

Benefits of Engagement with Children and Young People

Organisations and agencies may ask ‘why do we have to do it?’ There are real benefits for all: active involvement of children and young people will mean a more effective and user-friendly service and will also develop the skills and confidence of the young person and enhance the local community. Children and young people also have a right to be involved when adults are making decisions that may affect them (Article 12, UNCRC) as well as engagement being integral to a variety of government strategies (see above).

Benefits to children and young people

Participation provides the opportunity for children and young people’s personal, social and political development. Participation can offer practical experience and the opportunity to learn how to exercise responsibility.

Children and young people’s participation brings a number of benefits to the individual children involved:

- Gaining an improved understanding of social policy and decision making processes;
- Increasing their connection and ownership to communities;
- Gaining experience that can be put to use in future employment and social life;
- Enhanced self-confidence and self esteem;
- An opportunity to acquire and expand skills, including problem-solving, negotiation and communication skills;
- Familiarisation with group and democratic process, including understanding different points of view, the need for compromise and a sense of responsibility for group decisions;
- An opportunity to learn and practice the skills of responsible and active citizenship;
- Participation in wider society;
- Children & young people learn through interaction with significant others including the community; and
- The possibility to protect themselves and challenge abuses of their rights, either directly or through informing a responsible adult.

Benefits to organisations

Children and young people’s participation has benefits for organisations in that it:

- Services and policies that are designed, delivered and evaluated on the basis of identified needs of children and young people;
- Better policies for children and young people;
- Priorities for children and young people identified;
- Different perspective offered by children and young people;
- Relationships with young people are enhanced;
- Organisation’s planning can avail of a wider variety of perspectives;
- Organisations build greater capacity, increase sustainability;

- Services that are more effective;
- Meet Government/ Assembly targets and expectations;
- Meets equality requirement;
- Evidence for persuading Ministers and finance decision makers to target resources effectively;
- Children and young people's needs identified;
- An understanding and awareness of the social context in which the child lives;
- Increases organisational relevance to children & young people;
- Improves organisational ability to achieve outcomes;
- Assists organisations to effectively target funds; and
- Enhances organisational credibility and reputation.

Benefits to the community

Participation empowers children and young people as members of civil society and active citizens. The practice of participation strengthens children's ability to hold organisations, institutions and government to account. It enables children to play an active part in civil society and to compensate for their exclusion from formal political processes. It increases the visibility of children and children's issues ensuring that they are given greater weight in economic, social and political agendas:

- Enables children to play an active part in civil society and to compensate for their exclusion from formal political processes;
- Increases the visibility of children and children's issues ensuring that they are given greater weight in economic, social and political agendas;
- By increasing accountability to children, it enlarges the democratic space and encourages good governance;
- Change in perception of young people and their needs;
- It gives young people pride in the work carried out and may help to minimise vandalism and other anti-social behaviour;
- Empowers children and young people as members of civil society and active citizens; and
- Strengthens children's ability to hold organisations, institutions and governments to account.