

## **ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **Introduction**

Leicester LSCB is committed to developing a safeguarding system that supports children and young people to be engaged participants in their own lives. Participation is a right, not an option and children report that we could do it better. Although it can be a challenge to balance children's and young people's protective needs with their need to have a say, it is crucial that the voice of the child is central in our practice.

Legislation and guidance enshrine their right to participation in decisions about their own lives and research shows that supporting them to make informed decisions improves outcomes in terms of self-confidence, social skills and positive life choices. As well as improved individual outcomes, participation results in improved services. Involving children and young people in decision making processes is a responsibility shared across agencies.

We need to create opportunities for young people to make meaningful contributions and include them in governance arrangements. Our approach will be to build a culture that supports and values participation; develop structures; strengthen practice and establish review processes so that we can evaluate the impact of participation on outcomes.

### **Vision:**

All children and young people in the safeguarding system shaping:

- Their lives now and for the future; and
- The services and support they and other children and young people receive.

All children and young people have a right to participate in decision-making about their own life.

This is not limited by ability, age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and pregnancy and maternity and other personal circumstances or behaviour. Specific skills and processes are required to facilitate the participation of the most vulnerable and least 'heard' children in our services including the very young, children with learning disabilities or communication difficulties

Children and young people will also have increased opportunities to express their views, and have these views meaningfully considered, in discussions about the type of services they and other children and young people receive.

### **Objectives:**

- To develop an organisational culture of valuing children and young people's views and being proactive in facilitating their participation;

- To grow the number of children in our services who report that they have had opportunities to participate in decisions about their own lives and that they are satisfied with the process and the effect of their participation;
- To expand opportunities for children and young people to have a say about the nature and delivery of services to themselves and their peers;
- To ensure that structures are in place to embed best practice relating to engagement and participation in all the LSCB's work, including programme and task and finish groups;
- To provide a framework for organisations to effectively involve children and young people in the development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their lives;
- To make services more responsive to issues affecting children and young people;
- To promote a joined up approach to participation between all partner organisations;
- To encourage practitioners to develop and embed participation in their service area, department or organisation;
- To develop and embed a simple framework for monitoring and evaluating participation within the LSCB governance and within LSCB Member agencies.

## **What is participation?**

The LSCB have agreed the following definition:

*"Participation is a process where someone influences decisions about their lives and this leads to change." (Treseder, 1997)*

The participation of children and young people can be focused on matters and decisions that relate to them as individuals or to them as a group.

Participation is most usefully viewed as a multi-layered concept depending on the uniqueness and diversity of the child or young person involved, the matters being discussed and the decisions being made. (Appendix B has examples of partnership models/activity).

Participation is an ongoing process of engagement and involvement not an event.

Trust and positive relationships between adults and children and young people are essential to effective participation.

*Source: Treseder, P. (1997) Empowering children and young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision-making. Save the Children.*

## **Benefits for children and young people:**

- Direct improvements in their own lives and life chances e.g. improved services;

- The possibility to protect themselves and challenge abuses of their rights, either directly or through informing a responsible adult;
- Enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem;
- Personal, social and political development through practical experience and the opportunity to learn how to exercise responsibility;
- An opportunity to acquire and expand their skills, including problem-solving, negotiation and communication skills;
- Familiarisation with group and democratic processes, including understanding different points of view, the need for compromise and a sense of responsibility for group decisions;
- A sense of purpose and competence in their own lives - a belief that they can
- make a positive impact on their own lives and on the lives of their peers, family and community;
- An opportunity to learn and practice the skills of responsible and active citizenship.

### **Benefits for organisations:**

- Enhances relationships;
- Increases the organisation's relevance to children;
- Children and young people bring a fresh perspective and innovative ideas;
- Improves the organisation's ability to achieve outcomes;
- Assists organisations to effectively target funds and services;
- Enhances an organisation's credibility and reputation;
- Offers organisations a wider variety of perspectives;
- Improves organisational systems;
- Helps build capacity and sustainability within an organisation.

### **Benefits for families and the community**

- Improved parenting and relationship skills;
- Children become innovators and creators within the community and not just end-users Communities become more aware of how valuable its children and young people are, and of their needs;
- Community is valued by children and young people when they have a sense of ownership and involvement;
- Children become more aware of local democracy.

### **What are the barriers to participation?**

- The circumstances that bring children into contact with the safeguarding system can lead to adults adopting a 'protective' role that has the unintended;
- Consequence of excluding their views through well-intended efforts to spare them further trauma. In turn, children may accept this approach because they lack; confidence and self-esteem and have no expectations that their views will be listened to;
- Attitudes toward children and their capacity to be involved in decision-making relationships between children and young people and those people involved in making decisions about them;
- Structures and processes used by adults for decision-making;
- Lack of understanding of what participation means and lack of information;
- Lack of consistency in approaches;
- Capacity of those involved in working with children and young people and the resources necessary to support participation.

**Links with other strategies:**

This strategy will operate within the LSCB community engagement and communications strategies and alongside the work to promote partnership and participation of families.

**Reporting mechanisms/review of strategy**

This strategy has been developed in accordance with the LSCB Business Plan and will be reviewed and evaluated annually. Progress of the implementation/action plan will be reported quarterly to LSCB Executive.

### Relevant legislation/research

#### United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The following are guiding principles derived from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

- Children have the right to be listened to, to freely express their views on all matters that affect them, and the right to freedom of expression, thought association and access to information.
- Measures should be put in place to encourage and facilitate their participation in accordance with their age and maturity.
- Participation should promote the best interests of the child and enhance the personal development of each child.
- All children have an equal right to participation without discrimination.
- All children have the right to be protected from manipulation, violence, abuse and exploitation.

The principles recognise the potential of children to enrich decision-making processes, whose perspectives add value to the process of change. Thus authorities have a statutory obligation to ensure that their services for young people have accounted for the opinion of the young person. Participation is a legal requirement of the work Local Authorities undertake.

#### Working Together 2015

A child-centred and coordinated approach to safeguarding

Key principles

Effective safeguarding arrangements in every local area should be underpinned by two key principles:

- safeguarding is everyone's responsibility: for services to be effective each professional and organisation should play their full part; and
- a child-centred approach: for services to be effective they should be based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of children.

A child-centred approach

- Effective safeguarding systems are child centred. Failings in safeguarding systems are too often the result of losing sight of the needs and views of the children within them, or placing the interests of adults ahead of the needs of children.
- Children are clear what they want from an effective safeguarding system:

Children have said that they need:

- Vigilance: to have adults notice when things are troubling them
- Understanding and action: to understand what is happening; to be heard and understood; and to have that understanding acted upon
- Stability: to be able to develop an on-going stable relationship of trust with those helping them
- Respect: to be treated with the expectation that they are competent rather than not
- Information and engagement: to be informed about and involved in procedures, decisions, concerns and plans
- Explanation: to be informed of the outcome of assessments and decisions and reasons when their views have not met with a positive response
- Support: to be provided with support in their own right as well as a member of their family
- Advocacy: to be provided with advocacy to assist them in putting forward their views

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 protects children, young people and adults against discrimination, harassment and victimisation in relation to housing, education, clubs, the provision of services and work.

The public sector equality duty in Section 149 of the Equality Act requires public bodies, including local authorities, schools and hospitals, to take active steps to eliminate discrimination and to do positive things to promote equality.

The Childcare Act 2006

“To have regard to the views of young children in the design, development and delivery of early childhood services”...

“school governing bodies in England and Wales to involve children in the development of school behaviour policies”

Children and Families Act 2014

This Act brings changes to the law to give greater protection to vulnerable children, better support for children whose parents are separating, a new system to help children with special educational needs and disabilities, and help for parents to balance work and family life.

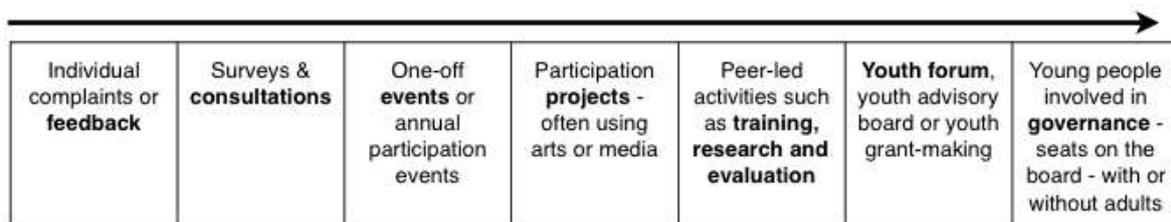
Ofsted

At every stage of the child's journey, the inspection will evaluate the effectiveness of:

- The focus on the interests of the child
- How well all partners take account of children's wishes and feelings and the extent to which this informs their care.

### Models/Approaches to Participation

There are a range of ways in which children and young people’s participation can be promoted



#### Four approaches to participation (Wilcox, 1994, Kirkby 2003)

No one approach is assumed to be better than another.

The appropriate degree of participation will be determined according to the matter under discussion or decision being made, and the circumstances and capacity of the children or young people concerned.

**Consultation** – children and young people’s views are taken into account: the information children and young people provide (whether volunteered or sought by adults) is one source, amongst others, that adults use to make a decision. The children/young people are not involved in implementing any decisions.

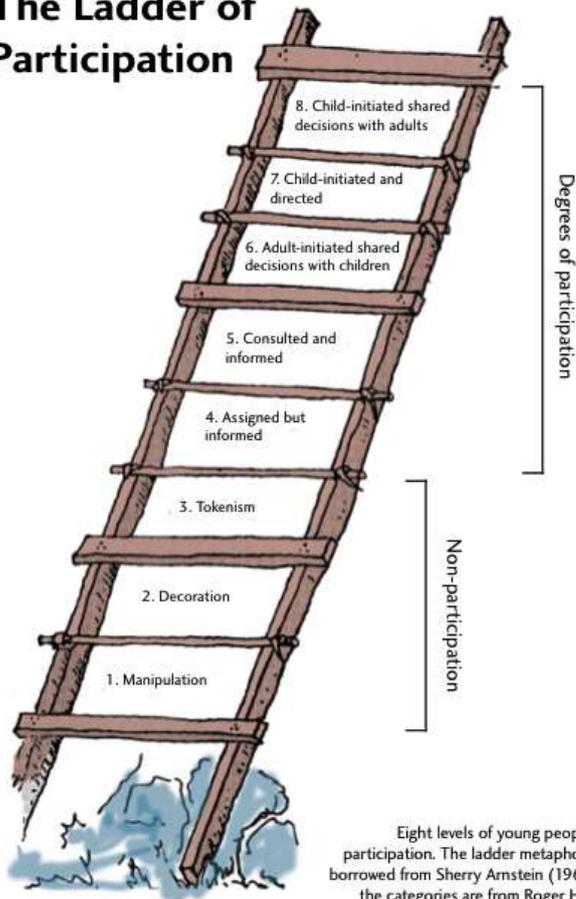
**Deciding Together** – children and young people are involved in decision-making: children/young people and adults discuss their views, identify options and make a decision together. The adult in the process holds ultimate responsibility but children and young people steer decisions. Adults are most likely to implement any decisions.

**Acting Together** – children and young people share power and responsibility for decision-making: children/young people and adults decide together and take action to implement the decision together.

**Supported** – children and young people make autonomous decisions: children and young people make their own decisions and carry out the actions with the support of adults. This may still be in a framework of adult structures, processes and resources.

## Hart's Ladder

### The Ladder of Participation



It is important that youth participation is meaningful - and that it involves a genuine opportunity for young people to influence decision making and bring about change. Meaningful participation is more than just consultation - where young people are asked their views - but adults retain all decision making power.

The different degrees to which participation involves adult power, or shared decision making between young people and adults can be shown on Hart's ladder of participation - ranging from the manipulation of young people on the bottom rung - to young people and adults working in partnership on the top rung.