

Participation Strategy

2023-2026



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Foreword

I am pleased to introduce this Strategy as participation is central to our work supporting children, young people and families in Lincolnshire. We are committed to listening to them and taking their views into account to achieve the best possible outcomes.

This Strategy sets out the principles, practice and strategic priorities for participation practice across Children's Services. Participation is very much part of our everyday work. This Strategy will help us not just to act on thoughts and feelings case by case, but also to use feedback as part of ongoing service improvement.

The Participation Team provides an important service in helping teams to develop their participation practice. This includes a review process to reflect on practice and ensure that the views of children, young people and families are used to the greatest effect.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "H Sandy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'H' and a long, sweeping underline.

Heather Sandy

Executive Director of Children's Services

“ There’s a radical - and wonderful - new idea here... that all children could and should be inventors of their own theories, critics of other people’s ideas, analysers of evidence, and makers of their own personal marks on the world. ”

Deborah Meier

Educator



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Introduction

This strategy has been written to ensure that Children's Services staff, and the wider children's workforce in Lincolnshire, have a common understanding of, and approach to, participation.

The Strategy begins with a definition to help ensure that there is a common understanding of what participation is. It goes on to explore why participation is important by looking at the Children's Services vision, inspection, legislation and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Participation is not done just to satisfy statutory duties. There are numerous benefits, both for Children's Services and those we work with. These benefits however, will only be fully realised when participation is part of who we are and how we work, not just at an individual level but throughout the organisation. Working to common principles will help make sure our participation practice is of a consistently high standard across Children's Services.

Ways of engaging with children, young people and families are described to help teams consider the best approaches for them. Different contexts will demand different methods, and sometimes more than one method.

The impact of participation activities on service improvement can be assessed through recording and monitoring. Auditing will help improve the participation practice of teams and identify common issues across the organisation which need to be addressed.

The Participation Team takes a strategic lead for the on-going development of participation practice across Children's Services.

2 Participation Defined

...the foundation is valuing the voices of individuals.

It is easy to make assumptions about what Children, Young People and Families (CYPF) think and feel. We need, however, to listen carefully and allow their views to influence what we do. This will lead to achieving the best possible outcomes.

Participation is about ensuring that CYPF are given opportunities to be involved in decision making processes on issues which affect them. It is not simply about seeking the views of CYPF, but acting on them as part of developing and improving what we do.

Participation is not just about working with CYPF on things which are high on our agenda. They must be given the opportunity to share their agendas. Sometimes participation is driven by staff, sometimes by CYPF. It should be happening at individual, local and strategic levels, but the foundation is valuing the voices of individuals. If we do not get it right on an individual level we will not get it right at a strategic one.

Participation is sharing decisions with those affected by them and must be an integral part of our work. It is not about giving groups or individuals whatever they ask for, and generally happens within constraints, including welfare, finance and the views of other stakeholders.

CYPF should, however, always have a degree of decision-making power so that they feel listened to and understood. We must always say what we plan to do as a result of hearing their views, and why.

...an integral part of our work.

Participation is a voluntary activity and not all CYPF will want to be involved. However, every effort should be made to encourage their involvement through the use of appropriate methods at venues and times to suit them, and making the benefits clear.



“ The young, no doubt, make mistakes; but the old, when they try to think for them, make even greater mistakes. ”

Bertrand Russell
Philosopher

3 Why Participation is Important

There are a number of key drivers to developing and embedding good participation practice.

LCC Children's Services Vision

'Putting Children First - Working together with families to enhance children's present and future lives' speaks of putting CYPF at the heart of planning and delivering services. They will be seen as experts and be involved in decision making, with their views being heard more clearly and acted upon where possible. They will have a real say in designing services.

...CYPF at the heart of planning and delivering services.

Inspection

Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers

An outstanding local authority is one where:

"...the views and experiences of children, young people and their families are at the centre of service design and influence development and strategic thinking."

Ofsted Framework and Evaluation Schedule, February 2019

Inspectors will look at how well children and young people are listened to, and want to see evidence that practice focuses on their needs and experiences and is influenced by their wishes and feelings. They will also look at how feedback from children and their families informs practice and service development.

Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

Inspectors will evaluate:

- ▶ how the local area partners work together to plan, evaluate and develop the SEND system, including the extent to which leaders actively engage and work with children, young people and families
- ▶ the impact of the local area partnership's SEND arrangements, including the extent to which children, young people and families participate in decision-making about their individual plans and support

Inspectors will take account of the extent to which:

- ▶ practitioners assess the strengths and determine the aspirations of the child or young person alongside their individual needs
- ▶ children and young people access impartial information, advice, and support that enable them to make informed choices about their future
- ▶ children, young people and families are supported to understand their rights, make choices and contribute to decision-making about their plans and support
- ▶ children and young people understand their plans and support, including intended outcomes, and why some changes are not possible

Area SEND inspections: framework and handbook, November 2022

Children's Act 2004

This places a duty on local authorities to know the child's wishes and feelings and take them into consideration during the child protection process, as far as is reasonable, practicable and in-line with the child's welfare.

Section 19 Children and Families Act 2014

Local Authorities must have regard to the:

- ▶ views, wishes and feelings of CYPF;
- ▶ importance of CYPF participating as fully as possible in decisions;
- ▶ importance of CYPF being provided with the information and support they need to help them participate in decisions.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018

References to the participation of CYPF in this guidance include:

- ▶ the statutory requirements for children in need include every assessment being informed by the views of the child;
- ▶ high quality assessments "involve children, ensuring that their voice is heard and provide appropriate support to enable this where the child has specific communication needs;
- ▶ every assessment "should draw together relevant information gathered from the child and their family";
- ▶ when initiating section 47 enquiries social workers should "see the child who is the subject of concern to ascertain their wishes and feelings; assess their understanding of their situation; assess their relationships and circumstances more broadly.

SEND Code of Practice 2015

Statutory guidance for organisations working with children and young people who have SEND. Local authorities must:

- ▶ make sure that CYPF are involved in discussions and decisions about their support and local provision;
- ▶ make sure CYPF are included in the Education Health and Care Plan needs assessment, are aware of opportunities to share their views, and are consulted about the content of their Plan;
- ▶ consult CYPF in developing and reviewing the Local Offer.

Children's Commissioner for England

Independent of Government and Parliament, the Children's Commissioner has unique powers to help bring about long-term change and improvements for all children, particularly the most vulnerable.

The role of Children's Commissioner was established under the Children Act 2004 which gave the Commissioner responsibility for promoting awareness of the views and interests of children. The Commissioner's statutory remit includes understanding what children and young people think about things that affect them and encouraging decision makers to always take their best interests into account. The Commissioner has powers to gather data and powers of entry to talk with children.

The Children and Families Act 2014 further strengthened the remit, powers and independence of the Commissioner, giving special responsibility for the rights of children who are in or leaving care, living away from home or receiving social care services.

The Commissioner speaks up for children and young people so that policymakers and the people who have an impact on their lives take their views and interests into account when making decisions about them.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The most complete statement of children's rights ever produced, and the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history.

Article 3

The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all actions concerning children

Article 12

Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously

Article 13

Every child must be free to say what they think and to seek and receive information of any kind as long as it is within the law



“ If you want to do something that really changes someone's life, the best thing you can do is make the person you're trying to help a participant in the process. ”

John Stahl-Wert

Entrepreneur, author, speaker, and authority on leadership development

4 Benefits of Participation

Benefits for CYPF

Relevant services which adapt to their changing needs and hopes

Feeling better about themselves and their abilities

Being seen and valued as citizens

Having a real say in shaping their own lives

Building on existing skills and developing new ones

Having opportunities to achieve accredited learning



Developing skills, confidence and attitudes that increase resilience

Benefits for Children's Services

Demonstrating a commitment to CYPF in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and current legislation and guidance.

Learning from CYPF about their:

- ▶ attitudes and behaviours
- ▶ needs
- ▶ aspirations
- ▶ views on what makes a quality service
- ▶ barriers to accessing services

Part of achieving an 'outstanding' judgement following Ofsted inspection



Services designed, delivered and evaluated based on actual rather than perceived needs

Fresh perspectives and new ideas

A significant contribution to ensuring the best use of limited resources

Fulfilling the Children's Services
'Putting Children First' vision



“ Children learn how to make good decisions by making decisions, not by following directions. ”

Alfie Kohn
Lecturer in education and human behaviour

5 East Midlands Participation

The views of CYPF need to be considered strategically.

The Participation Team is an active member of the East Midlands Regional Participation Leads Group (EMRPLG). The EMRPLG works strategically to improve participation practice across the region. This includes addressing the collaborative priorities agreed by the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance.

Participation is generally recognised as a good thing but is not always seen as part of day-to-day practice, and can be limited to clearly defined processes to fulfil statutory duties. The views of CYPF need to be considered strategically. To address this the EMRPLG developed the model below which was endorsed by the East Midlands Directors of Children's Services.



Each Local Authority has a Participation Manager or Strategic Lead who will:

- ▶ ensure that the voice of CYPF is at the heart of discussion and decision making at the highest strategic level;
- ▶ establish strategic priorities and plan participation activities to inform action plans;
- ▶ act as an advisor and auditor to ensure quality participation is taking place;
- ▶ collate and report on participation outcomes;
- ▶ share local priorities and plans with the EMRPLG to develop regional priorities and partnership working;
- ▶ deliver participation training.

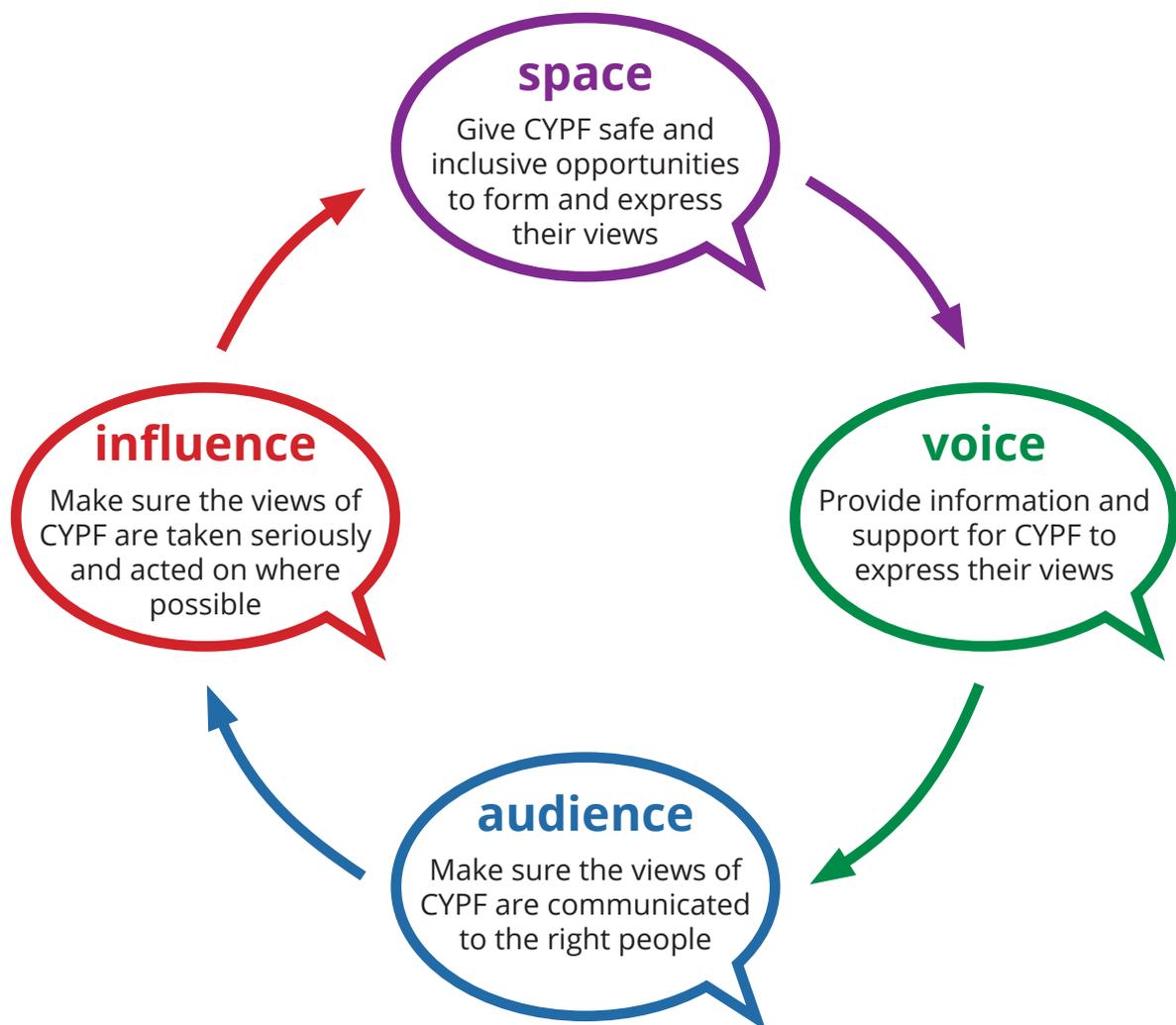


In each Local Authority:

- ▶ each service area develops a participation plan in response to strategic priorities;
- ▶ the Participation Manager/Strategic Lead monitors progress against plans;
- ▶ the service area lead demonstrates how participation practice has influenced service improvement.

6 The Lundy Model of Participation

Professor Laura Lundy is Co-Director of the Centre for Children's Rights and a professor in the school of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University, Belfast. In her 2007 paper 'Voice' is Not Enough, she proposed a model of participation based on four key elements - space, voice, audience and influence. The Lundy model has been adopted by national and international organisations and governments to inform participation policy and practice. The model is set out below.



Each of the four phases of the model has questions to help plan activities and reflect on them afterwards.

space

Give CYPF safe and inclusive opportunities to form and express their views

- ▶ Have the views of CYPF been actively sought?
- ▶ Is there a safe and accessible space where CYPF can express themselves freely?
- ▶ Are staff appropriately trained and supported?
- ▶ Have CYPF been pro-actively recruited from a variety of backgrounds?

voice

Provide information and support for CYPF to express their views

- ▶ Have CYPF been given the information they need to form a view?
- ▶ Do CYPF know their participation is voluntary?
- ▶ Are accessible and creative activities being used to help CYPF express their views?
- ▶ Is enough time being scheduled to delve into issues?

audience

Make sure the views of CYPF are communicated to the right people

- ▶ Are the right decision makers involved and engaged?
- ▶ Is there a clear and agreed process for communicating the views of CYPF?
- ▶ Do CYPF know the audience their views are being shared with, and what will happen afterwards?
- ▶ Does the audience have the power to make decisions?

influence

Make sure the views of CYPF are taken seriously and acted on where possible

- ▶ Have the views of CYPF been considered, and how was this recorded?
- ▶ Have CYPF been told how their views have influenced a decision, and if not, why?
- ▶ Is there a process in place for CYPF to hold decision-makers to account?
- ▶ When and how will CYPF see the impact of their participation?

7 Models of Engagement

Different models suit different situations.

There are a number of ways to engage with CYPF, some of which are described below. Different models suit different situations. It may be appropriate to use different models alongside each other. For example, the use of feedback forms may lead to more in-depth engagement with groups or individuals. While online methods have some advantages, physical meetings offer a different dynamic and remain vital to constructive engagement. It is essential to create an environment of trust, enthusiasm, genuineness and excitement.

Formal groups

Formal participation groups allow on-going dialogue with the same individuals over a period of time. These groups are therefore well suited to medium to long-term project work. Examples include:



Voices 4 Choices (V4C) is Lincolnshire's Council for Children in Care aged 8 to 17. It provides an opportunity for Children in Care to come together to share their views and experiences, and discuss ways of improving services. There is also a range of activities on offer. There is a group in each of the four localities.



Lincolnshire Youth Council meets to discuss issues facing young people in Lincolnshire and shares ideas and opinions with managers and councillors. Meetings usually include an activity.



Young Inspectors help organisations make their services more accessible to young people. They meet every month and carry out inspections during school holidays. Inspections include mystery shopping, observations, questionnaires and focus groups



Lincolnshire Young Voices is a group of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). It carries out research on issues faced by young with SEND, and works with various services to raise awareness and make improvements.

Informal conversations

There will be times when CYPF share their views during informal conversations, rather than during planned activities. These occasions are equally as important as planned engagement.

Big conversations

These are well suited to short-term projects and provide an opportunity for CYPF to share their views with senior managers and councillors, and to develop action plans. Progress against action plans is reported at the next gathering. Projects are only signed off when everyone is in agreement that work is complete.

One-to-one

Many of our services involve staff working one-to-one with CYPF. This will include conversations to help develop plans for individuals, but can also be used to help evaluate interventions and services as a whole.

Focus groups

When creating or evaluating a project or service a small group of CYPF can be brought together to gather their views. This also creates an opportunity for co-production, where CYPF are given more power and responsibility.

Feedback forms

Feedback forms are used extensively across Children's Services. Care needs to be taken to design forms which are easy to complete and will provide valuable information. Teams should be using standardised forms across localities to allow county-wide analysis. Care needs to be taken to develop forms which are short, easy to complete and provide useful information. Online forms allow anonymity even when completed in a face-to-face situation and make analysis, sharing and storage easier.

Collaboration

There are a number of examples of how teams across Children's Services collaborate with CYPF. These include Social Workers and Early Help Workers involving families when writing danger statements and safety goals.

Online tools

Online tools, including Let's Talk Lincolnshire and social media, provide the potential to engage CYPF in on-going dialogue and promote participation events and groups. Video conferencing cuts out the travel time and costs of bringing people together physically. The use of these tools needs to be carefully thought out and follow the relevant policies and guidelines.

8

Feedback and Participation in Action

The views of CYPF are captured across many teams and services and through a variety of methods. These include the use of the Council’s online ‘Let’s Talk’ engagement system, face to face group meetings, Young Inspectors activity, the Children in Care Council and surveys. The Children’s Services Stakeholder Engagement Group is responsible for collating participation and feedback activities and the table below highlights a selection including the resulting impact.

Service/Team	Method	Purpose	Impact
Strategic Commissioning	‘Mystery shopper’ review of online counselling service conducted by Young Inspectors	To identify what is, and is not working well, and what needs to happen	Informed improvements to current service and commissioning plan for future service
	Feedback from online forums	To identify issues and improvements required	Activities page created giving young people practical and creative activities. They can visit this at any time, including while they wait for a counsellor.
SEND Lincolnshire Young Voices (LYV)	Face-to-face and virtual committee meetings	To promote the views and feedback of children and young people with SEND.	LYV developed an online training resource to support professionals in communicating with children and young people with SEND. Ongoing completions of the training course with excellent feedback received
Early Years	Service observation	To observe the service and gather feedback from service users on effectiveness.	Feedback around improvement are shared with the supplier to embed into practice
Children in Care	MS Teams/telephone conversation	To feed into the re-procurement of the Independent Visitor Service	Informed the specification for the Independent Visitor Service

Service/Team	Method	Purpose	Impact
Children With Disabilities	Lincolnshire Young Voices facilitating peer-to-peer virtual Teams conversations with young people open to the Team	To hear directly from young people what's working well, what's not working well and what improvements could be made.	Feedback around improvement is shared with the supplier to embed into practice.
	Council's online engagement platform, 'Let's Talk'	To understand the impact of services	Views included in a wider review of services
Leaving Care Service	Face-to-face and via telephone/Skype	To help inform service development in line with needs and wishes of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. Develop understanding of services, deal with any concerns and capture compliments.	Learning sessions in conversational English, cooking and English culture. Film nights
	Day event/ focus groups	To make a video to raise awareness of supported lodgings and providers.	Providers and young people have a better understanding and awareness of supported lodgings.
Residential Care	'Chill and Chat' meetings	To gain the views and feedback from the young people	Changes to the daily running of the home.
	Incident report and de-brief direct work	Record incidents with evidence of discussion with young people and agreed outcomes	Fulfilling statutory requirement. Issues raised used to identify additional work
Early Help	Comments books, boards, boxes, online survey forms	An anonymous way for parents to offer comments and ideas	Parent feedback boards have been updated to make them clearer and more accessible to all.

Service/Team	Method	Purpose	Impact
Young Carers	'Check in - check out' discussions at all sessions.	To gather views of those attending group sessions to help develop support. To identify if further support is required after 18, and signpost.	All 16 - 18 year old Young Carers were contacted and offered a transition assessment to support their needs in to adult carers. Young Carers have increased confidence in the service and that they are able to influence and help build the support that is on offer. Development of a Young Carers' newsletter
Independent Chairs	Reg 44 interviews with children in care	Ensure the voice of child is heard regarding their care within the homes	Report produced with recommendations. Fed back to homes and OFSTED with review of actions. Actions are tracked from month to month and the home challenged if not progressed.
Participation Team	Young Inspectors Big Conversation	To give teams a young people's perspective on services. To give Children in Care and Care Leavers a direct audience with senior managers and councillors. Developing work and improving services	Inspection reports are produced with recommendations which are tracked Development of Living in Care Guide and the Caring Promise
0-19 Health	Random selection of 10 breastfeeding mothers and 10 artificially feeding mothers, with children under 6 months of age.	To ensure staff are trained appropriately and are utilising learning in practice to give correct advice and care. To assess level of parental satisfaction with care given.	Increased contact as an opportunity to advocate responsive breastfeeding

Service/Team	Method	Purpose	Impact
Virtual School	3 key questions as part of the PEP process	To get feedback on support provided by the Virtual School	Views have informed setting preferences, additional support and resources needed, and ensured consistency of Virtual School co-ordinator when a child has expressed a preference.
Liaise	Service user representatives on Liaise Steering Group Young Inspectors	To ensure that the service meets the requirements of the SEND Code of Practice 2015, and the IASS National Minimum Standards Provide a young person's perspective on the Liaise service and present use these findings to contribute to service improvement	Key partners and stakeholders have a strategic overview of Liaise, and support the service to deliver a high quality service that is both effective and responsive to need. New Liaise service presentation written for young people rather than adults, website content reviewed, and changes made to advice procedures when supporting a young person



“ Children are likely to live up
to what you believe of them. ”

Lady Bird Johnson
First Lady of the USA, 1963-69

9 Sharing Participation Impact

It is important to consider the outcomes of our participation practice.

Teams are expected to use You Said, We Did (YSWD) to record and share both formal and informal participation activity. It is important to consider the outcomes of our participation practice. YSWD helps with this by including impact and next steps. Examples of YSWD are collated by the Participation Team, with some being used on posters to help share good practice. The process and examples are given below.

Process



You said

CYPF share their views. This might be through feedback they are asked to provide on a service. Opportunity must also be given for CYPF to answer questions they are not being asked.



We did

A service responds to what CYPF say. Ideally this involves working in partnership to ensure that CYPF have been understood and the action taken meets the need in the most effective way possible. The action taken must at least be fed back to CYPF so that they understand the value of sharing their views. When it is not possible to take the action that CYPF want to see this must be explained so that they don't feel they are being ignored.



Impact

There will be impact for both CYPF and the service. This must be captured and reported, both internally and with CYPF. Reporting to CYPF will help them understand the level of influence they have. If there has been no impact alternative solutions should be explored with CYPF.



Next steps

There will be impact for both CYPF and the service. This must be captured and reported, both internally and with CYPF. Reporting to CYPF will help them understand the level of influence they have. If there has been no impact alternative solutions should be explored with CYPF.

Example 1 - Best Start Skills Development



You said

A parent said they would like to do an online course but did not have a suitable learning environment at home.



We did

A laptop and room was made available at a Children's Centre.



Impact

Parent has completed their Level 2 distance learning course.



Next steps

The parent will continue to be supported on their pathway, and this facility will be made available to other parents experiencing similar barriers to learning.

“ A person's a person,
no matter how small. ”

Dr Seuss



Example 2 - Children in Care Residential



You said

Young people asked to review and update the independence training programme. They wanted it to be more meaningful to them as individuals, and reflect their personal development.



We did

We worked with young people individually and as a group. A new system has been put in place which is reviewed monthly and allows young people to reflect on progress.



Impact

Monthly reports allow young people to see their progress and areas for improvement.



Next steps

Reports will be shared with social workers and supported accommodation to evidence skills.

Example 3 - Future 4 Me



You said

A young person shared that a barrier to her attending TAC meetings was that she didn't like the school representative.



We did

The Early Help Worker adapted the process, meeting with the school representative before the meeting and feeding back afterwards.



Impact

The young person is more engaged with the process.



Next steps

The Worker will continue to support the young person, adjusting the process as needed.

10 Strategic Participation Priorities

Our priorities for developing participation and engagement work will ensure that the views of CYPF are captured, listened to and acted on where needed to develop and improve our services:

Raise awareness of our participation groups

We will provide support and information to our teams and CYPF to help grow our participation groups. This will be done through meeting with teams to raise awareness of our participation activities, and to help them develop and evidence their engagement and feedback work.

Develop the participation and engagement of parents and carers

We will seek to develop mechanisms to improve how the views of parents and carers are captured in order to improve outcomes.

Develop the focus of the Stakeholder Engagement Group

The aims of the Stakeholder Engagement Group (SEG) are to:

- ▶ improve the consistency of practice around gathering CYPF feedback;
- ▶ ensure that CYPF are engaged in the design, evaluation and development of services;
- ▶ ensure that the voice of CYPF influences ongoing service improvement;
- ▶ share practice and learning;
- ▶ avoid duplication of participation activities.

A key activity for the SEG is producing an annual audit of participation activities. The Participation Team will ensure all teams are represented so that evidence is captured from across Children's Services.

Develop our feedback mechanisms

We will develop and embed a single, generic feedback form for use across Children's Services. This will allow wider collation and analysis of the views of CYPF, and how they have been acted on.

Training and support

In partnership with the East Midlands Regional Participation Leads Group, we will ensure that training and support are available to help teams with their participation and engagement work with CYPF. This will include embedding the Lundy Model of Participation across Children's Services.

Quality assurance

We will undertake audits and reviews to ensure that recommendations for change made by CYPF have been acted on, and to support teams with the development of participation practice.

Contact

If you would like to discuss your participation practice or invite the Participation Team to meet with you, contact:

participation@lincolnshire.gov.uk

**“ I raise my voice not so that I can shout,
but so that those without a voice can be heard. ”**

Malala Yousafzai
Activist for female education

