

Everyone in your community has something to offer. Engaging with and involving young people in the planning process will help to ensure that their opinions are heard. They may come up with some good ideas too!

Where to start

You will need to decide what level of involvement you want from the young people in your community. Do you want to:

- Gather opinions from young people on what services they want in their local community?
- Carry out research into the needs of young people?
- Support young people to explore an issue they define?
- Involve young people in the evaluation of a current service?

The more involved young people are in the planning process, the more committed they will be to working on any action points that are identified. However, beware of raising false expectations. All too often young people are involved in identifying services they would like only to find there is no money to see this happen.

Different age groups from all geographical areas of the community may want to be involved, but be realistic. Ask your young people how much time they are willing to give and what issues are important to them **before** you try to set up a new consultation group.

You need to go to the young people. Existing groups such as schools and youth clubs can provide a ready made audience in a safe environment; you can contact the head teacher or group leader to see how interested they are in supporting the process. You will need to negotiate ground rules, set small goals, log achievements and provide regular positive feedback. Be prepared to go with new ideas that the young people have and think about using the ways in which they communicate e.g. Facebook, text messages and internet surveys.

Remember you may need parental consent and you must ensure that the young people and anyone working with them are kept safe throughout.

Building trust

Meaningful youth participation will only develop when you build up a degree of trust. You need to consider the young peoples' concerns and priorities which may be different from yours.

Remember:

- Participation should be voluntary – no pressure
- Be honest about goals, milestones and timescales
- Let young people take the lead
- Go at their pace
- Use appropriate language
- Be concise
- Don't promise what you can't give
- Have some fun along the way

Key questions to ask

Before you begin any discussions, ask the following questions to help you decide what consultation methods you should use:

- How old are the young people?
- How can you meet/engage with them?
- Have you an issue you want to discuss?
- Can the young people raise their own issues?
- Will you or the young people take the lead?
- When should this take place?
- What groups can you work with?
- How will you let the young people see the results?
- What happens next?

Define your aims

- Decide who you want to involve
- Decide who sets the agenda

Build relationships

- Consult the young people
- Consult existing groups

Engaging young people

- Establish clear ground rules
- Set small milestones
- Decide how information will be collated and used

Feedback

- Once you have the information you set out to get, communicate it
- Let everyone know what will happen next

Keep safe

Once you have decided which young people you want to work with you need to make sure that you adopt safe working practices. You have a duty of care to keep the young people and any volunteers safe. If you are working with a school or an existing group, make sure you understand and follow their safeguarding policy. If you are starting from scratch you should undertake safeguarding training.

Remember:

- You have a duty of care towards young people
- Never work alone
- Make sure the young people know who you are and what your role is
- Contact local agencies e.g. the police if you are engaging in street work
- Let parents know what is happening – consider a leaflet drop
- You may need a CRB check

Methods and techniques

Once you have decided who you want to work with and how, you may like to consider some of the following activities:

Drama/role play

Use props with young people to act out how they think other people in the community view different issues. You may wish to consider inviting drama groups or theatre groups to investigate the issues being considered.

Discuss

Talk about what other people might think about the community; this can help clarify their agenda.

Interview people

Work with the young people to prepare questionnaires for their peers to complete. Try to help them to identify ways of recording the main points.

Map people and places

Provide minutes or agendas of planning meetings to inform the young people about any plans there are for new buildings, roads or other development. Draw or write the issues on a map to illustrate what they think and why.

Arts and crafts

Be creative; get the young people to photograph, draw or paint their community. Before and after pictures can be a great way to map physical changes. Videos can be used to capture interviews which can then be used as a focus for discussion groups.

For more information please contact ACTion with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01228 817224 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

ACT champions community and rural issues

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Levels of participation

Young people participate when they are given an opportunity to think freely for themselves and become involved in the decisions which affect them on a voluntary, informed basis.

Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Rung 8 – Young people and adults share decision making

Rung 7 – Young people lead and initiate action

Rung 6 – Adult initiated, shared decisions with young people

Rung 5 – Young people consulted and informed

Rung 4 – Young people assigned and informed

Rung 3 – Young people tokenised*

Rung 2 – Young people are decoration*

Rung 1 – Young people are manipulated*

* The last three rungs are non-participation

Useful websites

www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

www.communitymatters.org.uk

www.brathay.org.uk

www.cya.co.uk

www.savethechildren.org.uk

www.youngcumbria.org.uk

www.nspcc.org.uk

www.cumbrialscb.com

www.hbr.nya.org.uk

More information

ACT Development Officers can offer further support and advice. A range of additional Guidance Sheets are also available on our website.



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with communities
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