

CHANGE MAKERS/

**INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN
THE DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT AND
EVALUATION OF LOCAL SERVICES**

A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

Changemakers is committed to offering young people the chance to take part in decision making processes about the services that they use. There is no reason why young people can't be trained to have a far greater involvement in decisions about the design, development and evaluation of local services. We also believe that a far greater proportion of youth service budgets should be controlled by young people.

Evidence suggests that the decisions young people make result in services which respond more effectively to the needs of other young people. Young people's involvement in shaping the services which affect them is therefore crucial.

We also believe it is important to share best practice and provide support for organisations who wish to involve young people in decision making about the services they provide.

This guide is intended to provide examples of local authorities that have gone through the process of involving young people in decisions about local services. This includes allowing young people the opportunity to identify the needs of other young people, developing solutions to tackle this need and in some cases having a role in the delivery of services.

This guide focuses on case studies which demonstrate where involving young people in local decision making has been a positive experience for both the young people involved and the organisation, and draws on these individual examples to find some common factors.



WHAT IS OUR DEFINITION OF GOOD PRACTICE?

Young people can get involved in decisions about local services in a variety of ways. This includes being involved in opportunities to take a lead in the design, development and evaluation of services. Different stages of involvement may include the following:

- Needs assessment/research (what do young people want/need)
- Design or re-design of services to meet the needs of young people (young people leading or influencing the design of a service)
- Procurement of services (young people deciding who is best placed to deliver a service)
- Delivery of services (young people either delivering a service or supporting others to deliver)
- Monitoring and evaluation of services (young people leading the evaluation)

For the purposes of this guide, we will define good practice as involving young people in one or more of the stages referred to above.



CASE STUDIES

This series of case studies highlights different areas in which young people can be involved in local decision making.

Many of our case studies come from our own experience of working on a programme, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, to support local authorities to build their capacity to deliver youth-led commissioning. Through this programme, young people work within 'host organisations' to lead a project aimed at allowing young people to have a say in the services they want and a meaningful role in how provision is shaped. Other case studies come from partnership projects which Changemakers has been involved in with local authorities nationwide.

The case studies will cover the following areas:

- Objective of the project
- How young people were involved in one or more stages of decision making
- The benefits of involving the young person in the decision making process
- Sustainability of the project for long term involvement of young people

The case studies include involving young people in:

- Budgeting decisions
- Planning of health services
- Strategic decisions about the way services are commissioned
- Planning and delivery of education services
- Planning and delivery of youth services
- Marketing and communication decisions

CASE STUDY 1

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN BUDGETING DECISIONS



WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE?

A group of young people have been supported by Northumberland County Council to allocate money from the Youth Opportunities Fund to other young people's groups since 2006. In 2010, the Department for Communities and Local Government announced the end of a ring-fenced grant for the Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds, which meant that local authorities are now under no obligation to allocate funds to these areas. However, Northumberland County Council took the decision to continue to allocate a pot of funding, known as YFund, for this work. This project has provided young people in Northumberland with the opportunity to continue to have a say in how money is spent on services that both themselves and their peers access.

HOW WERE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED?

PROCUREMENT OF SERVICES

A group of young people, known as Young People in Northumberland (YPIN), who act as the voice of young people in Northumberland more widely, make decisions about how to allocate funding to applications submitted by young people.

The group ensures that the ideas and bids they receive are genuinely young-person led through telephone conversations with the applicants and scrutiny of the written applications. The Council is non-prescriptive about how the money is spent, and the young people have a significant opportunity to create the guidelines for how the money is spent.

In the 2010/11 financial year, young people were able to make decisions about a youth opportunities spending pot of £60k. In the first round of the fund that year, YPIN invited bids of up to £2k from young people. YPIN then assessed applications, and those which met the criteria were invited to pitch their ideas to the YPIN panel at a Dragons' Den style event. In the second round of the fund, young people were able to bid for an amount of their choice. In total over the year, there were 42 applications to the fund, 280 young people were involved in the application process, and 6,488 young people benefitted from the projects.

In the most recent round of the fund in the 2011/12 financial year, there were two pots of funding available – one for the generic opportunities fund where bids were invited from young people for anything from £1000 to £3000, and one to encourage enterprising and business ideas where bids were invited from young people for anything from £2000 to £4000. As a result of this application process, 18 young people from Northumberland assessed 41 YFund applications, and gave out £50k to young people across Northumberland. In total over the year, 276 young people were involved in the application process, and the current estimate is that 2,331 young people have benefitted from the projects.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The recipients of the funding talk about the experience giving them “a sense of pride”. One organisation who has supported young people who have made applications to the fund says:

“We have seen groups of young people develop their own initiatives, projects and activities, raising self esteem and confidence. Aspirations are raised as they achieve their goal, which has empowered them to make a difference in the lives of others.”

In terms of the young people involved with making the funding decisions, the experience increases their awareness of the needs of the local area. One YPIN member says:

“YFund is a fantastic opportunity to help young people across Northumberland kick start their projects”

and another says:

“YFund is a fantastic opportunity for young people or groups of young people to do things they'd never be able to do if the fund wasn't available.”

IS THE PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

In the 2011/12 and 2012/13 rounds of the fund, young people themselves have a much greater role in controlling the fund. For example, even the administrative aspects of distributing the money is now led by a young person who makes decisions about how the process should be run. This means that the fund is demonstrating a wholehearted approach to youth led participatory budgeting. The fact that the Council has committed to a pot of money in the 2012/13 financial year the same size as the 2011/12 pot demonstrates their belief in the benefits of this process.

CASE STUDY 2

WALSALL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN BUDGETING DECISIONS



**JOSHUA FRANCIS-RALPHS /
WALSALL BOROUGH COUNCIL**

WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE?

Joshua Francis-Ralphs worked with Walsall Council to set up a funding panel, the Changemaking Panel, which young people can apply to for sums of money. The panel gives sums of money to young people on assessment of their bids. The panel followed in the footsteps of the previous Youth Opportunities Fund, but in this case the money is awarded from the Early Intervention Grant, and as a result the work of the panel is more directed at provision for specific groups and more targeted at vulnerable young people.

HOW WERE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED?

PROCUREMENT OF SERVICES

Young people are involved as members of the panel making decisions about how money should be spent – the panel is completely made up of young people from Walsall. Joshua organised and ran training sessions with the panel to make sure that the members were properly acquainted with the new target groups that they are funding and able to carry out their role effectively. The panel now meet each month to assess each bid in line with a strict framework based upon the rules of the funding and the Every Child Matters framework.

Secondly, young people are involved through being responsible for putting together bids to apply for the money available. Young people are able to apply for funding for a project, event, individual or activity by putting together an application form and sending it into the panel.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

One of the benefits of involving young people in this way is the number of young people that have been impacted. So far the money has had an impact on over 500 young people.

In addition, Joshua believes that by giving just small amounts of money for the simple things, this then enables young people to look to the future. He says:

“It’s all about impacting the individual and doing the small things, this will allow the big things to happen for themselves.”

To date, money has been spent on things like a mobility scooter for a disabled young person to be able to get to college, a mobile phone for a young person put into care miles away from their friends and family and a washing machine for a group of dancers who had to share costumes and didn’t have the facilities available to wash them.

Another benefit for young people leading the panel is the skills they have gained from being involved. For example, the panel faced challenges as the fund went from being a general fund, where it was easy to see whether a project should be funded, to a fund focussed on early intervention and prevention, where it is more important to consider the possible implications of not funding a project. The panel learnt how to discuss these issues and weigh up the positives and negatives of funding different types of project.

IS THE PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

The panel still exists and is continuing to give out funds to young people. By ensuring that young people are fully trained to make these decisions, by providing them with a budget to spend on resources and provision for other young people, and by allowing them control over the decision making process, this demonstrates a commitment to a real youth-led approach.

CASE STUDY 3

SOLIHULL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PLANNING OF HEALTH SERVICES



WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE?

Katie Buckingham worked with Solihull Council on a project to understand, explore and challenge the myths and stigma attached to mental health problems amongst young people. The Council was in the process of developing an Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy to promote and improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people. One of the objectives of the strategy is to improve understanding of mental health, and Katie's project therefore aimed to contribute to this by raising awareness of mental health and reducing the stigma attached to it.

HOW WERE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED?

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Katie developed the project based on sound local research that she carried out with local youth groups, clubs and representative forums. She successfully developed a programme of short workshops, which she then delivered in a range of settings, including colleges and schools, that challenged young people to think about mental health issues. She consulted with 200 young people in the local area to find out more about their perceptions of mental health and found from these discussions that there were a number of common misconceptions that young people held about mental health.

DESIGN OF SERVICES

During these workshops sessions, Katie recruited a team of ten young commissioners to support her to take the project forward. Along with the group of young commissioners it was decided that a resource pack would be the best way to highlight

and challenge the misconceptions that young people held. The group worked on the content of the resource pack. They decided that it should be a combination of case studies to introduce some of the main mental health issues; activities for young people to complement these case studies; additional information about specific mental health issues; advice and support; and a video and poster to raise awareness of mental health issues.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Laura Power, Commissioning Officer at Solihull Council, who supported Katie throughout her project, says that the uniqueness of the project is that it has not only been developed by young people but that it has also been tried and tested on young people. She believes that this is one of the reasons for the project's success:

“[The project] would not have received the same response [if it had been delivered by a staff member] as the reason the project has been successful to date is because it has been led by local young people for young people.”

Laura also thinks that the project has been a good reminder to the organisation of what can be achieved when young people are actively involved.

Finally, the project has also enabled the local authority to successfully meet a strategic need to better understand mental health needs. Laura says:

“Locally we have recognised that understanding of mental health needs to improve so that negative attitudes and behaviours decrease and this resource pack will be a strong contributor to achieving this strategic objective.”

IS THE PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

The commissioning project will have an ongoing legacy as the Council aims to continually promote the pack so that all secondary schools and colleges in Solihull actively use the pack. The pack has also been sent out to mental health services and GP practices in Solihull. Katie is now working closely with Solihull Youth Council as part of the Youth Service's Active Involvement and Democracy team to ensure her resource is being used to inform and educate more young people about mental health. The exercises within the resource pack will be delivered by young people who are currently being trained by Katie. The Council has also had regional and national interest in the resources and hopes to work with other authorities to encourage the take up of the model elsewhere.

Nicki Gilbert, Active Involvement and Democracy Co-ordinator, concludes:

“The legacy of involving young people with this resource will continue and hopefully develop into new initiatives which are responsive to the emerging needs of young people.”

CASE STUDY 4

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PLANNING OF HEALTH SERVICES



WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE?

Katrina Curtis worked with Youth Connexions and Hertfordshire County Council to investigate the local provision of sexual health services. A previous mystery shopping exercise of local sexual health services in Hertfordshire had identified a number of negative experiences. The report had concluded that:

“When services worked best, young people felt welcome and comfortable discussing their needs with staff. They felt listened to, not judged, and that they had gained knowledge and felt that their needs were being met. However, a significant number of mystery shoppers had bad experiences. These young people felt hurried, uncomfortable, judged, patronised and humiliated when confidentiality was not maintained.”

Following the report, sexual health services were encouraged to work towards the ‘You’re Welcome’ framework (criteria for young people friendly health services) but Katrina was concerned that not enough change was taking place. As a result, she developed her project in order to improve the engagement of young people in the delivery of local health services.

HOW WERE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED?

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SERVICE

Katrina’s project set out to involve young people through first recruiting and training a group of young advisors. Katrina recruited a team of eight young advisors, and delivered a specialised training programme for them, which included both the Asdan qualification in Community Action alongside information on the

Department of Health You're Welcome standard. The training was intended to support this group of young advisors to plan and carry out a series of mystery shopping visits and to work with local health services to support them to work towards the You're Welcome standard.

At first, the intention was for the young advisors to work with the Youth Connexions One Stop Shops to help them meet the You're Welcome standard for their sexual health services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). However, the project was then extended to look into the wider provision of sexual health services and CAMHS across Hertfordshire.

The young advisors carried out an extensive process of mystery shopping. During the mystery shopping of CAMHS, young people engaged clinicians and reception staff in informal interviews and site visits to establish whether the service was 'young person friendly'. Young advisors also visited 55 sexual health services across the county to carry out mystery shopping. At the end of the process, the young advisors produced a report on what they had seen, which both raised concerns and made recommendations.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

This provides an example of the local authority involving service users in to advise on future provision to ensure that services are firstly accessed by young people and secondly effective for the people who will be using them. The project has provided a group of young people with the skills and knowledge to carry out evaluation of services for young people across the local area.

IS THE PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

Following her consultation with service users Katrina fed information back to a Strategic Stakeholder Group, consisting of key personnel within the local authority and health services, to ensure sexual and mental health services better meet the needs of the young people using them in the future. In addition, the training provided to the first group of young advisors means that they now have the skills to continue with the process of mystery shopping in the future. The training has also acted as a pilot for a peer education training programme that Katrina has developed with the support of the first group of young advisors, indicating that a wider group of young people in the local area will be able to take on a similar role in the future.

CASE STUDY 5

LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF EDUCATION SERVICES



**DILETA SENKYIRE /
LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY**

WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE?

Dileta Senkyire worked on a project with Hackney Council to develop and implement a homework club pilot. The club is aimed at providing extracurricular activity for students aged 11-16, to improve their academic progress in English, Science and Mathematics.

HOW WERE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED?

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Dileta identified, both through her own experiences and also through speaking to other young people in the local area, that there was no-one to help students with their homework. She says:

“Outside of school hours they couldn’t go to their teachers, and so it was just left up to them to get on with it.”

Throughout her project, Dileta was confident that a homework club would be used by local young people as they had identified that this was something they wanted.

DELIVERY OF SERVICE

Dileta came up with the idea that university students and graduates from Hackney would volunteer to run the project. She says:

“The good thing about the university students coming from Hackney was that there was a sense of them giving something back to their local community.”

Dileta led on the recruitment of both the volunteers to run the project as well as the students to take part in the homework club. She admits that it was not always easy to recruit, that in the case of the students it was difficult to fit in with their other commitments and that sometimes it took a long time to encourage them to attend.

However, as time progressed and Dileta arranged training for the volunteers, the project started to take shape and both volunteers and students began to sign up. She says:

“The volunteers and students were really dedicated, and the students were great at spreading the word.”

Dileta recruited nine volunteer tutors, of which five attended every week. In total, 62 young people were involved in the pilot of Hackney’s Homework Club.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The local authority had already recognised that there was a gap for a project like this, and so Dileta was able to successfully meet this pre-existing need. In addition, by engaging university students and graduates from Hackney in the delivery of the homework club, the project was able to allow them to act as role models to their younger peers. Finally, although it wasn’t always easy to recruit students at the start of the project, as time progressed, possibly because a young person was leading the project and because students encouraged their peers to attend, the project was successful at getting students to sign up and attend.

IS THE PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

The homework club started as a pilot model, but Dileta was keen to widen the project out. The pilot homework club ran for eight weeks, and Hackney Council is now planning to run the project in the long term. They will continue to run the club at its original venue, a youth club. The Council is also in the process of renovating their youth clubs and hopes to roll the homework club out to them over the next few months.

CASE STUDY 6

LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF YOUTH SERVICES



WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE?

Platform is a youth-led arts youth hub in Islington, which opened in July 2011. From the very outset, Islington Council recognised the importance of involving young people in the commissioning process for the youth hub, and young people continue to be involved in the day to day running of Platform.

HOW WERE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED?

DESIGN AND PLANNING

A panel of young advisors was recruited and appointed to be involved in the development of the project, including involvement in the decision about what should be provided for young people. This group consulted over 300 young people as well as other members of the community. Young people were consulted on the design, name and branding of the building, as well as the types of activities and services they would like to see delivered. The young advisors also joined the panel to appoint the architects and the consortium commissioned by Islington Council to manage the project.

DELIVERY OF SERVICE

Young people are now actively involved in running the venue themselves. A youth programming team, made up of young people from the local community, has shaped the arts programme. Young people have been recruited to key positions and ten young people are currently undertaking paid youth leadership work. A training programme has been developed to involve young people in the running of the cafe. Platform has also provided young people the opportunity to get involved through volunteering opportunities.

Young people are able to use Platform's facilities to organise their own events. They have taken the lead on planning and delivering more than 12 events at Platform. In fact they now lead all the Friday night events at Platform.

The young people involved in Platform have also formed a business planning group which makes decisions on various things including the pricing structure for both the activities and the cafe at Platform, behaviour management, time banking, and whether there should be a membership scheme. This is an example of co-production as whilst young people make the final decisions, the adult partners involved in Platform are on hand to challenge and discuss the various issues with the group.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The success of Platform, and the involvement of young people in deciding what happens there, can already be demonstrated through the number of young people accessing the hub. The youth hub has now been visited by 1387 young people, which includes regular and new attendees.

Another benefit has been to give young people the experience of both paid and volunteer roles, and the interview and work experience opportunities this has provided.

The benefits of such a youth-led approach can be seen through the success of the events being planned by young people, particularly in terms of the number of attendees. One of these events attracted 140 people, double regular Saturday night attendance numbers at the time. The group who put on the event developed their confidence, leadership skills and motivation to do other similar events, so much so that they held a second event three months later.

Finally, young people are starting to see Platform as a place where they can start to make a reality some of the things that they want to happen in the local area. One young person involved in a Platform event says:

“Platform is a good opportunity to make things like this happen. We had the opportunity because of Platform, and if it wasn't here, it might have only been a dream.”

IS THE PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

The whole idea behind Platform is that young people enable their peers to do and achieve the things they want to do and achieve. It can already be seen that young people are starting to step up from one kind of involvement to another. For example, some young people have already progressed from performing in an event during the festival launching Platform to directing and putting on their own event. Others have progressed from young advisor roles during the set up and planning of Platform to paid leadership roles.

CASE STUDY 7

LONDON BOROUGH OF LAMBETH INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISIONS ABOUT THE WAY SERVICES ARE COMMISSIONED



**TOLU SHOMOYE /
LONDON BOROUGH OF LAMBETH**

WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE?

Tolu Shomoye worked with Lambeth Council on a project to involve young people in the commissioning of services. The commissioning team had realised that they didn't involve young people enough in the commissioning of services. They wanted to engage young people in the process to find a way to feed young people's input into decisions about services as well as to make them more aware of what the commissioning of services actually means.

HOW WERE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED?

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Tolu appointed a team of six young commissioners to support his project. The team planned and delivered a number of interactive consultation workshops which engaged over 40 young people from both the statutory and voluntary sectors. The sessions were intended to get young people's views on commissioning in general but also more specifically their views on the services being commissioned for them. With the views gained from these consultation sessions, the young commissioners then reported back to the commissioning team to help inform the specification for the Council's Early Intervention Grant.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Charline King, youth hub coordinator at Lambeth Council, who supported Tolu throughout his project, believes that the way that Tolu approached the project was different to the way someone from within the organisation may have approached it. In particular, she believes that his ability to get the most out of other young people was one of the key benefits of getting a young person involved:

“Tolu was able to carry out more of a meaningful consultation with young people as they were willing to open up to him and to share information in a way that they might not have done otherwise.”

She also says that his enthusiasm and energy encouraged other young people to get involved:

“Tolu’s enthusiasm really made a difference and he showed us that young people were more likely to engage when they felt that he was there to listen to them.”

Another benefit of having a young person lead a project like this is their ability to reach out to a broader range of young people than those that the Council may usually work with. Tolu was able to maximise the participation of young people by reaching out to different types of young people beyond the usual suspects.

Finally, the project has contributed to changing the opinions of others within the organisation. Charline says:

“The project has helped staff and managers to recognise that young people can make a commitment to putting the needs of others in the community first despite common misconceptions of young people.”

IS THE PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

As a result of Tolu’s project, in the future the commissioning team within Lambeth are hoping to have a youth commissioning team which will act as a scrutiny panel for the commissioning decisions being made. In addition, some of the young commissioners involved in Tolu’s project are going to form a youth management team, which will be working with managers in the youth service. The Council is now looking at provisions in the current services and whether they are really being used by young people and meeting their needs.

CASE STUDY 8
LONDON BOROUGH OF HAVERING
INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN
DECISIONS ABOUT THE WAY SERVICES
ARE COMMISSIONED



HANNAH SMITH /
LONDON BOROUGH OF HAVERING

WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE?

Havering Council wanted to increase the input of local young people in setting the direction of its transformation programme across Children and Young People's Services. They wanted to engage young people at an early stage with a view to continuing their involvement as the transformation programme moved forward. Hannah Smith worked with the Council to help them to engage with young people through consultation as it embarked on its programme.

HOW WERE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED?

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Hannah identified that decisions about Children and Young People's services were often being made without enough effort to actually talk to young people so she engaged seven young people in the borough in the planning of an innovation event.

The event was intended to bring out the views of a wider group of young people about current Children and Young People's services in Havering and their views about how to improve these services. Twenty young people from a variety of groups and backgrounds attended the innovation event, and participated in a number of engaging activities intended to encourage them to share their thoughts and ideas.

After the event, Hannah collated all the information taken from young people and presented ideas and recommendations to the Council's Children and Families Transformation Board which is currently overseeing the transformation programme across Children and Young People's services.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The project raised awareness of the importance of involving children and young people in decision making, in particular as part of the transformation programme. Hannah's project has helped to support the Council in taking the views of young people into account when developing services.

Jane Smithson, Children's Services Commissioning Manager at Havering Council who supported Hannah throughout her project says:

“Not doing the project would have been a missed opportunity for the transformation programme as we would not have aligned our work to the views of young people.”

In addition, Hannah was able to establish good relationships with staff and partners through her project, and the Council will now be able to build on these positive relationships.

IS THE PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

The Council was at the beginning of its transformation programme when it embarked on this project which has gained young people's support to engage in future consultation to support the transformation programme. Hannah's idea to create a database of young people willing to take part in consultations for the Council and to act as youth consultants in the future is being developed as part of the programme. The project forms part of a range of activities designed to improve participation right across Children and Young People's Services - this has become a priority for the Council.

Hannah has continued to be involved with the Council since the end of her project, and is currently supporting the implementation of the Youth Consultancy Platform as part of the transformation team within the Council.

CASE STUDY 9 NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION DECISIONS



**STEPHANIE ROBSON/
NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL**

WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE?

Stephanie Robson led a project with Newcastle Council to improve the way that the Council communicates with young people. The Council was keen to find out how to market activities and opportunities to a wider group of young people. Recruiting young people for her project led Stephanie to question the Council's usual recruitment processes. She realised that the Council would often refer to a database of young people who had previously been involved in other activities. Whilst she realised that this was practical for reasons of cost, she felt this was unfair.

The project was therefore about tackling this problem, to ensure that services and activities for young people are accessible to all. The project was focused in particular on how to market opportunities to a broader group of young people using Youthlinx, the Council's website for young people.

HOW WERE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED?

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Stephanie started by recruiting a team of young commissioners. She did this through selecting young people who had been unsuccessful candidates to the Youth Parliament, a recruitment method she chose because it would be quicker, easier and cheaper. However, it was through this recruitment process that she started to question the way that young people are usually recruited by the Council.

The group of young commissioners discussed this issue, and felt that 'vulnerable' young people are offered a number of

opportunities as a result of the people they came into contact with on a daily basis, and more able students are offered opportunities via school because it is felt that they will be the most suitable representatives of the school. The young commissioners were concerned that this resulted in some young people being overwhelmed with opportunities and choice and some young people not being involved in any opportunities at all.

Once the young commissioners had been recruited, they went about consulting with young people to find out how they felt about the way the Council communicated with them. They started this process by using traditional mechanisms, for example, through the Council's 'Think Tank', a group of young people who act as a steering group for the Council.

However, the group decided that by using these methods of consultation they were only reaching those already engaged in Council activities. They therefore decided to consult with young people in the places that they meet, for example, a shopping street, the beach, the park and the skate park.

At the end of the project, the research was fed back to the officers responsible for the website. A presentation was made to the Senior Management Team and the Children's Trust Board making the case for changing Youthlinx and wider marketing techniques.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Through speaking to young people the Council had previously not been able to contact, the group of young commissioners were able to gain more representative and reliable information on what young people thought, which they were then able to feed back to the Council.

Newcastle City Council was able to gain information about how and why their current methods of communicating with young people were not as effective as they could be and how best to market to young

people. They were also provided with specific advice on how, with small changes, they could improve Youthlinx so that more young people use it in the future.

IS THE PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

Stephanie has said that she will know whether the Council has become more effective in the way that it communicates with young people, as she and her peers are in this target group and will be able to assess whether advertising and communications are reaching them. Both Youthlinx and the Director of Children's Services have been fully supportive of the project and have said that they will produce a list of changes that they will be held accountable for.

WHAT ARE THE KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS?

There are some key factors which the majority of these case studies share in the way they have involved young people in decision making about local services.

1 SUPPORT

Appropriate support for the young people involved is important. There needs to be buy-in from senior members of the organisation in which the young person is working, as well as day to day support from a staff member that the young person regularly works with. A representative from one of the local authorities Changemakers worked with says:

“The project has highlighted that to do something like this properly there has to be a commitment of time on behalf of the team leading the project.”

High level endorsement from senior members of the organisation in particular is critical. The project has a higher chance of gaining real recognition if more senior staff members are bought into the project. The commitment of the staff that young people are working with day to day may be required to ensure senior buy in. This might include supporting young people to agree which staff and meetings will need to be targeted to achieve the right results.

The size, scale and culture of local authorities can sometimes make it difficult for young people to penetrate and make a mark. Supporting young people through this needs strong staff support from within the local authority.

It is also important to recognise that in exercising a position of leadership within an organisation, young people are taking on higher expectations and a higher level of trust than they are used to, and navigating the ‘office politics’ that they might not have experience.

Therefore, additional support may be necessary to keep their focus on what they are trying to achieve and to help them navigate problems.

2 CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Clear expectations should be set for young people in terms of what should be done and by when, and if necessary, what the conditions are for them getting paid for that work. The expectations set should give enough flexibility for anticipating that the way an objective may be achieved will change, but that the objective itself should stay the same. Young people need to be given adequate time to make the most of their involvement with an organisation, as it can take time to ensure that a project is successful.

One of the young people Changemakers worked with referred to some of the challenges she faced, but that through making some small adaptations and with time, she was able to meet the objective of her project.



3 HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Several of the local authorities that Changemakers has worked with have referred to the commitment and dedication of the young people leading the projects as a key factor in the eventual success of the projects.

One local authority officer supporting one of the young people Changemakers worked with says:

“Her commitment and dedication to the project has been invaluable and the reason for its success. The quality of her work has also been extremely impressive, particularly for her age, with a number of health professionals commenting on the quality and depth of her research.”

Another local authority officer says:

“He showed commitment to the project after his exams were finished and was determined to complete the project.”

Where high expectations are made of young people, good results are likely to follow.

4 TRUST

One of the key benefits of involving young people in decisions is the different perspective that they can bring to existing problems. However in order to maximise the impact of this fresh perspective, it is important that young people are trusted to take real responsibility and that adult professionals are encouraged to be open minded about what young people can do.

The ideas and recommendations that young people come up with should be binding and not just ignored by adults at the end of the process. Adults should be prepared to embrace the risk that may be involve with accepting

young people’s decisions as binding, recognising that making mistakes is not something unique to young people.

5 CO-PRODUCTION

Some of the most successful examples of involving young people in local decision making take a ‘co-production’ approach, by which adults give young people the tools to enable them to make decisions but then expect young people to make these decisions.

The respectful relationship between young people and adults should work both ways. Decision making should not just be about adults listening to the views of young people; young people should also be aware of the context in which adults have to make decisions. Therefore, young people should not be sheltered from important data such as financial information, in order to challenge the decisions young people are making.

6 REWARD

It is important to consider how young people’s input can be valued in a tangible way. This could be through financial payment, but it could be through other forms of recognition such as time banking.

Young people should be on an equal footing with adults with regards to whether they are being paid for their time or not. So if adults are being paid for their time to work on a project, then young people should be paid too.

Linked to paying young people is the importance of emphasising personal responsibility. The projects that young people get involved in should be demanding and challenging if they are going to have any credibility. Therefore, staff supporting young people should not be reluctant to be more challenging and tough at times.

7 SUSTAINABILITY

Young people's involvement should be maintained once the young person involved in the set up of a project leaves the organisation. The full impact of a young person's involvement on local services may only become fully apparent once that young person has moved on.

Some of the most successful examples highlighted in the case studies are those which have resulted in long lasting changes allowing continuous involvement from young people rather than just a one-off project. For example, by setting up processes which ensure that young people will be involved in future commissioning decisions.

Another key factor related to sustainability is the importance of young people bringing their peers on board. Several of the case studies referred to above provide examples of how young people have benefitted a local authority through building links with young people which the local authority has previously not had in the past.

8 TANGIBLE IMPACT

Opportunities to involve young people shouldn't just be about their own skills development but also about how their input can benefit the services being provided by the organisation in question.

This can be demonstrated in cases where work would not have taken place without the young person's involvement, often because of resource constraints being experienced by local authorities. For example, one local authority we worked with says:

“Without this programme, I do not feel this work would have been taken forward as the cost of an officer delivering this work would have been significant.”

Another local authority who engaged with young people in a youth-led project on how services are commissioned says:

“Not doing the project would have damaged the transformation programme as we would not have aligned our work to the views of young people.”

**CHANGEMAKERS /
22 UPPER WOBURN PLACE,
LONDON, WC1H 0TB**

T: 020 7554 2840 /

WWW.CHANGEMAKERS.ORG.UK

 /BE_ACHANGEMAKER

 /CHANGEMAKERSFOUNDATION