

participation

DRAFT



children strategy & charter

2012 - 2015

*Improving outcomes
through active listening*

Introduction

This strategy and charter have been developed by the Active Citizen Team (ACT) in partnership with children. They have been endorsed by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP).

For the purposes of this strategy and charter children are defined as those aged 0-19 years, and those aged 19-25 who are accessing the leaving care service or who have a disability.

Participation Strategy

The Strategy provides a framework for the participation of children in Lincolnshire. Listening to and acting on the views of children is essential for the development of relevant and effective services. This applies to services provided uniquely to children and those provided to the community as a whole.

Participation Charter

The Charter gives organisations, and teams within organisations, the opportunity to express their commitment to four key principles of participation:

- * Children have equal opportunity to be involved
- * Children are valued
- * The involvement of children is a visible commitment which is properly resourced
- * The involvement of children is monitored, evaluated, reported and improved

What is Participation?

Participation creates opportunities for children to be involved in decision making processes on issues which affect them. It's about listening to what matters most to children and taking their views seriously. It's not just about consulting them on matters that are high on adults' agendas. Participation is a right not an optional extra.

Participation is not a token-gesture towards involving children. It is not 'ticking the box' to impress OFSTED or to help secure a funding bid. It is not the same as consultation, which

is just one method. It is not about always requiring children to engage in adult structures in order to be heard and taken seriously.

Participation is not always easy and it cannot be rushed; some children require more time to think and say what they feel, and some need more support and different methods to choose from and use. Participation is not a 'bolt on' to our work with children, it must be at the heart of it. It is not always formal, and it is not always about groups of children.

Definition

The process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship.

Roger Hart 1992

Benefits of Participation

There are many benefits of involving children in decision making processes, to both children and the organisations which engage them. These include:

For children

- * Better and more relevant services
- * Services which are more flexible and responsive to needs and aspirations
- * Opportunities to build on existing skills and develop new ones
- * Opportunities to achieve accredited learning
- * Increased confidence and self-esteem, leading to greater resilience
- * Being valued stakeholders in their communities
- * Promoting a positive image of children

For organisations

- * Learning from children as citizens and customers about their:
 - * Attitudes
 - * Needs
 - * Aspirations
 - * Views on what makes a quality service
 - * Barriers to accessing services
- * Fresh perspectives and new ideas
- * Services designed, delivered and evaluated based on actual rather than perceived needs
- * Demonstrating a commitment to children in line with the aspirations of the Big Society agenda

Benefits

Participation Structures in Lincolnshire

Active Citizenship Team (ACT)

- * A sub-group of the CYPSP
- * A cross-sector partnership of professionals which meets bi-monthly
- * Provides the support, challenge and co-ordination for participation in Lincolnshire
- * Works to achieve and maintain representation from key children groups in the statutory and voluntary/community sectors
- * Has a membership which is expected to actively contribute to the participation agenda in Lincolnshire, acting as champions within their own organisations, teams and services
- * Shares good practice and information on planned activities, research, funding and opportunities for partnership working

Children and Young People's Voice (CYPV)

This children's group meets with the CYPSP on a regular basis. It is made up of representatives of the following groups:

- * Lincolnshire Youth Cabinet
- * V4C – the Looked After Children Council for Lincolnshire
- * Action for Young Carers
- * Rural Youth Forum
- * Children with Disabilities



CYPV

Meeting to prepare for their next meeting with CYPSP

Participation Team

Lincolnshire County Council's Participation Team exists to embed and develop participation across the Council and its commissioned services. It supports the Lincolnshire Youth Cabinet, V4C and CYPV. You can contact the Participation Team by e-mail:

participation@lincolnshire.gov.uk

The Participation Team is represented on the East Midlands Participation Leads group. This group meets to share good practice and has established a working relationship with the Directors of Children's Services (DCS) in the East Midlands. It has an agreement to produce three best practice documents, commissioned by the DCS group, each year.

The Context for Participation

Local

Children and Young People's Plan

The aim of the Plan is to ensure that all children are given every opportunity to thrive and prosper. It sets out the priorities of the CYPSP for children in Lincolnshire:

- * Safe and protected
- * Community aspiration
- * Tackling poverty
- * Happy and healthy
- * Learning and achievement

These priorities were agreed after consultation with partners and stakeholders, including children. While participation cuts across all five of these priorities it is explicitly referred to within community aspiration:

Priority

Priority - Community aspiration

Key task

We want to empower citizens to be engaged in shaping and delivering services to improve their communities

Children's Plan

National

Positive for Youth, 2011

Positive for Youth is a new approach to cross-Government policy for children aged 13-19 in England. It sets out a shared vision for how all parts of society can work together to support families and improve outcomes for children, particularly those who are most disadvantaged or vulnerable

The Government urges relevant bodies in every area to involve children in making decisions about council, health, transport, and other relevant services. It wants to see every area having arrangements for young people to audit

the quality of these services. Funding is being provided to the British Youth Council in 2011-2013 to set up a new national scrutiny group of representative young people to advise Ministers across Government directly on how policies affect children and their families.

The Government will work with children to review progress in realising the Positive for Youth vision and in improving outcomes for children.

The Munro Review of Child Protection in England

The Munro Review made a number of recommendations to reform the child protection system from being over-bureaucratised and concerned with compliance to one that keeps a focus on children, checking whether they are being effectively helped, and adapting when problems are identified. Participation is most overtly referred to in Recommendation 3:

The new inspection framework should examine the child's journey from needing to receiving help, explore how the rights, wishes, feelings and experiences of children and young people inform and shape the provision of services, and look at the effectiveness of the help provided to children, young people and their families.

Ofsted

Framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children - January 2012

Views of children, young people, parents and carers

As well as listening directly to children, young people and their families, inspectors will take into account any available evidence held by the local authority that demonstrates how the views of children, young people and families or carers have been taken into account in the evaluation, development and design of early intervention and child protection services.

Conducting inspections of children's homes - January 2012

Listening and talking to children and young people

The views and experiences of children and young people who live in or stay at the children's home are at the centre of the inspection and provide key evidence in assessing outcomes against the evaluation schedule. Inspectors will always try to meet with children and young people during the inspection, although in exceptional circumstances this may not be possible.

Children's Commissioner and Children's Rights Director

The post of Children's Commissioner was created in July 2005. The role is to champion the views and interests of children, especially those who are least able to make their opinions heard. The Commissioner can also conduct independent inquiries. You can learn more about the Children's Commissioner for England at:

www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

The Children's Rights Director spends lots of time listening to what children and young people who live away from home, or who are receiving social care support, have to say about how they are looked after. The Director reports the views of children to the Government and other decision makers so that things can be made better for them. To find out more about the Children's Rights Director visit:

www.rights4me.org

The roles of Children's Commissioner and Children's Rights Director will be merged on

International

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

In 1989, the world's leaders officially recognised the rights of children by signing the UNCRC. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care, education, and legal, civil and social services. There are 54 articles. The first 42 articles are the rights all children under 18 years of age have. Articles 43 to 54 explain how governments and international organisations like UNICEF will work to ensure children are protected.

The UK Government ratified the UNCRC on 16 December 1991. This means that all laws, policy and practice must be compatible with the Convention. As international law, the Convention is meant to be followed and should be referred to by courts, tribunals and other administrative processes when making decisions that affect children.

To see the convention visit:

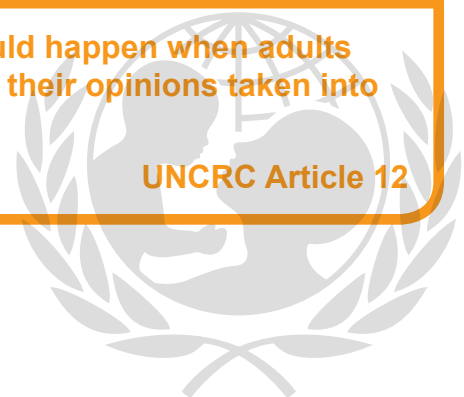
www.tagd.org.uk

The article most explicitly about participation is Article 12:

Children's Rights

Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.

UNCRC Article 12



When UN member states ratify the Convention, they must report to the UN initially after two years, then every five years. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child examines written evidence and meets with Government representatives. Before it meets with Government, it holds private discussions with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and with children and young people. NGOs are invited by the UN Committee to submit a

written report highlighting areas of concern, as well as significant progress in implementing the Convention.

Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) co-ordinates the NGO England alternative report to the UN Committee. To learn more about CRAE visit:

www.crae.org.uk



Primary Parliament

Children share their views on how to be healthy during an event involving twelve primary school councils.

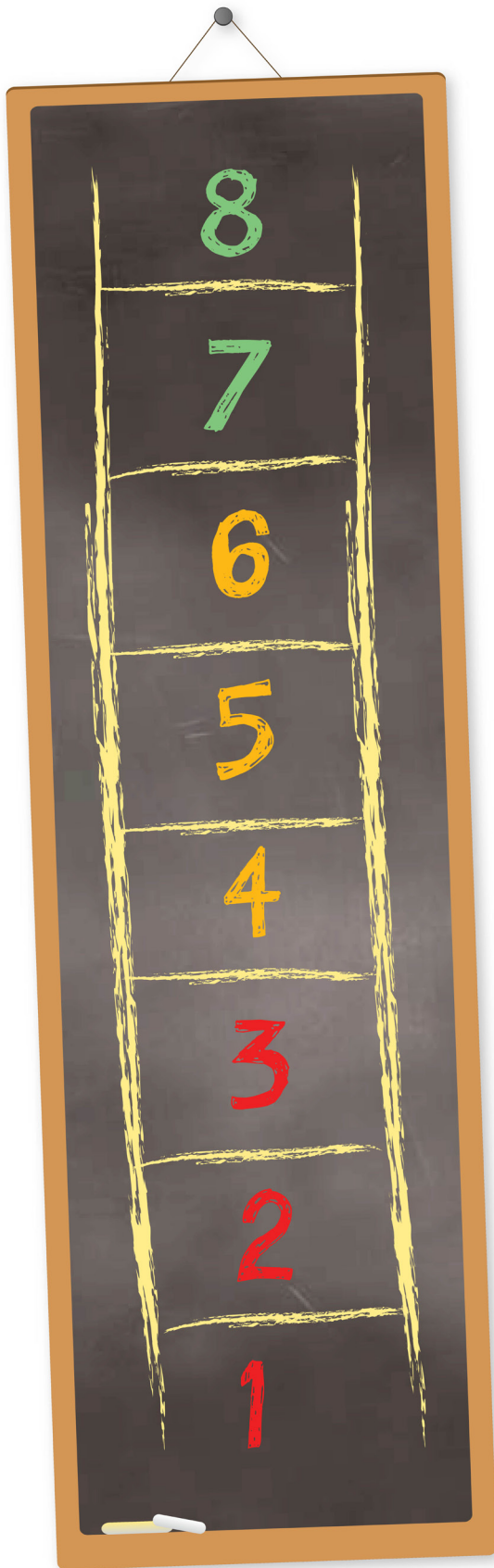
Assessing Participation

Hart's Ladder of Participation provides a means of evaluating the quality of engagement within organisations, services and communities. It describes the generally accepted levels of participation and provides a framework for benchmarking.

We hope to see participation activities working at level 6, while recognising that there will be times when various constraints will mean working at a lower level. Children will

usually need more support near the start of a project and less as they develop confidence and skills. The nature of some projects will restrict the level of decision making children can have, while listening to and considering their views remain an essential part of the process. Informed choice and skilled support will enable children to meaningfully participate in a meaningful way. We would hope no organisation or setting is operating at levels 1-3.

Hart's Ladder - Definitions



Children initiated decisions and actions

Children take ownership and are empowered and able to call on the life experience and expertise of adults supporting them and given control of budgets and key decisions.

Children initiated and directed

Children have an idea and decide the way forward. Adults support, but do not take charge. Decision making is shared or negotiated.

Adult initiated decisions shared with Children

Adults have the initial idea. Children have their views considered and are involved in making decisions at every step of planning and implementation.

Consulted and informed

Children give advice on projects run by adults. They are told how their input will be used and what decisions have been made. They have a full understanding of the project and their opinions are taken seriously.

Assigned and informed

Children are assigned a role and told how and why they are being involved.

Tokenism

Children appear to be given a voice, but they have little or no choice about the scope or methods of their participation.

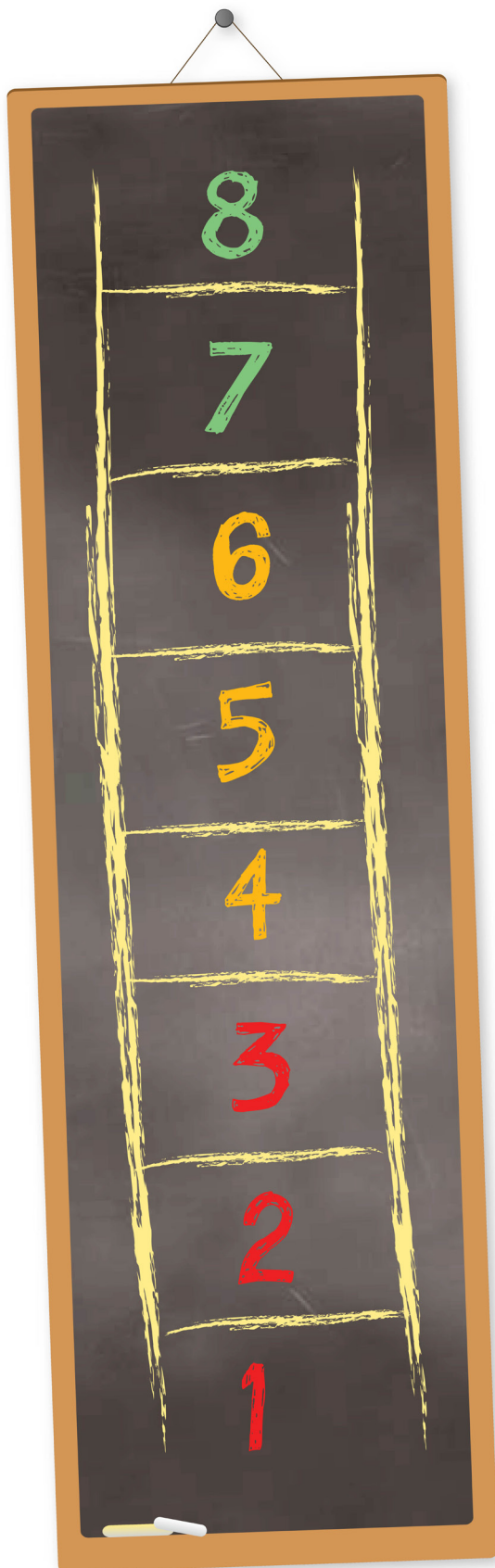
Decoration

Children are 'used' to help or bolster a cause. They may take part in an event but not understand the issues.

Manipulation

Children do or say what adults suggest. They have no real understanding of the issues, or will not have been asked for their opinions. Some of their ideas may be used but they are not told what influence they had.

Hart's Ladder - Examples



A youth forum set their priorities with action plans and approved spending from their own budget. An adult supports, offering advice on how to take projects forward.

Children wanted an information pack for a service they receive. They wrote some of the content and worked with graphic designers. Adults supported this work and made it clear that certain information would have to be included.

Adults wanted to run an event to celebrate the achievements of children. Children were asked for their views and became involved in planning and running the event.

An adult had to review a project and make improvements. She invited a group of children to tell her what they thought of the project and how they would make it better. Having listened she told them what changes she would make, and why, and invited them to review progress in one year.

A school governing body invited the chair of the school council to their meetings to represent students.

Children are consulted about an issue using a large consultation document which was written for adult professionals using language children, and many adults, do not understand.

Adults started and ran a project. Children who had no understanding of, or involvement in the project had their photographs taken to promote it.

A school council was controlled by a member of staff. Children were chosen rather than elected, had no influence on setting the agenda and there was little or no regard for their views.

Assess participation practice

The Participation Charter

The Charter is an agreed standard for participation in Lincolnshire. It describes four key principles of participation for organisations to work by:

1. Children have equal opportunity to be involved

- * Take a children's rights approach and adhere to the UNCRC
- * Work with children using a range of methods appropriate to age, understanding, wishes and purpose of work
- * Ensure children's involvement is safe and free from oppression and bullying

How?

You can ask children to share their views through art, music, drama, film or photography.

2. Children are valued

- * Place a high value on children's views and ideas
- * Give feedback that shows action has been taken, or explains why it has not
- * Communicate using creative and effective methods appropriate to age, interests and levels of development and need
- * Use plain language without being patronising
- * Use a recognition system that benefits children

How?

Make sure children know you are taking them seriously and thank them for their contributions. Recognition includes accreditation, a certificate of appreciation and vouchers or other payment.

3. The involvement of children is a visible commitment which is properly resourced

- * Include children in a range of decision making processes
- * Provide support for staff to implement participation principles
- * Share practice with partners

How?

Make sure that enough time and resources are allocated to projects to properly engage children. Children can be involved in activities such as recruitment, evaluation of services, research, commissioning and training delivery.

4. The involvement of children is monitored, evaluated, reported and improved

- * Assess current practice
- * Put an improvement plan in place
- * Involve children in reviewing plans and progress

How?

Think honestly about where your current work with children is on Hart's Ladder. Identify priorities for improvement and who will be responsible for making changes. Invite children to help you do this.

Signing up to the Charter is a commitment to involving children in decision making processes. This commitment applies to the way an organisation works, not just to one-off projects.

To sign up complete the form on the next page. This includes giving a brief summary of your participation work over the last year, and how you will follow each of the key participation principles over the next two years. A child who has been actively involved in decision making processes with your organisation must also sign the form.

You will be sent a certificate which will be valid for two years. When your certificate expires you will be contacted by the Participation Team about renewing. You will be asked about your participation work over the previous two years, and your intentions for the next two years.

You will be asked to share your participation work. In turn we will include you in our regular participation e-bulletin.

To discuss signing up to the Charter contact:

participation@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Sign up



The Big Conversation

A group of Looked After Children and Care Leavers meet with LCC Children's Services and Barnardo's staff to discuss the services they receive. Improvement plans were agreed and future meetings arranged.

Participation Charter Sign-up

To sign-up to the Charter please complete this form.

Your details			
Name			
Organisation			
Position			
Telephone			
E-mail			
Please give a brief description of your participation work over the last year			
Please describe how you will follow each of the Participation Principles over the next two years			
How will you ensure children have equal opportunity to be involved?			
How will you ensure children are valued?			
How will you ensure that the involvement of children is a visible commitment which is properly resourced?			
How will you ensure the involvement of children is monitored , evaluated, reported and improved?			
Signatures			
Please sign within the boxes as signatures will be scanned for printing on your certificate			
Your signature		Child's signature	
Date		Role of child	
		Date	

Return to:

participation@lincolnshire.gov.uk

or:

Participation Team, WAYO, 74-76 Hemswell Avenue, Lincoln LN6 0AZ