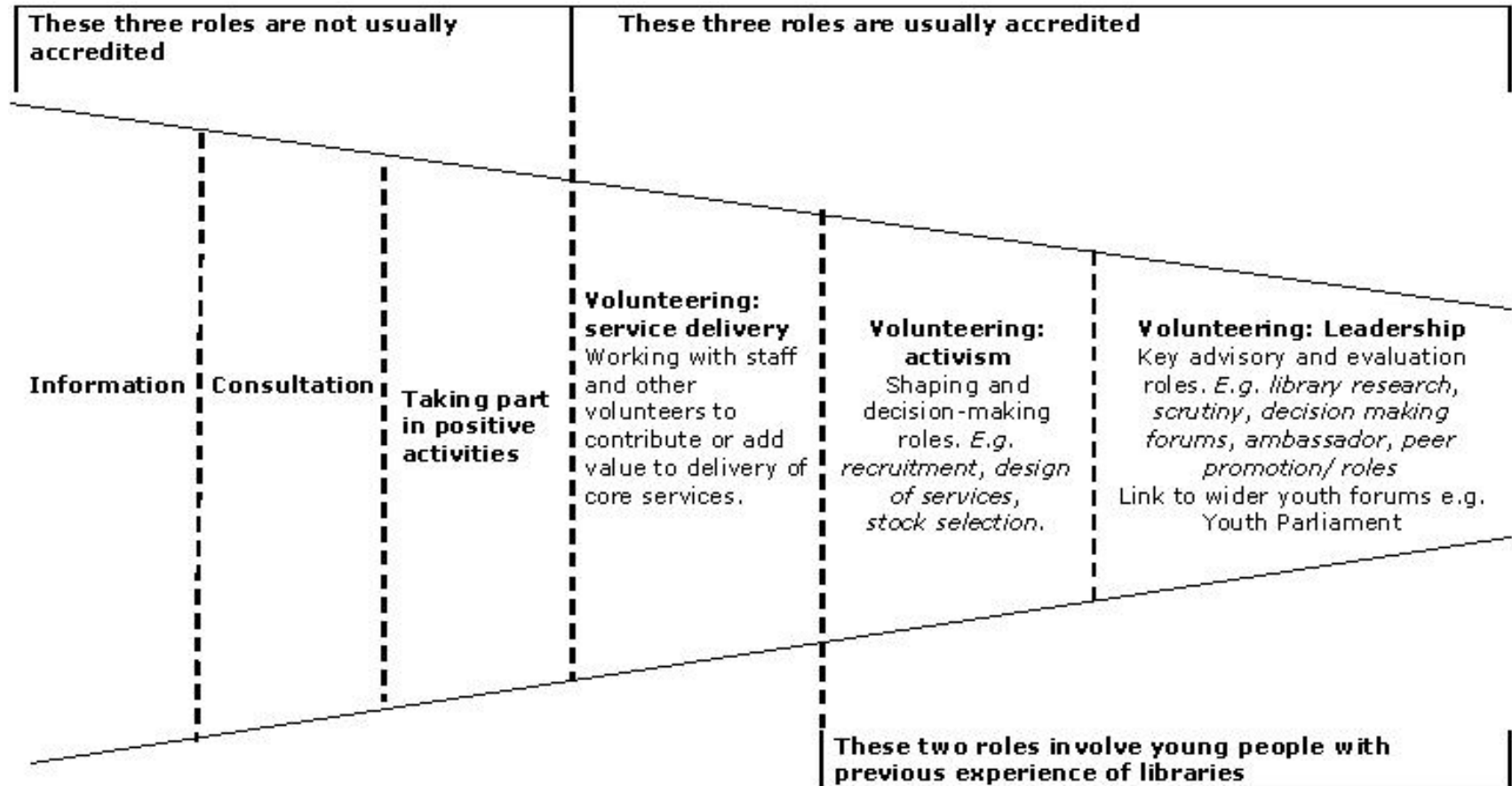
The model is not designed to be prescriptive or linear, but a continuum. Young people can join or leave the model at any point, based on their interests and previous experience of working with libraries.

For some young people, simply accessing library resources will be enough. Some will want to take part in library activities but will not want to make a wider contribution to the service. Others will be interested in being involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services.

Each level of involvement requires careful planning and adequate resources if it is to be effective in engaging young people. These methods of involvement are not mutually exclusive; you should be working towards offering all of these approaches within the service as a whole. The model will help you to offer young people:

- **a broad range of opportunities**
- **the option for progression through the levels**
- **the option to pick and choose from a menu of opportunities.**

Participate Youth Involvement Model – for developing young people’s participation



This model is based on the model developed by the North West Youth Libraries Board

A) Information and Resources

“HeadSpace Folkestone provides lots of information that I’m interested in – for example on teen issues – stuff that’s relevant to people of my age.” Mark Clover, HeadSpace Folkestone

All libraries provide information and resources to their local community. Developing targeted services for young people should form the basis of the service you offer to all young people in all of your branches (either physically or virtually). Providing this service is a key part of delivering the national Library Offer for Young People and contributing to local authority requirements under Aiming High.

All young people in your local community should know that they can access books, reading, music, DVDs and the internet in their library and feel welcome when they do so. Better marketing can spread the word to young people beyond your current user groups. Similarly, just by raising young people's awareness of the library as a key source of information on local ‘things to do’ and ‘places to go’, you can attract young people who may not have used library services before.

In addition, the development of an effective information service is also a key way of attracting partners in the youth sector; as you can provide them with an outlet for information on the services that they offer. This fits in with the new local authority requirement to publicise local positive activities opportunities so that all young people can find out what is going on in their area.

You should aim not just to provide an information service but to actively promote it through partners, local publicity and online sources such as groupthing.org.

Accessing these services is not usually part of accredited opportunities for young people; however you could offer accreditation to young people volunteering as peer promoters/advocates for the library’s information service.

B) Consultation

“There’ll be new opportunities for young people in the area – before we opened we went out and did a survey of young people which I don’t think the library had done before. We found out there isn’t really anything for young people around here but they had lots of ideas in terms of activities they wanted, and they said reading groups, drama, music and art, that sort of thing so that’s what we’ll be doing.”

Amber Morgan, HeadSpace Buxton

Consultation typically involves young people in short-term or one-off activities focused on a particular issue or aspect of the service. It will engage young people in sharing their views, concerns and priorities and will give them a voice in the planning process. Consultation is different from decision-making in the sense that young people's views are taken into account when decisions are made but they do not have the power to actually make the final decision concerning any particular issue.

B1 Consultation: Effective consultation

Consultation can be conducted in a variety of ways through face-to-face meetings or online, one-to-one or in group settings. To be effective consultation should be:

- **well-thought out with clear benefits for young people and commitment on all sides**
- **open to all young people who may be affected by the issue (or at least to representative groups within the community)**
- **carried out as early as possible in the planning process**
- **the precursor to actual changes in services**
- **followed up with the young people who participated**

Young people can easily become disenchanted with consultation activities if they are unable to see their views being put into practice. It is vital that, following any consultation process, the young people who took part are notified about how their input has contributed to decision-making. Young people should be able to recognise their contribution to any decisions made and be given clear reasons when it is not possible to support their ideas.

You won't usually need to offer accredited opportunities for young people taking part in consultation activities; however you should consider offering accreditation to young volunteers involved in delivering or planning consultation with their peers.

B2 Consultation: Working with partners

In order to access a wide range of views from young people, it can be helpful to work with integrated youth partners to deliver consultation exercises. Partners can provide access to new groups that you might not otherwise reach, can facilitate relationships with your target audience and may also have the skills to deliver consultation exercises such as focus groups on your behalf. In order to attract youth sector partners, you need to be clear about what the benefits will be for young people. For example:

- **Will you be offering a reward for taking part?**
- **Can the involvement contribute to accreditation?**
- **Will the young people be developing communication skills?**
- **Will there be an opportunity for young people to have ownership over real changes to their local library service?**

Meet with partners in advance to agree shared objectives for the consultation exercise and be clear about what each agency will be offering and gaining from the experience.

B3 Consultation: Consultation methods

“When I was involved in designing our HeadSpace, I went to a meeting where we had a “mind-mapping” session and all sorts of ideas and suggestions came out.” Connor Parsons, HeadSpace Efford

One-off or short-term consultations can be most useful when you have a particular proposal or planning issue that you would like young people to comment on. Perhaps you need advice on what to call your new Young Adult area or maybe you would like young people’s ideas on how to attract their peers to the library.

Some key methods for conducting consultations are:

- **Focus groups**
- **Questionnaires and web surveys**
- **Interviews**
- **Suggestion boxes**
- **Competitions**
- **Creative consultation techniques**

B4 Consultation: Focus groups

A focus group is when you invite a group of young people to have a discussion about specific issues and record their ideas. It will usually involve a facilitator asking questions, managing group dynamics and making notes.

Focus groups can be particularly useful for:

- **General discussions about how libraries could be improved**
- **Collecting and testing out ideas before submitting funding bids**
- **Asking for ideas for future library activities**
- **Discussing the redevelopment of library spaces**

When planning a focus group, it's important to think about:

- **which young people you'll invite e.g. current library users or non-users**
- **what young people will get out of being involved e.g. will there be snacks, rewards, accreditation or a new activity on offer as a result? Will the focus group itself involve creative activities that young people will enjoy?**
- **how you are going to make your focus group interesting and enjoyable. Use a range of creative techniques such as collage or drama to engage your young people.**
- **What the limitations of the consultation are. Make sure you explain from the outset what your parameters are e.g. the budget for any library refurbishment and the need to take into account other customers and library procedures.**

Example:

Halton Libraries conducted three consultation sessions with a variety of young people who were already using the library. Subsequently, they prepared the library for change by initiating in-house training. Ultimately, this led to book buying trips, social events, website building and creative workshops. Young people and staff have benefited from the experience.

“Less formally, young people see library staff as welcoming and helpful, and have even gone to them for advice about bullying. The staff in turn welcome young people into the library and don't see normal levels of noise as threatening.” Librarian, Halton

For more information on focus groups see the Involving Young People document Conducting a focus group

B5 Consultation: Questionnaires and web surveys

Questionnaires are an easy way to collect the opinions of young people but they have limitations and should be used sparingly. Questionnaires can be distributed in libraries or through schools and youth groups in order to provide feedback on a variety of library issues.

Questionnaires are most useful when you want to get a wide-range of opinions on fairly straightforward issues. They are also an effective way to gather statistics which can be useful when leveraging funding or advocating on young people's behalf e.g. 70% of young people think that libraries should open on Sundays.

When using questionnaires you need to think about:

- **Making your language simple and clear**
- **Asking a range of questions: open, neutral questions (e.g. what do you think of libraries?) lead to more interesting responses than closed, leading questions (e.g. libraries are good, aren't they?) Multiple-choice questions are good for collecting data.**
- **How you will collect information from young people who have English as a second language and those with low literacy levels.**
- **What incentive there is for young people to complete your questionnaire. Consider offering prizes to motivate young people to take part.**
- **How young people might be involved in designing questionnaires and devising questions**

Websites can be used to increase the range of young people accessing surveys. Questionnaires can be posted online and distributed via sites such as grouptthing.org. You can also use websites to post information about library plans and pose questions for immediate debate and discussion. Web surveys can be especially useful for:

- **Consultations which involve a lot of visual content e.g. designs for websites and posters, decorating schemes for libraries**
- **Reaching a wider audience than paper surveys and focus groups**
- **Getting immediate feedback**

If you're using web surveys and discussion groups you need to think about:

- **How you are going to publicise your website or survey – use partners, groupthing.org and other social networking sites**
- **What incentives there are for young people to complete the survey. You might consider offering a desirable prize for one winner.**
- **How you will moderate the site so that you can make sure it's used for the appropriate purpose.**
- **Involving young people at the earliest opportunity in designing the questionnaire (or even the website) and thinking about how to promote it.**

B6 Consultation: Interviews

In some cases, it can be a good idea to interview individual young people to get their ideas about library services. Interviews are particularly useful for:

- **Getting in depth answers to questions**
- **Working with socially excluded young people or those who have difficulties with group working or literacy**
- **Building good relationships with library users**
- **Gaining feedback from young people when they are using the library**
- **Capturing young people's voices for in-depth reports**

Interviews have limited uses and should be used sparingly as a consultation technique as they are time-consuming and cannot provide a broad spectrum of opinion. If you are using interviews, you need to consider:

- **How representative the young people are of your community**
- **How you can phrase questions so that you're not leading their responses**

B7 Consultation: Suggestion boxes

Suggestion boxes are a consultation method that is frequently used in libraries. Boxes can be placed on the library counter alongside suggestions slips that young people can fill in.

Suggestion boxes are good for getting ideas from young people and responses to your own suggestions. However, suggestion boxes are only going to provide you with feedback from current customers and, as such, they have limited success in involving a variety of young people.

Suggestion boxes can be useful for:

- **Collecting suggestions on a specific issue e.g. which graphic novels young people would like the library to stock**
- **Voting e.g. for the best book of the year**
- **Allowing young people to make general suggestions to library staff on an ongoing basis**

If you are using suggestion boxes, think about:

- **Whether this method is giving you a wide enough range of opinions as it can only be accessed by library users**
- **Changing the theme of the box regularly to keep young people interested**
- **How you can involve young people in coming up with solutions and responding to suggestions**
- **How you will give feedback to the young people who have made suggestions using the suggestion box**

Example:

In HeadSpace staff and young people empty the suggestion box together once a month. They discuss and create a response to each suggestion and suggestions with responses are then pinned up on the HeadSpace notice board next to the suggestion box for everyone to see.

B8 Consultation: Competitions

Competitions to design logos and slogans can be a simple way to get young people involved in shaping library services, although their scope is very limited as often only one idea can be used. Involve young people in judging competitions to make sure that the winning entry appeals to the target audience and not just to library staff.

B9 Consultation: Creative consultation techniques

Creative consultation techniques involve using the arts to solicit young people's views about a particular issue. In libraries, creative techniques could include:

- **Making collages of how the library seems now and what the ideal library would be like.**
- **Making videos about the library service.**
- **Using drama to demonstrate how negative library staff can make young people feel and to model positive customer service behaviour.**
- **Creative writing about the library of the future.**

Creative techniques are useful for engaging young people because the process of consultation becomes an enjoyable activity in itself. They are also useful for engaging young people who are hard-to-reach, less vocal than others or those who have literacy issues. Thoughts and feelings are best elicited in this way as opposed to facts and figures. Sensitive subjects can also be discussed more easily whilst engaged in creative activity.

If you want to use creative consultation methods, it can be a good idea to work in partnership with artists and youth workers who are skilled and experienced in this kind of work. You also need to think about:

- **Allowing sufficient time and resources for the project.**
- **Valuing the process as well as the outcome.**
- **Whether you can offer accreditation for young people's creative involvement.**
- **What the outcome of the consultation will be and how it will be displayed.**

For more information on using creative consultation methods see the How to Guide: How to use creative methods for participation from the Participation Works website www.participationworks.org.uk

B10 Consultation: Summary of consultation methods

When involving young people in consultation, you might want to use one or all of the above methods and mix and match different approaches to suit your young people and the issues that you want to discuss. Regardless of which method you use, it is important to involve young people as early as possible in the process, to make the consultation as creative and enjoyable as possible and to offer incentives for involvement.

Remember that consultation is usually just the starting point for a deepening relationship with young people. By providing timely feedback and taking forward young people's suggestions, you build trust that will lead to a positive engagement with libraries in the future. By contrast, not following up consultation exercises betrays the trust of young people and can leave you in a worse situation than when you started.

For more information on consultation, see the document Tips for Consultation and use the Consultation Checklist to help you when you are planning consultation.

C) Taking part in library activities

“Now that we are up and running, we are looking at doing things like holding more music evenings like the launch event. There are about 22 of us who are coming regularly – it’s very much down to us now to decide what we want to do.” Chloe Deadman, HeadSpace High Wycombe

A wide range of creative, stimulating and reading based activities can attract young people to engage positively with library services. Key activities that have been developed in FtP and HeadSpace projects include manga workshops, reading groups, gaming tournaments, music workshops and live gigs, film making, drama clubs, web design, animation, slam poetry and author events. Activities can also be offered online by providing space for young people to develop and showcase their creativity, for example through groupting.org.

You would not normally need to offer accredited opportunities for young people who are simply taking part in activities; however you should consider offering accreditation to young people who are volunteering to develop, lead or deliver library activities.

In order to provide successful activities for young people, it is important to work with partners from other agencies and with young people themselves. Ask young people what kind of activities they'd like to take part in and involve them in the planning of new opportunities. Remember, the earlier you involve young people, the more successful the outcome. If young people have been involved in planning an activity, you can be sure that you are providing what young people want and you'll be guaranteed an audience.

It is also important to work in partnership with other agencies and individuals when planning creative activities for young people. Integrated youth workers will have contact with young people who may like to attend the activity and can offer you routes to market your events. They may also be able to assist with funding and accreditation. In addition, youth workers are likely to have contact with arts professionals who work well with young people. You don't have to be an expert on drumming or poetry to provide positive activities with young people; you just need to be prepared to provide a welcoming venue for the activity and work with people who have the relevant experience. See the partnerships section of Making Change Happen for further ideas about how and who to work with.

Example:

As part of Partners for Change, Swindon Libraries worked in partnership with the U-Too Training organisation and with workers from Bromford Housing Association to provide literacy and library support to young mothers. Activities

included making Storysacks, taking part in baby rhyme times and being involved in computer taster sessions. Participants then had the opportunity to take part in decision-making activities within the library and to volunteer to support other new mums.

The Participate Creative Reading Module provides services with detailed information and training on developing a programme of reading based positive activities in partnership with young people.

Volunteering – Delivery: Activism: Leadership

“I’m doing some volunteering at HeadSpace Folkestone – it’s really good because I’ve also just started doing some youth work and it’s helping me with that.” Rachel Tubby, HeadSpace Folkestone

Volunteering encompasses a broad range of short and long-term roles that should be rewarding and enjoyable for young people. These roles are designed to offer young people opportunities to develop their own skills as well as take a lead in shaping the way services are planned, delivered and evaluated. Developing youth volunteering will require investment in time and resources as young volunteers will require training and support in order to carry out their roles.

As volunteering has a focus on developing young people's skills and requires an agreed commitment from young people, libraries should consider offering accreditation for volunteering. However, it is also worth remembering that accreditation is a young person's choice, and young people should not be required to take an accredited path in order to be involved in volunteering.

“It’s important that regular volunteering gets rewarded. [Accreditation awards] are a symbol. A symbol of recognition.”

Young person, HeadSpace Haslingden

Developing effective volunteering

Before involving young people as volunteers, you will need to do some groundwork within your service. Key things to think about will be:

- **Making sure staff understand why young people are being involved as volunteers and how they can support them**
- **Developing a volunteer policy**
- **Putting health and safety procedures in place**
- **Planning how you will recruit and train your volunteers**
- **Planning what support volunteers will need and what resource implications this might have**
- **Planning how you will recognise and celebrate young people's involvement**
- **Planning progression routes for young people**
- **Devising appropriate roles for volunteers to play**

For detailed guidance on recruiting, supporting and developing young volunteers in your service, please refer to the Involving Young People Volunteering Handbook.

Volunteering roles

Young volunteers can be involved in a variety of library roles. These are best determined by matching the needs of your service with the requirements of your local young people. Broadly speaking, volunteering roles can be grouped under three headings: service delivery, activism and leadership.

Volunteering: Service delivery

(Described in section **D** of this document)

Young people can be involved alongside other staff and volunteers in delivering the core service of the library e.g. serving customers, shelving books and helping out at events. Young people involved in service delivery can shape their roles to be more relevant to young people e.g. as book waiters have done in HeadSpace.

Volunteering: Activism

(Described in section **E** of this document)

Young people can be involved in helping to shape your library service, determining what services your library should offer and how these services are delivered. For example, young people can be involved in stock selection, training and recruiting staff, designing spaces and planning programmes of events.

Volunteering: Leadership

(Described in section **F** of this document)

Young people can be actively involved in leadership within the library, taking on such roles as evaluating the effectiveness of the service, promoting/advocating on behalf of the service within the local or national community and playing an advisory role within the library.

For more details on these three volunteering roles, see below.

D Volunteering: Service delivery

“One of the best things about HeadSpace is that if you go into a library you can get suggestions from someone your own age. Adults aren’t always on the same level, but if you can talk to someone of your own age, then they can help you to find something that will be suited to you.”

Shaheen Mogradia, HeadSpace Bolton

One effective way to attract young people to your library service is to have young people visibly working in the library as volunteers. These young volunteers can perform a range of functions e.g. serving their peers (as well as other library users), helping with ICT and providing book recommendations to library users.

Example:

In HeadSpace this model has been effectively developed through the role of the Book Waiter. A Book Waiter's role is to “support other young people to feel at home in HeadSpace and to make the most of the books, music, DVDs computers and games available.”

In practice this can mean such varied tasks as:

- **Assisting other young people in HeadSpace with getting refreshments finding stock and accessing ICT**
- **Keeping up to date with books, music, DVDs and games in HeadSpace stock**
- **Making recommendations about stock to other young people**
- **Getting feedback and suggestions about HeadSpace and its activities and resources**

These roles are most effective if young people have ownership of their role and if their potential for engaging other young library users is maximised. By engaging peer-to-peer with other young people, they can influence the way in which the library service is viewed and give young people an authentic voice within the service.

“I'm going to volunteer to be a book waiter - I think it's a good idea to have someone your own age helping you choose a book to read because it can be intimidating to have to ask an older person.”

Lowell Fachau, HeadSpace Lyme Regis

For more information, download the Volunteering Handbook from the Participate website.

E) Volunteering Activism

Young volunteers can be involved in a range of planning activities to make libraries more relevant to their needs. These volunteers will typically be involved in shaping services through being able to make decisions on areas or issues of the service determined by adults. Such activities could include the roles listed below.

E1 Volunteer activism: Selecting and promoting library collections

“I got involved with HeadSpace Folkestone a couple of months ago. I thought it sounded good that there would be more computers available, and that we would be able to choose books that we liked. We suggested things and our ideas were listened to so we have more manga, and I really like the fantasy and sci-fi books.” Rachel Tubby, HeadSpace Folkestone

Stock selection offers an excellent opportunity to involve young people in library services. It is relatively easy to organise and can have a tremendous impact on the Library Service and on the young people involved.

Stock selection activities can be a good way of making initial links with young people who don't normally use the library service, can provide attractive and desirable resources for young people and can leave staff with a better insight into young people's reading choices and new skills in working with this target audience. For young people, choosing stock can improve budgeting and literacy skills, as well as making them feel valued by the library service. Before involving young people in stock selection you need to think about:

- **what proportion of your budget you are prepared to hand over to young people**
- **whether there are certain areas of stock that you want young people's advice on e.g. non-fiction, graphic novels or whether you want to give the young people free rein**
- **whether your stock selection group should consult with (or take into account the interests of) other young people in their choice**
- **working in partnership with youth groups in order to access young people who wouldn't normally use the library service**
- **whether you could set up a young people's collection in the library and replicate the selection in the young people's school/youth centre.**
- **how you are going to involve the young people in the launch, display and marketing of the new stock**
- **which methods of stock selection you will use**

Young people can be involved in any stock selection processes that are already established in your service and can also contribute in ways that may be more unusual.

Some ideas for involvement in stock selection:

- **Visiting bookshops: give young people a budget and allow them to select books from your local bookshop.**
- **Visiting library suppliers: take a group of young people along to a library supplier to purchase stock.**
- **Using websites: allow the young people access to your online purchasing systems.**
- **Suggestion schemes: put out a suggestion box alongside lists of possible resources (in the library and in youth centres) and ask young people to tick the ones that they would like to see in the library.**
- **Online suggestion schemes: set aside an area on your library website for young people to recommend titles for purchase.**
- **Approval collections: bring a group of young people in to look at your approval collection and allow them to choose the titles that appeal to them.**

Stock selection is most effective if the partnership with young people continues beyond the shopping trip. Think about involving young people in some of the following ways:

- **Designing publicity for the new collection – put stickers on the books to indicate that young people chose them**
- **Invite the young people to set up a display of the new books**
- **Invite the young people to a launch of the new collection – include refreshments and invite the press to make it a real event**
- **Ask the young people to borrow the books and write reviews about them for a display or for your website**
- **Involve the young people in backing the books if they have come from a bookshop**
- **Consider making a display of photographs and commentary on the book buying process**

Example:

The Fulfilling their Potential North West project (FtP NoW) gave Halton support to enter a new phase with BookingMad. Members of the group took part in planning a book-buying expedition, and were well prepared when they visited Borders with £2000 to spend. As well as buying manga, thrillers, science fiction and fantasy and other teenage books and CDs, they looked at display and stock ideas. As part of a subsequent event, they organised – and hugely enjoyed - a working party to label all the books purchased with labels they had designed themselves.

E2 Volunteer Activism: Training and recruiting staff

Involving young people in staff training and recruitment not only improves young people's skills and self-esteem, it also ensures that staff have the skills appropriate for the job of working with young people. Young people can contribute to designing job descriptions and person specifications, to interviewing prospective candidates and to training library staff once they're in post.

Preparing person specifications

Young people can be involved in deciding what roles library staff might play in relation to young library users and also itemise the qualities that library staff need to have. Be creative and ask young people to draw their ideal librarian, listing their attributes.

“The librarian at a local school was of great assistance. Pupils, both users and non-users of the library services produced a 'book display' of what the words 'library staff' meant to young people and designed their own 'perfect library worker.’” Tameside libraries

Selection

In integrated youth work settings it's not uncommon for young people to sit on interview panels. Obviously young people will need training for this role; but it sends out an important signal to any prospective applicants. If applicants aren't comfortable talking to a panel of young people, how will they fair running a reading group or homework club? Before employing young people in this capacity, think about how much weight you will give to their opinions. What if their choice doesn't converge with yours? Make sure that their opinions will be taken seriously.

Example:

A Young People's Services Librarian was appointed in Newham Libraries on the basis of staff conducting an interview (50%) and young people judging a 10-minute book presentation.

Training

Involving young people in staff training gives staff a valuable opportunity to see things from a young person's perspective and to listen to young people's views.

Young people can be involved in the planning of training, in leading training or can contribute to particular segments on e.g. young people's interests or on how

to talk to young people effectively. They can also take part in training alongside library staff contributing their ideas to group discussions.

Examples:

Young people in Tameside contributed to the planning of library staff training, giving ideas about how young people perceived libraries. They have also been involved in producing a DVD to assist with training staff when they are unable to be present.

Young people from the Derbyshire Book Pushers were involved in library staff training for HeadSpace and library staff valued the opportunity to talk directly to young people about how the project might develop.

During some Fulfilling Their Potential training, a 17-year-old trainer called Ellie Munro presented a session for library staff using Hear By Right.

“Ellie was really good. She got us to examine our attitudes to young people. She was inspirational.” Ellie Munro.

Participation Works has produced a guide to involving children and young people in recruitment and selection it can be downloaded from their website:

www.participationworks.org.uk

E3 Volunteer activism: Designing and planning spaces

“The colours really stand out, and the way we’ve done the shelves for the books and magazines and comics makes it really easy to find things. The seating is really relaxed too – we’ve got beanbags, so you can move them around and sit where you want to. At the opening I looked at it and it was so satisfying because we have been involved with it and it has worked!” Phoebe Hill, HeadSpace Lyme Regis

If you consult young people about how to improve libraries, the library environment is likely to be one of the first things they comment on. Young people who were inspecting Lambeth libraries made this observation of one local library:

“The walls inside needed repainting and the furniture needed changing because it was old. It looked quite dull and the ceiling was peeling.”

Young people also frequently complain about the low profile of young people's services, observing that there are usually areas customised for children and babies but not specifically for teenagers.

“We think there could be a designated teenage reference place separate from where the children's bit is, to help with studies or a space that is more just for teenagers with up-to-date books, films and magazines that would appeal to us.” Peer Inspectors, Lambeth

The Reading Agency's Big Lottery funded HeadSpace project has worked with young people across 20 libraries to develop youth centred spaces and creative positive activities. For more information about developing a HeadSpace for a new or refurbished library in your authority, see [The Reading Agency's website](#).

Benefits of involving young people in creating new spaces

Library makeovers are one of the most popular ways to involve young people in shaping services. The benefits of this approach include:

- a visible statement of the importance of young people's involvement
- a practical, hands-on activity that young people are likely to enjoy
- the creation of a new area that will be appealing and accessible to young people
- increased library membership and usage by young people
- opportunity to build lasting relationships between library staff and young people
- new ideas and fresh input that can be transferred to other library redevelopment
- a creative educational activity that is likely to appeal to teachers and youth workers who can provide young volunteers
- an opportunity to work in partnership with schools, youth groups and arts agencies

Creating the space

When creating a new space for young people, you are likely to go through the following stages:

- a) consultation about the current space
- b) preparation for changing the space
- c) development of the new space
- d) marketing of the new space
- e) celebration of the new space
- f) evaluation of the makeover project

g) programming of activities using the new space

See below for an explanation of these stages in detail.

a consultation

Any library makeover project is likely to begin with an assessment of the current space and consultation with young people. If you want your new space to be appealing to a wide range of young people, it is important to broaden your consultation group to include young people who don't currently use the library service. Youth partners can be particularly helpful in connecting you to your target audience and may have ideas about consultation activities.

b preparation

Once you know what kind of space you are trying to create, you will need to work with your young people to design the new space. This might include activities such as looking at colour schemes, collecting images of furniture and shelving and maybe purchasing stock. If you can afford it, it is good for professional designers to work alongside young people to develop the brief for the new space. For young people to have ownership of the project, you need to involve them at every stage.

c development

It may be that some of the work to develop the space needs to be handed over to professionals; however it is important to keep young people motivated as the practicalities of a library refit take place. If it isn't practical for young people to be literally painting the walls of the new space, think about whether they can be involved in designing signage or buying new stock. At the very least they can begin to plan marketing materials and make preparations for the launch.

d marketing

Unless you're working with HeadSpace (in which case some of this will be taken care of); young people should be involved in the naming and branding of the new space and in designing publicity. Remember that marketing doesn't just mean making posters. Work with young people to think about how to spread the word using social networking sites, grouphing.org, the local media and through school and youth work partnerships.

e celebration

A launch event provides a great opportunity to celebrate the young people's achievement as well as welcoming new young people to the space. Let young people plan the event. You could include any number of elements such as workshops, performances, speeches, presentation of certificates and refreshments. Show a video or provide a display showing other people the stages that the young people went through to create the new space.

f evaluation

At the launch event, you'll want to get feedback from visitors about the new space. You'll also want to evaluate the process that the young people went through to create the space.

g programming

Once the space is created, it is important not to rest on your laurels. Capture the interest of young people at the launch event and ask them what they would like to see the space being used for. Begin planning activities that use the space immediately. Let young people decide what they'd like to do next and involve them in planning a programme of activities.

Example:

The whole concept, design and branding of HeadSpace was created by young people through a range of consultation exercises. The original idea (and the name Book Bar) came from the Derbyshire Book Pushers. In further consultation with other young people, the concept was validated but the name was rejected by a number of young people who felt that the word 'book' could be off-putting to non-readers and that 'bar' could be off-putting to parents. Designers worked with teams of young people across the country to collect design ideas using the Internet and catalogues to create 'mood boards'. They also discussed a variety of name options with young people. Finally the designers came up with colour schemes and branding materials drawn from the ideas that young people presented. From four name choices, young people voted nationally to call the project HeadSpace.

Locally, teams of young people were involved in putting the finishing touches to the space, choosing from a range of furnishings that were in keeping with the national branding. Young people were also involved buying stock, in organising launch events across the country and in planning the activities that are now ongoing in each HeadSpace

For more information on involving young people in shaping library spaces, see the document: 'Tips for makeover projects'

E4 Volunteer activism: Planning programmes of events in the library

“Now with HeadSpace we've got our own section of the library for young people - we'll be having things like weekly night sessions where you can play music, and drama workshops and there will be youth workers you

can talk to confidentially. So it's got lots of things, and it's very different from an old-fashioned, quiet library!” Lowell Fachau, HeadSpace Lyme Regis

One crucial and enjoyable way in which young people can be involved in the library service is as programmers for young people's events. In the past, libraries have made the mistake of programming events in order to attract young people. Often this has led to low numbers and disappointment for staff who may have been genuinely excited about attracting new users. If we involve young people earlier and more completely in the planning process, we are likely to end up with events that are well received by the target audience and fulfilling for the young people who organised them.

Young people can be involved in planning activities and events on a one-off basis or as a long-term commitment.

“So, right from the start, the Rochdale Readers group has been directed by its members. Staff sit on their meetings, and provide refreshments, but otherwise it’s the young people’s show.”

Staff in Rochdale talking about their crossover reading group

As programmers of activities, young people can be responsible for:

- **Consulting with other young people to determine which events will be popular**
- **Planning and organising events**
- **Booking artists, entertainment and catering**
- **Managing the budget**
- **Attending the events to ensure that they run smoothly**
- **Gathering feedback and suggestions about events**

For more detailed information and training on developing a programme of reading based positive activities in partnership with young people see the Participate Creative Reading Module.

“Halton, as a deprived area, receives Splash money, which the library has spent on activities. Particularly popular was an anti-makeover, which saw young people (boys as well as girls) queuing to be turned into Goths; drama, rap and drumming workshops have also featured.”

Librarian, Halton

F) Volunteering: Leadership

Leadership roles will usually be appropriate to young people who already have some experience of volunteering within the library service. They can provide young people with valuable progression routes and also ensure that your service's commitment to young people's involvement is embedded at all levels. As young leaders, young people can be involved in inspecting and evaluating the library service, in advocacy and promotion and as advisors to management.

F1 Volunteer leadership: Assessment

A number of authorities have used the skills of young people to evaluate their services, assessing their current position and making suggestions for improvement. Some authorities have taken this further, involving young people in giving out quality marks when libraries have reached a certain standard in working with young people.

Example:

In order to achieve membership of the Investing in Children scheme, libraries in Durham have had to demonstrate that they have listened to and acted on the suggestions of young people. Consultation exercises have led to action plans and action plans have become activity. Young people continue to assess whether the library has done enough to warrant membership on an annual basis.

“The proof of success isn't demonstrated with new stock or the launching of the new teenage area, nor is it about statistics and boxes ticked; success is what young people say it is.” Durham, Investing in Children

F2 Volunteer leadership: Promotion

“We also made a presentation about the project to a conference of 200 people! We were very nervous but it was great and we got to go to London.” Sameeha Patel, HeadSpace Bolton

Young people progressing from other library engagement activities could be involved in promoting and advocating on behalf of the service with peers and wider local authority stakeholders. This is a powerful form of advocacy for your service as it gives credibility to the messages that you are making about your service and is clear evidence of the successful and positive relationship that the service has developed with young people. Libraries should be aware that this form of involvement is usually only developed over a significant period of time during which young people have developed clear knowledge and trust of the service. If trust is not established, it is possible for organisations to fall into the trap of only achieving

manipulation, decoration or tokenism when working with young people in this role. (See Hart's Ladder of Participation on the Participate website)

Activities young people could be involved in include:

- **Designing publicity for the library**
- **Creating web publicity and networks via e.g. groupthing.org and other social networking sites**
- **Media projects that promote libraries – making films on mobile phones for example, which can be uploaded on to groupthing.org and shown in the library.**
- **Promotion at professional conferences and seminars**

Example:

Young people from the Bibliotekz in Warrington and HeadSpace Haslingden spoke to a delegation of Heads of Libraries as part of Fulfilling Their Potential North-West. The Bibliotekz group spoke about their advisory and campaigning role for Warrington Libraries while the young people from Haslingden spoke about their roles as HeadSpace volunteers. In feedback, a large number of delegates said that the presentations by young people were the element of the event that they found most useful. Young people also said that they felt empowered and excited by the experience.

“I really enjoyed the young people’s presentations. I knew that libraries were starting to involve teenagers more in planning and delivering services, but only in a vague way. Hearing the young people from Lancashire and Warrington talk about their actual experience of volunteering in libraries made it more real.”

Senior library worker, Lancashire

Other activities include:

- **Representation on wider young people’s groups e.g. UK youth parliament**
- **Recruiting new volunteers from schools or youth groups**
- **Peer to Peer promotion**

Example:

The Book Pushers were teenage reading advocates who read and presented from books of their choice to a range of audiences to encourage wider reading amongst their peers and to spread the love of reading and use of libraries. The project arose from an East Midlands Reader development initiative encouraging staff from each authority to develop a project aimed at improving access to reading and libraries for teenagers. The Book Pushers project was managed by Derbyshire Libraries and started in January 2001 with auditions for reading

addicts aged 12-15. Young people were trained and develop skills in presenting books to a wide range of audiences. As well as their presentations in Derbyshire they have talked at regional, national and international conferences. The BookPushers came up with the idea for HeadSpace and were instrumental in seeing it develop.

F3 Volunteer Leadership: Advisory roles

Young people volunteering in advisory roles will shape services by sharing power in decision making on strategic service development. They will be involved in identifying service priorities, budgeting and scrutinising service delivery against targets and outcomes that they have taken part in setting. Activities young people could be involved in include:

- **Youth councils/forums**
- **Advisory or reference groups**
- **Committee places**

Example:

With the help of High School Librarians, Suffolk Libraries has established young people's advisory panels for a large number of the county's libraries. The young people's panels have met on a regular (sometimes half-termly) basis and have been able to offer their input into a whole range of library services through:

- Conducting image audits of young people's areas
- Contributing to library refurbishments
- Making suggestions for better guiding
- Selecting stock
- Suggesting magazines
- Promoting the service to other young people
- Contributing to the design of the 'teen zone' website
- Submitting reviews to the 'teen zone' website

Suffolk Libraries has found it challenging to manage so many panels over such a large, rural area and to maintain the motivation of the young people at times when there are no major issues to be debated. An evaluation of this initiative is underway and will recommend options for the future development of young people's panels.

Evaluating youth involvement

“The structure of the meetings has changed – what was originally carefully organised would now seem, to an outsider, to be rather chaotic. However, this reflects the fact that the group is now managed more by its [young] members - a real sign of their engagement.”

Jennie Archer on Halton's Booking Mad reading group

You could use the Youth Involvement Model in this document as a tool to help you evaluate the involvement of young people in your service over time, measuring the range of opportunities available to young people and the progression of young people through the Model.

For further information and a range of engaging evaluation methods you can use to assess impact, please refer to the Participate Evaluation Handbook and guidance on evaluation in the Making Change Happen website resources.

Conclusion

Developing young people's participation takes time, resources and the commitment of all library staff. Once these things are in place, young people's involvement can be embedded into the library service providing tremendous benefits for young people and also for the library building and its staff.

Services that have effectively worked to provide young people with a range of opportunities for involvement are vibrant places where young people feel valued and empowered to shape the libraries of the future.