

Investing in Children and The National Youth Agency

Developing a Participation Strategy

Proposal for Portsmouth City Council

June 2008



The National Youth Agency

A participation strategy and implementation programme

1. Introduction

It is now widely acknowledged that children and young people must be seen not simply as **recipients** of services, but as citizens and potential **participants** in the development of policy and practice. This is a matter of both ethics – children and young people have rights; and pragmatism - engaging children and young people in a dialogue about the services they use leads to service improvement and better outcomes for children and young people. This is consistent with the Government agenda as laid out in **Every Child Matters**, and the philosophy that underpins the **National Service Framework** on health services for children.

Over the past five to ten years The National Youth Agency and Investing in Children have been exploring ways to promote the human rights of children and young people so that they are better able to fulfil their potential. Both agencies have focused on working with children and young people as active partners in this process. Both agencies have located their work within the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. And both agencies have sought specifically to assert the right of children and young people to be active participants in dialogue about decisions that effect them (article 12 of the UNCRC) and to develop strategies and processes to make this a reality.

It has been (and continues to be) the objective of both agencies to achieve change and improvement in the lives of children and young people, by promoting their human rights in this way.

The NYA and IiC are in partnership to offer interested public service and voluntary service bodies the opportunity of using Hear by Right and Investing in Children development strategy (including the Investing in Children Membership Scheme). By agreeing to bring the two programmes together, The NYA and IiC are seeking to create a more powerful and comprehensive tool that will harness the power of the organisational change model of Hear by Right and the crucial test of seeking the endorsement or otherwise of children and young people themselves that it has made a real difference to their lives.

This paper outlines proposals, and describes a collaboration between Portsmouth City Council, Investing in Children and The NYA which can build upon local successes and consolidate the participation of children and young people in local decision making. The proposals also address the issue of sustainability, and focus on the development of capacity within the agencies within Portsmouth itself, so that arrangements for the engagement of children and young people are located within a coordinated, strategic framework.

This proposed three-way partnership would be the first of its kind in England, developing new collaborations and shared learning, building on 10 years of experience from NYA on building in participation through the Hear by Right standards and from Investing in Children of externally validated membership through evidence from children and young people of dialogue and change.

2. About Investing in Children and The NYA

Investing in Children

Since the creation of the Investing in Children Development Agency in 2004, IiC has sought to support the creation of partnerships with public and voluntary agencies adopting the IiC Strategic Approach to Participation.

Like the NYA, IiC offers encouragement and support to agencies who wish to adopt this approach. A key part of this is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategy based upon evidence from and endorsed by children and young people themselves, that it has resulted in dialogue and change. This is the Investing in Children Membership scheme.

The IiC Membership Scheme is not self-assessed, but is externally validated. The Membership scheme exists at the level of the 'lived lives' of children and young people, and does not address issues of whole organisation change.

The NYA and Hear by Right

One of the primary means by which The NYA has sought to do this is by encouraging and supporting public and voluntary agencies to use Hear by Right.

Hear by Right is an organisational planning tool that assists agencies to create a map of organisational activity, from which an action plan can be devised. Agencies are encouraged to seek evidence of the effect of their action plan by recording the testimony of children and young people about what has changed for them. This is a self-assessment process. The NYA promotes its use, by providing support to agencies who wish to use it. The NYA does not externally evaluate or validate the success or otherwise of agencies who use Hear by Right.

3. The Investing in Children Development Agency

In 2007, The Investing in Children Development Agency and The NYA entered into a partnership in order to make the practice models more widely available, through forging a series of 'public-public' partnerships.

Put most simply, the intention is to 'franchise' Investing in Children and Hear by Right as widely as possible across public services (and possibly the voluntary sector too). The IiC Development Agency in partnership with The NYA will enter into contracts to assist prospective partners to create their own, franchised 'Investing in Children' organisation, based upon the foundations laid through Hear by Right. At the end of the development contract, the franchised Partnership will have acquired the capacity to maintain its participative strategy independently of the Development Agency, with one important exception.

The only threat to the original Investing in Children project in this process is that potential partners may dilute the principles of the initiative, and so undermine its overall credibility. For this reason, the only function that will not be franchised is the accreditation of applicants for IiC membership. By retaining this function, the Development Agency retains an important quality assurance mechanism.

The Investing in Children Membership Scheme is a kite-mark scheme, available to individual teams of workers or establishments providing services to children and

young people. Successful applicants are able to provide evidence of **dialogue** and **change**. The evidence must come directly from children and young people. A Membership Certificate is valid for one year, after which a re-evaluation will take place.

Over a three-year development period, the partnership will agree a programme of support services that can be provided locally or through IiC or The NYA. These will be provided on a tapering basis, with the emphasis being on creating self-sufficiency and sustainability within the partnership as soon as possible. The range of support services includes:

- (i) Policy consultancy. Providing strategic leaders and managers with evidence from research and practice to assist them to create and own the participation strategy, using Hear by Right to develop a map and implementation plan.
- (ii) Staff Development. Using an Action Learning process, develop the capacity of key workers within Portsmouth to have the values, knowledge and skills to promote the effective participation of children and young people and to be confident in using relevant NYA / IiC practice tools. (At the earliest opportunity, the partnership will offer a 'Training the trainers' course, and license Portsmouth practitioners to provide their own staff development programme).
- (iii) Practice Support. Experienced workers from IiC and NYA will work alongside Partnership staff, as they acquire confidence in their approach (for example supporting Agenda Days, Research teams, using Hear by Right etc)
- (iv) Accreditation of applications for IiC membership. As noted above, this is the only function which will not transfer to the franchised partnership at the end of the development period. (Local arrangements for the gathering of evidence will be negotiated, to ensure that the process is as cost-effective as possible.)

4. Principles for participation

There is a range of approaches to the engagement of children and young people, from consultative/survey mechanisms to structured representative models. The important issue is that the chosen approach should be based upon sound principles.

Investing in Children and The NYA have been part of a long-term national piece of work, funded by the Economic, and Social Research Council (ESRC) looking at the link between participation and social inclusion. The following guidelines are drawn from this work.

- Participation is about ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard. This is not necessarily the same as children and young people answering adult questions, but acknowledges that they will have valid ideas of their own.
- Participative practice needs to be concerned with issues that children and young people agree are important to them. Often a hierarchy of knowledge is

created, with priority given to the ‘important ‘ issues identified by adults. It needs to be recognised that children and young people are knowledgeable about the reality of their lives.

- Participation needs to be understood as a means to an end, in this case, improvement in service provision. ‘Taking part’ or ‘being consulted’ is not an end in itself (although it can often be presented as a box to tick) but becomes meaningful when it leads to change.
- Participative practice needs to be inclusive. Children and young people need to be supported to participate on their own terms. Often the more structured approaches favoured by adults preclude the participation of less confident, less articulate young people.
- Participation should be transformative, in that it successfully challenges the old-fashioned view that children and young people are objects of concern. (Edwards, Davis and others 2004, pp 103-104).

The best participative practice needs to take all of these issues into account.

5. Elements of a strategic approach

The following steps, when addressed together, are intended to assist organisations in the process of creating a strategy for participation:

1. Taking care of ‘politics’. Supporting children and young people to articulate a point of view is only effective if the people with the power to make changes are prepared to listen. Key leaders within the organisation need to be prepared to ensure that issues identified by children and young people are found a place on busy agendas. There is a risk that the strategy could become simply a series of projects. Most benefit will be gained if the strategy is coordinated, and different groups of staff (and different groups of young people) can learn from and support each other. The Hear by Right standards framework offers a tried and tested approach to enable organisations to build in children and young people’s participation rather than for this to be bolted on.
2. Creating activity ‘on the ground’. At the heart of the strategy, there must be opportunities for children and young people to develop their ideas, and to communicate these to the adults around them. In Portsmouth there are already a range of vibrant and dynamic participation initiatives. These may be added to with for example ‘Agenda Days’ and research groups or through young people leading on their Hear by Right priorities for their participation.
3. Developing sustainable in-house capacity. Practice support will be provided to workers across the organisation to develop **their** capacity to support children and young people. This is more sustainable than commissioning IiC / NYA to do this as external agencies.
4. Credible evidence of change. The Investing in Children Membership Scheme provides externally validated evidence directly from children and young people of dialogue and change. This can in turn be used to endorse progress under the Hear by Right participation standards.

5. Learning lessons and celebrating success and connecting with the wider world. An important part of the strategy is to ensure that everyone can learn from good practice, and that good practice is encouraged locally and nationally. At the same time there are lessons to be learned from other fields. It is important that work within this strategy can be seen within the broader context of children and young people striving to be heard within society. To support this, Portsmouth is entitled to two places on the IiC Partnership Board (one of which is reserved for a young person), sharing on the Hear by Right website and access to NYA and IiC national publications and dissemination of What's Changed and other good practice examples. It is crucial to the philosophy of the partnership that local practice informs and is informed by this emerging community of practice.

6. The Proposal

In order to realise the principles described in section 4, and to create the elements described in section 5, the following is proposed.

1. Portsmouth City Council is invited to enter into a public- public partnership agreement with Investing in Children and The NYA for a period of three years. By the end of this period, Portsmouth will have its own franchised 'Investing in Children' capacity, and will be part of a broader community of practice.

On entering into this partnership, Portsmouth will be asked to endorse the Investing in Children and NYA Statement of Principles. (See Appendix 1)

2. The Partnership will agree to provide, as required, consultancy, staff development and practice support to practitioners. The approach will be to avoid dependency, and promote sustainability, drawing upon best practice and expertise locally in Portsmouth.
3. Investing in Children will evaluate applications, and where appropriate award Investing in Children Membership Awards to individual projects or teams. (Membership is valid for one year, and then has to be renewed). This is the one area which will not be 'franchised'. Evaluation is Investing in Children's main quality assurance mechanism, and for this reason will be retained (although, as noted above, local arrangements for the gathering of evidence can be negotiated in order to keep costs down)
4. An individual from the Portsmouth partnership will be identified to coordinate this.
5. Resources will be allocated across the three years to pay for this. (A detailed contract will be drawn up, including costs)
6. Portsmouth will take up two seats (one to be occupied by a young person) on the Investing in Children Development Agency Partnership Board.

Reference: Davis, John and Edwards, Rosie (2004) Setting the Agenda: Social Inclusion, Children and Young People. *Children & Society* Vol 18 pp97-105

Investing in Children and The NYA

Statement of underlying of principles and expectations of all partners

Principles

- Children and young people are **citizens now**;
- As citizens, they have the **right** to participate in decisions that effect them;
- This places a **responsibility** on agencies to open up their processes and engage children and young people in dialogue;
- **Dialogue** is different from consultation;
- Children and young people know about what is happening around them (what they have referred to as their '**lived lives**').
- Dialogue should be aimed at bringing about **improvements** in their lived lives.
- The means of engaging children and young people must be **inclusive** and respect the **democratic rights** of all.

In becoming a partner, we expect partners to be able to demonstrate that:

- There is a clear strategy for developing, publicising and sustaining dialogue with all children and young people who wish to be involved.
- Responsibility for children and young people's participation is accepted collectively, across the partnership, and members of the partnership hold each other accountable for this.
- Children and young people are treated with respect and honesty, and their contribution is acknowledged as important.
- Children and young people have access to the agenda, and are able to initiate dialogue on issues identified by them.
- Key decision-makers make themselves available to talk and listen to children and young people
- Sufficient resources, including staff time, are committed to supporting children and young people to engage in dialogue.
- The process has resulted in change, recognised as significant by children and young people.