A NATIONAL VOICE

coram Voice)))
getting young voices heard

Stable Homes, Built on Love

**Empowering Voices
Participation Workers**

Stable Homes, Built on Love

What is Stable Homes, Built on Love?

The 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' strategy is the Government's plan for how to make children's social care work better. The strategy was published on 2nd February 2023 and sets out plans to:

- Address urgent issues facing children and young people
- Lay the foundations for whole system reforms
- Set national direction for change

A National Voice have been running a series of online sessions to talk to as many children in care councils and care leaver forums as possible about different areas of 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' and your ideas for an improved care system.

What we discuss will feed into the work the Department for Education (DfE) are doing to improve things for future children and young people.

We ran a session for participation workers who support participation and engagement within children's social care for them to share what is working well and what are the barriers to good participation and engagement.

Introduction

The session was for participation practitioners working with children in care, care leavers and other groups within children's social care for our upcoming engagement session, with The Department for Education.

This session included the Department for Education, who are keen to hear about participation and engagement work within local authorities with children and young people who are part of children's social care.

It was an opportunity to explore what is working well and what the barriers are to participation and engagement. It is also a chance to think about the future direction of participation and engagement within children's social care in light of the changes set out in 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' It was also an opportunity to ask the Department for Education about 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' any questions.

Who we heard from:

Banes
Barnet
Bath
Blackburn
Bournemouth, Christchurch
 and Poole
Brighton & Hove
Bristol
Buckinghamshire
Calderdale
Cumberland
Gloucestershire
Kent

Lancashire
Lincolnshire
Newcastle
North Lincolnshire
Northamptonshire
Oxfordshire
Royal Borough of Windsor
and Maidenhead
Rutland
Shropshire
Surrey
Swindon
Telford and Wrekin
Thurrock
Wirral

The Lundy model of child participation

This model was developed by academic Laura Lundy, Professor of international children's rights at the School of Education at the Queen's University of Belfast.

Her model, detailed in a 2007 publication in the British Educational Journal, provides a way of conceptualising a child's right to participation, as laid down in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.2 It is intended to focus decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision.

The four elements have a rational chronological order:

Space, voice, audience, influence.

The Lundy Model of Participation was prominently featured and endorsed by the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs in their recent National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015 – 2020).

Space
HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

Voice
HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

- Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

Audience
HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

Influence
HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

- Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?
- Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

Space

Relationships

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

- Giving the young person a support system where they don't feel alone.
- Our group of young people absolutely love attending and feel they can be themselves when they are there, we are now getting a few new ones attending now, and they make them feel so welcome.
- Young people say they feel connected and a part of something...
- Regular contact with the young people and an opportunity for them to develop new friendships.
- Young people tell us they have fun and that being in a group matters to them.
- Having social spaces/events helps young people to build confidence to give their views.
- Socials - increasing confidence and independence whilst building relationships.
- An opportunity to enhance confidence in services, to have an input!
- Young people feel comfortable knowing that the other young people in the room have had similar life experiences to them, they can open up more.
- Relationship-based engagement.

Engagement

- Hybrid engagement.
- Platform for meaningful engagement.
- Regular attendance of the groups. Their involvement with different activities locally and regionally.

Identity

- Young people say they feel connected and a part of something...
- Having social spaces/events helps young people to build confidence to give their views.

Space

Space

- Designated hub.
- Having a safe space to share thoughts and feelings.
- We have a "leavers lounge" where we hold different events, it's a nice area with a sensory room, x-box, sofa, facilities to make drinks, games etc.
- Safe space to share thoughts and feelings.
- Days with fun activities as a base are really popular, allowing us to reach more young people who don't attend meetings.
- Staff are creating younger groups so that YP are more prepared for expressing their opinions.
- In Kent, the children of foster carers can attend all of our activities and have their own participation group - Children Who Care - that feeds into our fostering service.

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

Communication

- Keeping in touch between formal meet ups.
- Virtual notice board linked to the core offer so young people can see what is happening during the year!
- Regular meetings with participation panel made up of our young people to discuss what they would like to happen.

Flexibility

- Expanding ways to engage - traditional Children in Care Councils, 1-1, small group, virtual, face to face bespoke feedback projects - findings ways that suit young people.
- Giving repeated opportunities in different ways to give views, asking what way works best for each person at different times (we can all change our minds!).

Space

Youth led

- Doing activities which are led by young people.
- Employing young people to engage with other care experienced young people to hear their views.
- Staying Close project has allowed for greater input from young people who have left care (who often have the clearest views on possible improvements).

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

What is working well with participation and engagement?

Voice

Identity

- Increasing confidence of young people.
- Growth with young people, interpersonal and group.
- A chance to empower!

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

- Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

Communication

- The young people feel they are listened to.
- Input from the voice of young people.
- Voluntary relationship with workers - not having to feedback everything young people say - they will tell us what they want passed on.
- We use a paper newsletter that goes out directly to children and young people. This bypasses the social worker.

Autonomy

- Young people decide what they want to be involved in.
- Young people knowing their rights and feeling able to stand up and have their voice heard.
- Have a say in their lives.
- Young people do want to express their views and be heard.

Systems & processes

- Having service request processes - so that consultation/project requests coming into the ICC's are shared with the young people and they then choose which the priority areas are.
- Opportunity to gain insight into the working of a council.
- Existing voice groups and the topics they are working on links into this.
- We are doing CIN and CP, CL, CICC and YP with SEND monthly groups, we have imbedded the Lundy model, we are doing a survey ever two years in all service areas, we are holding a big conversation.

Voice

Flexibility

- Variety of options and methods for young people to be heard in a way they are comfortable with.

Youth Voice

- Young people have increasingly developed views on issues in the care sector/their identity as care experienced (in part due to social media).
- Young people want to be involved in decision making, stay involved and see the output of their work. Time to build a relationships with the worker is the most important part. Putting good foundations in first.

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

- Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

What is working well with participation and engagement?

Audience

Systems & processes

- Engagement with Corporate Parenting Panel.
- Corporate Parenting training for councillors and other key decision makers.
- Having a dedicated participation coordinator in the leaving care team.
- Building relationships and connections with other organisations to provide a wide range of activities, experiences and opportunities.
- New opportunities and linking in with local enterprises, who can offer something different, for example we linked in with Sellafield to try out drones, virtual reality, programming, circuits.
- We have a voice of the child working group and log to track implementation of actions based on feedback and a regular newsletter to all young people to feedback improvements to close loop.
- We do practice week and young commissioners.

Co-production

- Partnership working.
- Meeting the adult influencers - people that can actually make the changes.

Audience

HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

Audience

Co-production

- Having young people meet with senior leaders on a regular basis helps profiles to be raised and things to change.
- A chance for young people to work directly with senior leaders and have an insight into their roles.
- Senior staff and policy makers are keen to hear children and young people's voices.
- Young people are being given the chance to connect with other young people in similar situations. Creating relationships and share with others who understand what it's like to be care experienced.
- Young people feel included.
- Children in Care Council host events for Corporate Parenting Group - chance to find out what life is like for care experienced young people.

Audience

HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

Influence

Systems & processes

- Young people have a direct say in our recruitment process.
- Recruitment and selection.
- We are improving services based on young people feedback.
- Recognition.
- Service delivery changes as a result of feedback from children and young people.
- OFSTED 2019 outcome instigated action plan and young people's voice was added in as a thread throughout it all. Also changes of senior managers etc. and changing links to Corporate Management Board - wider recognition of the Corporate Parenting role.

Influence

HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

- Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?
- Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

Co-production

- Utilising local influence and success as good practice nationally and in other local areas through regional forums.
- To see co-creation not tokenism!

Youth voice

- CSC engaging and listening to the voices and implementing changes.
- Young people co-delivering participation training across our local authority.
- Improvement of services involving the young people.
- Young people helping to write job descriptions for new workers and being involved with recruitment processes.
- We employ apprentice participation workers with lived experience of receiving services - they make a huge difference to our service.

Influence

Influence

HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

- Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?
- Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

Relationships

- Staff retention so the relationships and trust is built with young people so they feel supported.

Leadership engagement

- More impactful with senior leadership buy in; recognition of lived experience as a driver for change; involving elected members and educating re Corporate Parenting.
- Voices are heard, CSC are actively involved and making change based on the voices of our young people, staff retention means relationships and trust is built, regular groups for young people to share their voice.
- Some counsellors and lead staff want to hear young people's voices and do make changes as a result of their voice.
- Some senior staff and Council leads are very supportive of youth voice and will champion it.

What are the barriers to good participation and engagement?

Space

Funding

- Budgets.
- A bigger and same budget is needed for all participation and engagement services.
- Budget/Lack of funding to help with transport, reward incentives.
- Lack of funding to support enrichment and fun activities which help engagement with voice work.
- The barrier can be lack of funding.

Space

- Not enough safe spaces to use.
- Venues - where is best to meet with young people?
- Lack of spaces to meet, as funding is cut and buildings aren't open evenings and weekends to meet with the young people.

Staffing

- Having time due to other pressures and processes (- if you are not a dedicated participation worker, we all need to ensure participation).
- Sector staffing issues: when homes are short-staffed, participatory work gets seen as an unrealistic ideal; with staff teams changing the knowledge base on the importance of this work isn't built.
- More staff and the same staff in each area.
- Small team and huge service area.
- Reaching and engaging with those young people out of borough

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

What are the barriers to good participation and engagement?

Space

Stigma

- Young people not wanting to be labelled.

Transport

- Transport barriers for older young people.
- Accessibility - transport links - reaching out of area young people.
- Transport, young people getting to sessions and meetings.

Building relationships

- Takes time to build trust and confidence to share their experiences.
- Good engagement relies on strong and consistent relationships-sometimes the time and resources to build this relationship is challenging.
- For me it is important to put across to young people that we care and not make them feel that we are nagging. If you can build a relationship of trust they are more likely to engage.
- Youth workers in every area and a budget against that.
- Not managed by the right service.
- Retention - long term projects help groups form & develop relationships and gain the confidence to speak out and participate (interviewing job applicants etc.).

Tokenistic participation

- Tokenistic participation

Job opportunities

- More job opportunities for care leavers in the council.

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

What are the barriers to good participation and engagement?

Space

Recognition

- Recognition of the amount of time needed and skill needed to work inclusively etc.

Needs of young people

- Young peoples' varying needs, mental health, anxiety, lack of communication from carers/social workers/other personal advisors/ hostility to being in care from young people/ resources/ lack of interest.
- Other commitments, especially of younger children in care.

Timing

- Not approaching a young person for participation at the right times. It is important to try to be flexible around their schedule and understanding their schedule and/or personal goals.
- Too many last minute requests for engagements when an officer 'remembers' they ought to have consulted young people.
- Meetings held during school hours.

Foster carers

- Carers/parents using the service as free childcare as opposed to a young person understanding and wanting to participate.

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

What are the barriers to good participation and engagement?

Voice

Communication

- Miscommunication or messages not being passed on.

Support to young people

- Young people not engaging or knowing.
- Same voices being heard and others not.
- Young people not being made aware/encouraged to get involved.
- Reaching out to young people who have never attended anything before.
- Information being sent to foster carers/homes and them not passing it on as they feel the groups aren't for their young person, not asking what the young person wants and if they want their voice heard.
- Colleagues making assumptions on whether or not the young people they support would be interested in engaging with participation and engagement service.

Contacting young people

- Not having the same access to young people's details to share opportunities with them as other teams who don't encourage voice or pass on the message.
- How do we engage beyond the core group of attendees coming to sessions? How do we reach those young people in care who are living out of area? Especially when they don't want to meet virtually...

Covid-19

- Pandemic knock on effects: culture of group activities having to be rebuilt.

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

- Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

What are the barriers to good participation and engagement?

Voice

Trauma

- Risk of re-traumatizing young people by bombarding them with consultation requests that push them to re-live their experiences. Getting the right balance can be hard but is key.

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

- Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

Tokenistic participation

- Participation being on systems like a box the capture the voice of the child.
- Deciding at what point views are representative enough to make significant changes...
- Letting young people lead and accepting as professionals that some things might fail or might not go to plan and that that is ok.
- CiCC gets lots of requests - do we get the balance right with young people and the issues they want to lead?

What are the barriers to good participation and engagement?

Audience

Understanding

- Participation service not being supported/understood by colleagues
- SW and PAs understanding participation so they can correctly inform young people to support them to get them involved.
- Staff training.

Who's role is participation

- Participation and voice work being seen as the participation team's sole responsibility.
- Participation being seen as just the role of participation workers.
- 'Additional' responsibilities.

Foster carers

- Foster carers own negative perception of voice work preventing them supporting the young people in their care to be involved.
- Carers needing childcare, and not helping with transport, which then ends up a consultation being costly?

Audience

HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

What are the barriers to good participation and engagement?

Audience

Contacting young people

- Some social care staff act as gatekeepers and don't share opportunities for young people. Young people face complexity in their lives and in relationships with adults / other young people which impact on their participation.
- Trying to get those who are disillusioned with 'the system' after multiple social workers, broken agreements and just feeling unheard, to participate (what will be different?).
- Participation Team not having 'direct access' to all children and young people - having to rely on overly busy frontline colleagues who don't have the time to be responsive.
- Lack of support from PA's and SW - possibly due to their own workload.

Not feeling listened to

- Young people not feeling listened to by Corporate Parenting Board.
- Working for the council.
- Lack of Senior Management Team buy in.
- Management want us to be flexible to do the work but aren't flexible to meet with the young people to get feedback or complete joint working.

Time

- Action on voice can take a long time so young people don't always see results.
- Systems building in work with young people early - understanding it takes time that need to be built in around the desired timescales.

Audience

HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

What are the barriers to good participation and engagement?

Audience

Other

- Collating voices from multiple sources e.g. IRO review and foster care review along with Bright Spots survey is needed but capacity and expertise is lacking.
- Changes of staff.
- Some schools are increasingly separating from participation in Local Authority led activity.

Audience

HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

What are the barriers to good participation and engagement?

Influence

Feedback loop

- Not completing the feedback loop so young people get fed up with being asked the same questions but never hearing back on any changes.
- Systems incorporating feedback to young people - understanding the whole process, not just consultation.
- Not receiving enough feedback on project outcomes or learning about the impact the young people have had. This can then feel tokenistic and can reduce young people's motivation/involvement in future project work.

Funding

- Virtual schools get a huge budget from DFE why doesn't participation get the same for each area.

Influence

HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

- Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?
- Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

What would you want to happen now (in the next 2 years)?

- More safe spaces for young people to be able to meet.
- More safe spaces, more funding and more staff to gather more voices!
- Bigger budget for participation.
- Bigger team and budget.
- Training material produced about participation to be delivered to wider staff.
- Participation and engagement embedded in all services.
- Budget and staffing for each area that is the same so we are consistent across every area.
- More consistent participation offers/practices across local authority, modelled on the most impactful (Wandsworth's CLICK a really good example).
- Young people to be consulted at every level and throughout decision-making processes about their lives. Participation doesn't end after a consultation, it is ongoing and consistent.
- Children in Care teams to not see participation workers as the enemy!
- More focus on lived experienced leaders taking up roles in participation and engagement.
- Not a cliff edge for care leavers. Care needs to end at 21 with a step down approach from 18 with cares they know.
- An overview of what's changed across the country as a result of young people's views being heard.
- Better relationships with placements so they understand the importance of CLA attending CICC.
- More understanding from foster carers, social care and other youth work teams on the importance of voice work and more encouragement from them to our young people around voice.
- More investment financial, skills building and time for staff to really create and maintain positive relationships and build the confidence and skills of the children and young people to feel and be heard.
- For all CLA and Care Leavers to be informed about opportunities to engage and participate in participation and engagement. For them to get involved, feel empowered etc.
- Management to take the young people voices seriously and take action!
- Data and digital solutions to collate children's voices local level feeding into a national level.
- To see co-creation starting with services - move from consultation.

What would you like to happen in the future (in the next 10 years)?

- Participation to be embedded into everything and not just tokenistic.
- Young people engaged now taking the leadership and decision making roles asking for their views now.
- Care leaver led participation champions.
- For barriers previously been shared to have been overcome.
- For our lived experience young people to be given more opportunities within participation.
- Engaging children and young people being a part of standard practice across the country wherever services impact them.
- For everyone to understand what participation is!
- Participation and engagement embedded in all services.
- Greater pathways for young people who engage in participation work to careers in social care.
- To have co-creation of services.
- A national voice from children through youth work in all areas with the same size team and budget. Groups for CIC, CIN and CP, C & YP with SEND needs, CL and Youth Councils.

Additional Comments:

Sounds like you are all doing some amazing work in local authorities - what would be helpful do you think for a national board to focus on to complement the views being captured at a local level? Good question [anoynmous]! I think asking people to represent their local context so local views can be fed back would be great. We do that with CLNM and House Projects and it works well. You just have to ensure children and young people collect other people's views before coming along.

Another aspect to consider might be asking the group to do some peer research - CLNM just completed their most recent peer evaluation and it has been so helpful for us as a charity.

It's really helpful to see we all have many shared challenges / experiences - I agree - should be a team and budget for each area that is the same.

There has to be something in it for the young people - I agree not just using them!

Additional Comments:

Youth work needs to come back.

Young people in care leavers national movement deliver training to all new house project staff twice a year. They design and deliver the training. The training focuses not only on what they need from staff to be able to participate in developing services but the importance of co-production too and the wider impact this can have on their lives.

Local Authorities are also OFSTED focused so wonder if this impacts on practitioner's time to think about this, set in context of neoliberal policies!

We had 10 young people do the total respect training, it actually ended up bringing back trauma for one of our young people, the lady delivering it wasn't great at all.

Key messages to policy teams :

- Social workers and other professionals don't understand participation and engagement, and see it as the responsibility of participation workers. Training is seen as key to support professionals understanding.
- Working with the Corporate Parenting Panel was highlighted as a success
- Children and young people being involved in recruitment and selection processes was highlighted as a success.
- Participation and engagement is relationship based.
- Hybrid working has increased engagement with young people out of county and that don't want to engage in person.
- Participation workers are able to show evidence of participation and engagement including services being improved due to children and young people's feedback.
- Participation workers believe that the children and young people involved in participation and engagement benefit by increased confidence, skills development, fun and making friends.
- Senior leaders being supportive of participation and engagement is really important.
- Participation workers believe that lack of staff, resources and funding prevents good participation and engagement.
- Participation workers believe that having safe spaces for children and young people to support engagement is important.
- Participation workers feel that young people don't want to be labelled which prevents them for participating.
- There needs to be a push from central government about participation, including providing budgets and guidance.

coramVoice)))
getting young voices heard

Coram Voice, Coram Campus, 41 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AZ

Tel: 020 7833 5792
Email: ANV@coramvoice.org.uk