

SUMMARY

Background

Children in Scotland is undertaking a three-year programme, **Young People in the Community: Promoting the participation of children and young people in decision making, policy development and planning**, funded by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. One part of this programme was a ‘mapping study’ of organisations in Scotland which involve children and young people in decision making. The remit of the study was to investigate the involvement of children and young people in decision making on both issues internal and external to organisations.

The central aims of the research were two-fold:

- To map a national picture in relation to youth participation in decision making in Scotland.
- To create a database of organisations in Scotland involved in such work.

This database has facilitated the creation of a ‘Participation Network’ whereby organisations can exchange information, ideas and experience to aid the development of good practice.

Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected via self-completion surveys and through interviews.

Children in Scotland initially made contact with each local authority and health board in Scotland. Each was asked to provide contact details of any organisations, groups or initiatives that had involved children and/or young people in decision making. From these contacts a database of 371 organisations was created and a survey was sent to each of these. Surveys were also sent to each of the eight police forces in

Taking the initiative

Scotland and a further 14 were sent to religious organisations. Children in Scotland produces a bimonthly newsletter and a survey was also sent to each of the 1,000 organisations on the newsletter mailing list.

These methods aimed to contact as wide a range of organisations as possible as the intention was to collect data on all types of projects, from one off consultation events to well established and continuing youth organisations. In total, 217 survey responses were received.

From the 217 respondents to the survey, six organisations were selected for a more in-depth study. This involved interviewing worker(s) and in the case of two of the organisations, children and young people themselves.

Key findings

- Most responses (32.9%) came from local authority departments (and these were predominantly from social work); 6 of 15 health boards responded.
- More organisations (90%) involved children and/or young people in internal decision making than external (70%).
- Approximately 66% of organisations involve children and/or young people in **both** kinds of internal and external decision making.
- Most organisations involving children and young people in internal decision-making report doing so everyday. Children and young people are reported to be involved in management, planning and evaluating, which are arguably high levels of participation.
- Respondents underline the importance of the methods used to involve children and young people. Above all, children and young people themselves must feel comfortable with the methods used. Environment is also crucial to the success of the participation process and children and young people must feel relaxed, confident and secure.
- Feedback is more consistent when the decision making is of an internal nature. However, feedback to children and young people should be an essential part of their involvement in all decision making otherwise their involvement can be viewed as 'tokenistic'.
- Further evaluation is required on the actual impact of children and young people's involvement on decision-making. Respondents felt that their involvement did make an impact.
- A high proportion of organisations have not evaluated the involvement of

2 Carnegie Young People Initiative/Children in Scotland

Promoting participation

children and young people in decision making. In some cases involvement processes are still in the early stages. Organisations may benefit from guidance on how to go about this or additional resources to do so. Again, the Participation Network provides a forum for organisations to exchange ideas, information and experience in this area.

- There is much scope within organisations to provide training, be it formal or informal, for children and young people. Of course, such opportunities will often be constrained by budgets and resources.
- Few organisations have developed good practice guidelines. This is an area which needs further development and it is hoped that this can be facilitated through the Participation Network.
- Funding is problematic for many organisations, particularly for voluntary organisations. Many have the potential to extend existing programmes or develop new ones but are constrained by lack of finances and resources.
- Organisations specifically for three groups of children or young people were under-represented in this survey: those with disabilities/special needs; those from black and ethnic minority groups; and children under the age of 5.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

‘Children form one-fifth of Scotland’s population, but may have only limited opportunity to consider or comment on policies which impact on them. Whereas most adults are silent by choice, many children are not in a position to have an influence on matters which greatly affect them. In the vast majority of instances, adults in the wider community act effectively in the interests of children. However it remains the case that children have decisions made about, for and against their interests without their views being taken or needs properly considered. In families in danger of being socially excluded, the scope for children’s needs to be overlooked is even greater.’ (Scottish Office 1998: para 2)

‘I don’t think society as a whole actually listens to young people, because they can’t affect anything that happens around them. For instance voting; because we don’t have a vote, it means we’re not part of society.’ (Young Person in Save the Children Fund Scotland (SCF) 1999: 51)

The Scottish context

The need – the requirement – to involve children and young people in policy making has gained unprecedented policy prominence in Scotland over recent years. Debates in the Scottish Parliament regularly refer to the need to consult children over decisions that affect them, particularly in the Education, Culture and Sport Committee which is currently seeking to develop ways of consulting with children systematically. Children and young people are increasingly being asked to respond directly to local and national policies, from participating in conferences to responding on the Internet. How has Scotland reached this level of political commitment?

In part, this commitment arises from the long-standing practices of a number of Scottish organisations that have developed methods, structures and promoted the

Promoting participation

involvement of children and young people. Take four examples:

(1) Established in 1978, *Who Cares? Scotland* is the voice of children who are 'looked after' by local authorities. It works with young people up to the age of 25, to identify issues relevant to their lives and to influence the development and adoption of policies and practices that more closely reflect their needs. Young people are the members of the organisation and can become Directors on its management board.

(2) *Article 12* began in 1996 and three local groups are currently active, meeting in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Dundee. Representatives from these local groups meet nationally, approximately every two months. Article 12 promotes awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the need to consult with young people on issues relevant to them. Young people at a residential event held in August 2000 decided on three national priorities for Article 12: lowering the voting age, education and improving the minimum wage for young people. Article 12 is presently consulting with young people, through its local groups, to gain young people's views on these issues.

(3) Youth Fora have been formed across local authorities in recent years and *Connect Youth* seeks to bring such groups together. Connect Youth was officially launched in October 1995. It is a national initiative that recognises the right of young people to be involved in decision making about services and issues which affect them. Connect Youth works to develop, support and create a network of youth fora, youth consultations and youth conferences from across Scotland, with the aim of exchanging good practice and ideas. This work has contributed to the formation of the Scottish Youth Parliament, which was formally established in July 1999.

(4) The *Scottish Youth Parliament* is composed of around 200 young people aged 14 to 25. Two young people represent each constituency area. The Parliament aims to promote equality for all young people and be proactive in seeking openings to influence change. At the first AGM in March 2000 an Executive Committee was appointed and various working groups have been established on issues such as health, rural affairs, youth rights, drugs and youth organisations. The Youth Parliament will continue to work to connect local youth fora, national youth organisations and individuals in order to establish a

Taking the initiative

collective and active youth voice in the Scottish political process.

The development of such organisations has demonstrated the possibilities and value of involving children and young people. They have also influenced legislation so that the requirement to consult children and young people is increasingly being represented in Scottish law and policy.

Such influence has combined with the international obligations contained within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. One of the key articles of the Convention is Article 12: i.e., in all matters that affect the child, the views of the child shall be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. The UK ratified the UNCRC in 1991 and is thus obligated to implement its articles.

This international convention began to have legal reality with the *Children (Scotland) Act 1995*. Children and young people had had the right to state their views in certain specific decisions before the 1995 Act (e.g. adoption) but additional rights were established in a wider number of policy areas by the Act. Going even further than the *Children Act 1989* (applying to England and Wales primarily), the Scottish Act requires that due regard be given to children's views in court decisions on parental responsibilities, local authority decisions for 'looked after' children, and in certain decisions made by courts and children's hearings. The Act underlined children's rights to instruct a solicitor in civil proceedings. Local authorities were given a new duty to prepare, consult upon and publish children's services plans. Many local authorities have sought to consult with children and young people about these plans, even though the legislation has no explicit requirement to do so.

At a national level, the Scottish Office (and the Scottish Executive, after devolution in May 1999) was also considering how it should meet its obligations to the UNCRC, including Article 12. Following the 1997 election, Mr Sam Galbraith was made Minister for Children's Issues, alongside his other portfolios, and the Scottish Office issued a Child Strategy Statement in January 1999: 'To ensure that all Scottish Office Departments identify and take proper account of the interests of children when developing policy' (para 1). The Strategy was reissued by the Scottish Executive in September 2000. Explicitly quoting the UNCRC, the Strategy requires all departments to consider the implications of policies, whether new or amended, for children. In order to do this, the departments should decide whether they need to consult with relevant interests and whether this means consulting directly with children (para 10). Should departments decide that policies do have implications for children, they should inform the Minister for Children's Issues of 'important matters',

6 Carnegie Young People Initiative/Children in Scotland

Promoting participation

through the Children's Issues Unit (para 11). The Strategy, while welcome, does fall short of a full 'child impact' statement, with several weaknesses around monitoring: for example, the onus is on the departments to identify whether their policies would affect children; departments need not report publicly on their answers to the statement's questions.

The *Scotland Act 1998* provided for the creation of a Scottish Parliament with devolved powers. At the referendum in September 1997, a clear majority supported the creation of a Scottish Parliament with tax varying powers. The devolved Scottish Parliament was elected in May 1999 and the Scottish Executive was formed later in the same month. As a result of the *Scotland Act 1998*, the Scottish Parliament now has responsibility for matters such as health, education, criminal and civil law, agriculture and transport. Other matters have been reserved by the Westminster Parliament and they include defence, social security and foreign affairs. Most of the policy areas affecting children are now the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament.

A particular intention of the Scottish Parliament was to create a new style of government, that was more open, accountable and participative than Westminster. Devolution was not intended to end with the Parliament, but participation and power for decision making to be devolved down to communities as well (e.g. new requirements for community plans). When the Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament first consulted on the Parliament's proposed ways of working, children and young people were notably not included on the list of groups that might risk exclusion (Scottish Office, 1998). This omission now seems to be rectified, with the increased attention to children and young people's participation. Particular challenges for Scotland are due to its rurality – how does one involve children and young people living in rural and remote areas? – and its increasing ethnic diversity.

With the creation of the Scottish Executive, children's services were rearranged to accompany Ministerial portfolios. Scotland now has a Minister and Deputy Minister for Children and Education and an accompanying Education Department that includes a 'Children and Young People's Group'. This group aims to ensure integrated children's services across the Scottish Executive, alongside its responsibility for many of the children's services previously overseen by the Social Work Services Group (which is now defunct). Responsibility for the Child Strategy Statement, for example, now rests with this group. In the Scottish Parliament, a Children's Committee was not established but the Education, Culture and Sport Committee has a particular remit to cover the work of the Scottish Executive Education Department – and thus the focus on children.

Partly because no Children's Committee was established, a dynamic Cross Party

Taking the initiative

Group of MSPs was quickly established in the Parliament, to ensure cross-Parliament, cross-Committee attention to children's issues. The Cross Party Group has organised and contributed to Parliamentary debates on the UNCRC and met with children and young people themselves. The Group was instrumental for key amendments being added to the *Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000* – including the requirement that the authority shall have due regard, as far as is reasonably practicable, to the views of the child or young person in decisions that significantly affect the child or young person, in providing school education. As a result, Scotland is the first place in the UK where children have such a broad right to have their views considered regarding their school education.

The Group has advocated for a Children's Commissioner in Scotland, alongside the Scotland for Children Campaign (a short-life campaign group bringing together statutory and voluntary agencies). A commissioner would be an independent voice on children's issues, with statutory funding and powers and would undertake a variety of tasks. The Education, Culture and Sport Committee have agreed to hold an inquiry on such a commissioner, likely to be undertaken in 2001.

As a contribution to the Scotland for Children Campaign, the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights (SACR) produced a report suggesting a potential model for a commissioner (2000). The report considered four roles essential for an effective commissioner:

- Influencing law, policy and practice.
- Challenging individual breaches of rights.
- Conducting investigations into breaches of children's rights and encouraging or undertaking research.
- Promoting awareness of children's rights.

SACR proposes that a Commissioner for Children in Scotland must have certain statutory powers and authority. These would include powers to: review and influence law, policy and practice as it affects children; promote the UNCRC and report on Government compliance to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; and support and initiate legal action on behalf of children where appropriate. The Commissioner's work should be clearly built upon the guiding principles of the UNCRC. Further, the focus should be exclusively on children and young people and the office of the Commissioner should be independent from government and have secure tenure.

Importantly, the Commissioner could also develop sustainable and flexible means by which to consult with children and young people. With the increasing attention

8 Carnegie Young People Initiative/Children in Scotland

Promoting participation

to children's participation, many local and national organisations are seeking to obtain children's views – sometimes leading to 'consultation fatigue' for certain groups. Nationally, the Scottish Executive has funded several consultation exercises based around focus groups. Ministers met with large numbers of young people at a 'Youth Summit' (June 2000), that involved Internet link ups with groups across Scotland (see page 27 for further details). The Scottish Office/Executive funded consultation by Save the Children Fund Scotland on the proposed education bill (SCF 2000) and Children in Scotland on changing the law in regards to the physical punishment of children. Focus groups, however, are best at generating questions and highlighting themes rather than providing a systematic sampling of children's views.

Scotland is thus at a critical time in terms of involving children and young people in public decision-making. The commitment from policy-makers is now widespread and frequently very strong, providing great potential for children and young people to influence policy. Structures and processes are now being determined at national as well as local levels. Good practice is being developed but the opportunities are not always there to share it, nor are the lessons always learnt from events that go less well. Methodologies are being developed, but there remain concerns about the systematic and purposeful involvement of children and young people, how to ensure the breadth of children and young people are involved, and how best to involve 'hard to reach' young people, those at most risk of being socially excluded and very young children. If we – children and young people as well as adults – can capitalise on this considerable political commitment to their participation, Article 12 of the UNCRC could become an accepted reality in Scottish decision making.

What do we mean by 'participation'?

Hart (1992) asserts that participation '... 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' (p.5). As with many powerful and popular concepts, 'participation' is used (and abused?) to describe many different relationships and activities.

Writing on children and young people's participation has increasingly sought to emphasise 'real' (i.e. meaningful) versus tokenistic participation. For example, Bartlett (1999) states that participation is defined by 'a real engagement, according to age/ability, in all stages and development of a programme, from conceptualisation, through operation to evaluation' (p.1). This engagement should also include the confident

Taking the initiative

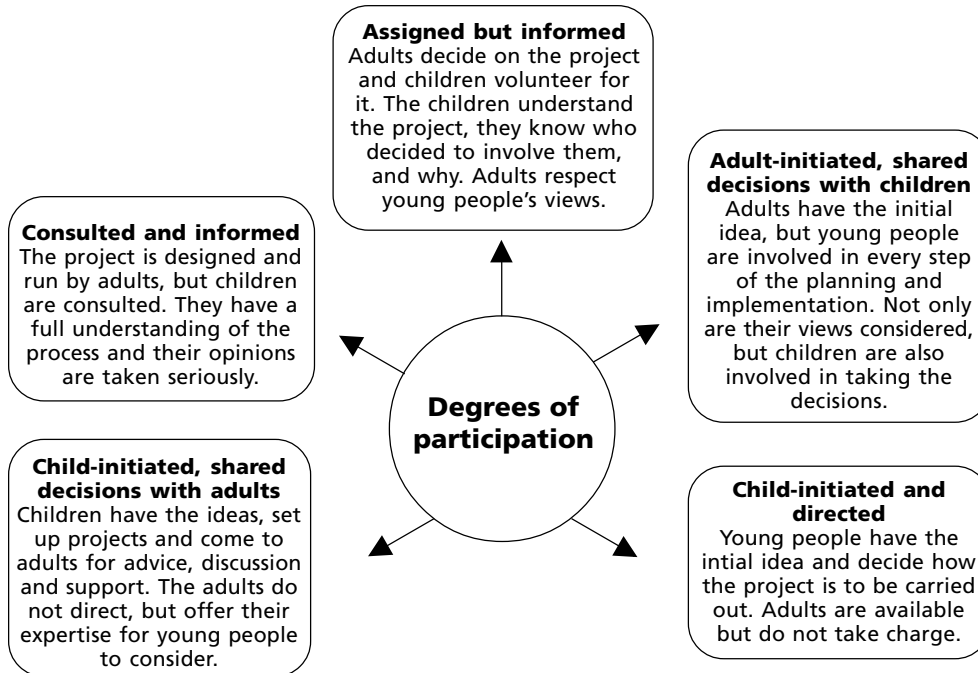
expression of views, perceptions, feelings, ideas and reactions of those involved (Bartlett, 1999). Green (1999, p.213) advocates a distinction between consultation and participation, arguing that consultation is a chance to express views and opinions whereas participation implies a more active involvement in deciding which issues are important enough to be consulted upon in the first place.

Hart (1992) provides an alternative typology that incorporates consultation as one of the many methods of participation. Hart adapted Arnstein's model of citizen participation, which ranks projects by means of a 'ladder of participation'. There are eight levels of participation on the ladder ranging from 'manipulative' and 'decorative' at the bottom to child initiated projects and sharing decision making with adults at the top. For projects to be participatory four requirements must be met:

- The children must understand the intentions of the project.
- They must know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why.
- They will have a meaningful, rather than a merely 'decorative', role.
- The young people will themselves have volunteered for the project after the project and what it entails has been made clear to them.

Hart's ladder seems to suggest that all participation of children and young people should be on the highest rung. However, Green (1999, p.205) states that this should not be presumed, as choice is the key measure for participation in a project. Some children and young people may not wish to take full direction of a project. They may simply wish for adults to listen to their opinions and to take them on board when deciding the work and activities of the project. To force or to coerce the young people into taking full direction would be against their wishes and therefore non-participatory. As Willow (1997, p.2) argues, there is no one way of involving children and young people and methods must be tailored to the needs and priorities of those involved. Perhaps a more useful model would be that illustrated below, which moves away from Hart's hierarchical model and displays the degrees of participation in a circular layout. Such a model moves away from the assumption that projects or organisations should always aim for the highest rung on the ladder, and recognises that different approaches may be best for different projects.

Promoting participation



From: *Empowering children & young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision making* (Save the Children). Phil Treseder, 1997.

The case for participation

Willow (1997) puts forward three cases – political, legal and social – for the participation of children and young people in decision making.

Political

Concern has arisen at the low numbers of young people voting in general elections. A MORI poll carried out after the 1992 general election found that 43% of those aged 18 to 24 had not voted (Green, 1999, p.210). Another MORI poll carried out in 1997 prior to the general election involved a sample of 980 18 to 22 year olds and 23 to 27 year olds from Scotland, England and Wales, and asked about voting intentions at the forthcoming election. Just under one-third (31%) of the sample responded that they would be certain not to vote at all. The main reason cited for this was a lack of interest in politics, with respondents stating that they could not be bothered to vote or did not know enough about it (MORI, 1997). These findings match those of the Scottish Parliament Election Survey (2000). Following the Scottish Parliament elections, a nationally representative survey was undertaken of

Taking the initiative

voting figures for the Scottish population aged 18 and over. The survey shows that of those aged 18 to 21 years, 33% of people did not vote; 46% of respondents (aged 22 to 25 years) did not vote.

Recent research examines the political behaviour and interests of 193 young people, aged 14 to 24 years. Whilst there were low levels of interest in politics generally, the young people did express concern in issues that are considered political in nature. These included education, employment, health and financial issues (White *et al.*, 2000, p.6–10). The young people identified a number of barriers which they felt had prevented and even excluded them from participating in politics. These included the limited number of opportunities available for young people under 18 years of age to participate in the political process, with feelings of powerlessness and frustration being identified. Young people saw themselves as lacking knowledge about how to engage with politics. Underpinning this was the view of politics as a complex and alien subject that is hard to understand. It was also argued that politicians fail to take account of young people's views, dismissing them as childish and unrealistic whilst taking heed of the views of those with money and status (White *et al.*, 2000, p.35).

Recognising and developing children and young people's citizenship is a key component of the political case. As Hart (1992) argues, young people who are below voting age must be afforded the rights of citizenship. How can they otherwise be expected to undertake the responsibilities associated with citizenship? How will young people come to have a true understanding of democratic participation along with the confidence and competence to participate? This will not automatically happen when young people reach the age of political majority. Rather, it is a process and these skills of citizenship can only be acquired through practice (Hart, 1992, p.5). To ignore the contribution that those below voting age can make to their communities and societies is to foster alienation and disenchantment in later life (Willow, 1997, p.6).

Legal

As mentioned above, Article 12 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts that the child has the right to express his or her opinion in all matters affecting the child. In Scotland, children also have participation rights under the *Children (Scotland) Act 1995* in individual decision-making, and now participation rights in school development plans and education authority plans under the *Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000*.

Social

Involving young people in decision making brings social benefits, not just to young

people but also to the communities in which they live. Participation means that young people learn more about themselves and about others. Through exercising their rights they realise that others too have rights which must be respected. In expressing their views they learn to appreciate the views of others. This leads to an understanding of diversity and the importance of taking account of the needs and hopes of others, who may have very different viewpoints (Green, 1999, p.220). Most importantly of all, the participation of the young empowers them as citizens to shape their lives and communities. Confidence and self-esteem are nurtured and children come to feel that they and their opinions are valued (Green, 1999, p.221).

What needs to be in place for children and young people to participate?

Green (1999, p.205) asserts that there are three key conditions which must be satisfied in order to ensure that people in general, and children in particular, are included in decision making processes:

- Cultural attitudes must be such as to encourage participation.
- Political, legal and administrative structures must be in place in order to ensure rights to participation.
- Economic and social conditions must be such as to enable people to exercise their rights.

True participation must also take account of the diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of the children and young people involved. This means that children and young people cannot be viewed as one homogeneous group. Differences will arise as a result of personal experience, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and disability (Green, 1999, p.213). Further, children and young people will only be able to participate if they are able to exercise their rights to take part. As Green (1999) argues: 'Involvement in the exercise of rights and the ability to participate in decision making cannot be understood in isolation from the inequalities of power, status and resources' (p.209). Those children who are most often excluded from the activities of mainstream society by disability, homelessness or poverty are therefore those children whose voices are least likely to be heard in decision making. Further, when young people in these situations are included and asked for their views it can be on the basis of the very issues which exclude them. This means that disabled young people are asked about their disability, homeless young people are asked about homelessness and so on

Taking the initiative

(Roberts, 2000, p.236). Efforts must be made to reach these young people and to include them in decision making in the whole spectrum of issues. A failure to do so will mean that projects will only be relevant or available to certain groups of children and young people – usually those who already have opportunities to participate (Willow, 1997, p.105). Recognising diversity and ensuring that participation processes are accessible to all are therefore essential to ensure that all children and young people have a voice.

Conclusion

The case for participation is strong. Not only does participation enable children to engage as citizens within their communities and society, it also sends powerful messages about the value placed on the opinions and aspirations of the young. Participation means children, young people and adults working together to find solutions and initiate change. Adults have a central role to play in participation. As Hart (1992) argues, the involvement of adults is crucial, not only for the guidance and support they can offer but also for the lessons which they too can learn (p.5). One of the greatest benefits of participation is the dialogue which it can stimulate between different generations (Willow, 1997, p.2).

The aim therefore must be to promote participation for all. If children participate in their early lives, they will be enabled to grow into confident, active adults who are able to make decisions and accept responsibility for those decisions. To exclude children from decision making is to impoverish society and its citizens, both now and in the future (Green, 1999, p.221).

Chapter Two

WHAT DID WE DO?

The mapping study

The mapping study sought to address four main questions:

- 1) Which types of organisations are currently involving children and young people in collective public decision making?
- 2) Which groups of children and young people are involved in such organisations?
- 3) By what methods are children and young people involved in internal and/or external decision making?
- 4) What perceived impact does the involvement of children and young people have on decision makers?

The survey

In May 2000, Children in Scotland made initial contact with each local authority and health board in Scotland. Each was asked to provide contact details of any organisations, groups or initiatives that had involved children and/or young people in decision making. A database of 371 organisations was created from the responses and a survey was sent to each of these. Surveys were also sent to each of the 8 police forces in Scotland and a further 14 were sent to religious organisations. Children in Scotland produces a bimonthly newsletter and a survey was sent to each of the 1,000 organisations on the newsletter mailing list. Inevitably, some of these organisations had already received a survey but additional organisations did respond who had not been identified by local authorities and health boards.

The survey was split into four sections. Section 1 asked for general background information on organisations, Sections 2 and 3 asked specific questions about the involvement of children and/or young people in decision making on issues internal to the organisation and decision making on external issues respectively. Section 4

Taking the initiative

asked questions of a more general nature in relation to the involvement of children and young people in decision making. (See the appendix for questionnaire.) The survey thus represents organisations' self-evaluation.

In total, 217 survey responses were received. SPSS, a statistics software programme, was used to analyse the 'tick-box' questions and the other answers were considered thematically.

These methods do not guarantee that all relevant organisations and groups are included within the study; indeed, the database and network will hopefully continue to grow during the three-year programme. The study does, however, gather information from a very broad range of organisations and groups, and suggests strengths and gaps which merit further investigation.

The case studies

From the 217 respondents to the survey, six organisations were selected for a more in-depth study. The criteria for selecting case studies was that they should represent diversity in four key areas:

- Geographical location (taking account of financial and time constraints).
- The primary focus of the organisations and the work carried out by them.
- The groups of children and young people served by the organisations.
- The ages of the children and young people involved in the organisations.

The case studies involved interviewing worker(s) and, in the case of two of the organisations, children and young people themselves. The interviews were informal in nature and allowed the interviewees to speak freely around key themes identified by the researcher. The interviews were tape-recorded and supplementary notes were taken by the researcher.

The organisations selected were: Allan's Primary School, Body Positive Tayside, Playback, Save the Children Fund (Scotland), The Venchie Project and West Lothian Youth Action Project. See chapter 4 for details about the groups.

Ethical considerations

Ethical concerns for the children and young people involved in the case study interviews were of paramount importance. Informed consent was sought from both

Promoting participation

the workers at the organisations and the children and young people themselves. Before the interviews took place, information was sent to the organisations for the children and young people, describing what the research project was about and explaining that the children and young people did not have to take part if they did not want to do so. Before each interview there was again an explanation of the research work and the chance to ask any questions. All children and young people involved in the interviews will receive feedback on the results of the study and they and their groups have been invited to be part of the Participation Network.

Chapter Three

SURVEY RESPONSES

Who responded?

The 217 responses received can be broken down as follows:

- 164 were received from the initial contacts identified by local authorities and health boards (a response rate of 44%).
- 7 were received from police forces.
- 14 were received from religious organisations.
- 32 were received from organisations from the Children in Scotland newsletter mailing.

Table 1 shows that the majority of organisations that responded are local authority departments (32.9%). Twenty-six out of the 32 local authorities in Scotland responded, and 25 of these stated that they involve children and young people in decision making, or have done so in the past. The responses from local authorities were received from several main departments. They came predominantly from social work, followed by education and community education. This high response is undoubtedly influenced by the survey methods used, as well as representing the considerable interest in consulting children and young people at a local authority level. The proportion responding was not as high from health boards, with 6 responses received from the 15 health boards. The organisations describing themselves as ‘other’ encompassed a diverse range including village councils, careers services, youth coffee bars and advocacy groups.

Table 1: Type of organisation responding to survey

<i>Type of Organisation</i>	<i>Contribution to Response</i>
Local Authority	32.9%
Voluntary or Charitable Organisation	23.0%
Youth Club	10.2%

Promoting participation

Information Service	6.7%
Youth Council	4.2%
Primary School	3.9%
Secondary School	2.8%
Health Board/Trust	2.8%
Arts Project	2.5%
College	0.4%
University	0.4%
Other	10.2%

Responses show that the organisations cater for a wide range of children. The majority of organisations (18.9%) aimed to support all children within a particular area. A large percentage (16.5%) identified themselves as catering for children/young people of both sexes. In fact, no organisations catered solely for one sex since where the 'boys only' box was ticked the 'girls only' box was also ticked. This would suggest that some organisations offer services or support to both sexes but not always within the same setting at the same time (for example, there may be certain clubs or services which are gender specific offered to both sexes by the same organisation).

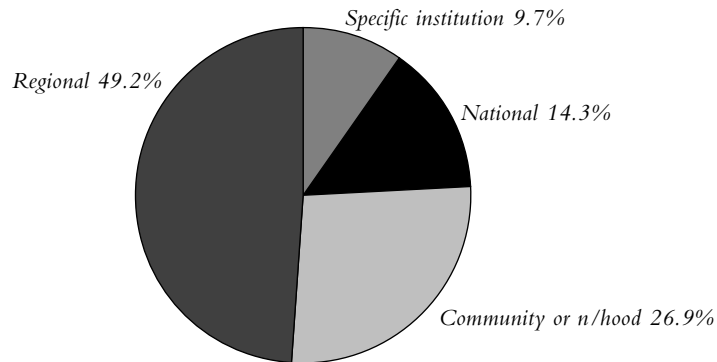
Just over one-tenth of responding organisations involved children or young people with disabilities and/or special educational needs. However, very few organisations identified themselves as catering solely or specifically for this group of children/young people. The same is true of the 10.3% of organisations involved with children/young people from ethnic minorities. No organisations identified themselves as catering solely for this group. One-tenth (11.6%) of organisations responded that they aim to provide services and support to children/young people 'looked after' by the local authority. This can again be explained from the many local authority responses and from the prominence of social work departments within these.

Graph 1 shows that the vast majority of organisations (49.2%) operate at a regional level, again probably due to local authority responses. Over one-fifth (26.9%) of organisations operate at a community or neighbourhood level (most of the 'voluntary' category would be included here). National organisations accounted for 14.3% of responses. This category would include the national voluntary organisations and charities as well as those religious organisations which operate at a national level.

The response from organisations that identified themselves as 'a specific institution' was fairly low at (7%). These included schools, colleges and universities. One can

Taking the initiative

anticipate that most local authority schools have some form of student council and thus are under-represented in the survey; this is likely to be a result of the survey being initially distributed during the school holidays.



Graph 1: Areas covered by organisations

In what ways were children and young people involved in decision making?

Almost 96% of organisations stated that they work directly with children/young people to involve them in decision making, or have done so in the past.

Responses to the survey show that 90% of organisations involve children/young people in internal decision making, whilst 70% involve them in external decision making. Two thirds (66%) of organisations involve children/young people in **both** kinds of decision making. It does not appear that one type of organisation does this more than others as a wide range of organisations made up this number.

Internal decision making

Frequency of involvement in internal decision making

If organisations are involving children in internal decision making, they report doing so as part of their everyday work. This was true for all types of organisation which responded, with no single type of organisation involving children in decision making

Promoting participation

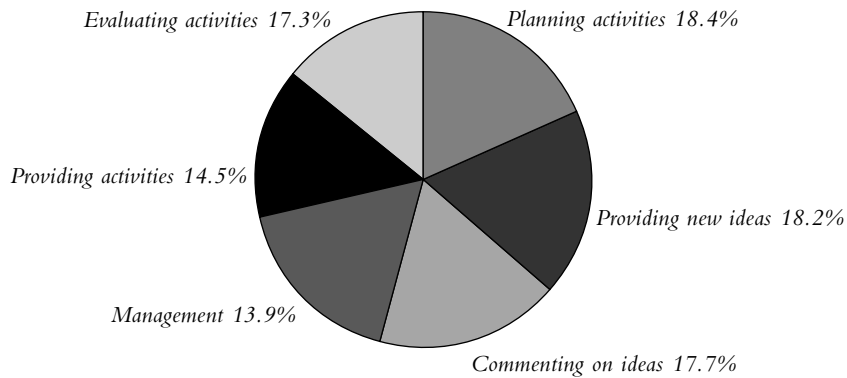
more frequently than others. **Table 2** shows the frequency with which organisations involve children and young people in internal decision making.

Table 2: Frequency of involvement

<i>Frequency of Involvement</i>	<i>% of Organisations</i>
Everyday	62.7%
At least every 2 months	9.7%
2 to 5 times in the past year	9.2%
In the past but not this year	3.2%
Once this year	2.8%

Issues on which children and young people are involved in internal decision making

As **Graph 2** shows, a high percentage of children and young people are involved at the forefront of organisations through planning and providing new ideas. Nearly one-fifth are also involved in commenting on ideas put forward by the adults in the organisations. This would suggest that a good number of organisations are attempting to engage children and young people at a high level of participation.



Graph 2: Issues on which children are involved in internal decision making

Allan's Primary School illustrates how children can be involved at a very high level in internal decision making:

The power of the Pupil Council

The Pupil Council at Allan's Primary School in Stirling has been involved in the recruitment process of new school staff. When a new teacher was to be recruited, headteacher Mrs. Breen consulted the Pupil Council on the qualities that the pupils would like to see in the new teacher. The resulting job specification was sent out with the job application forms. The Pupil Council was also asked to draw up questions that the pupils would like candidates to be asked at interview. When candidates came to the school they were shown round by pupils who then took them to the interview room and introduced them to the interview panel. The pupils then completed assessment sheets on each candidate. The eventual appointment was a joint decision by the Pupil Council and the interview panel.

The Pupil Council has also recently been given responsibility for refurbishment of the school toilets. It has been allocated a budget of £2,000 and has consulted with builders and decorators on ideas. A central focus of the revamped toilets will be an Art Gallery of pupils' own work. The children involved in creating the artwork are all children who have in the past been involved in vandalising the toilets. Headteacher Mrs. Breen explains that these children were specifically invited to join in the artwork to point out to them that past mistakes are not held against the children and that everyone can make a valuable contribution. Further, it is hoped that being involved will help to foster a sense of ownership by the children in their surroundings.

(For more information on Allan's Primary School see p.37)

How children and young people are involved in internal decision making

Children and young people are involved in internal decision making by a variety of means. The most popular way is through consultation on issues affecting them (30% of responding organisations). The next most common way is to have children or young people as part of a representative group and 26% of organisations use this. Slightly fewer organisations (23%) involve children or young people by having them on the management committee. Almost 21% of organisations responded that they involve children and young people in decision making in other ways – using methods

Promoting participation

detailed below and/or others such as suggestion boxes and conferences for children and young people.

West Lothian Youth Action Project illustrates one of the more innovative ways in which young people have acted on their own initiative and taken control of a project within their organisation:

Taking action

Several of the young people involved with West Lothian Youth Action Project have recently applied to The Prince's Trust for funding for a peer education programme. The young people themselves initiated the idea. They have taken responsibility for putting together the proposal and filling in the application form with the help of project staff. They have also met with an assessor from The Prince's Trust. The programme would involve the young people visiting local primary and secondary schools and they would liaise with school guidance departments. The peer education programme would focus on issues such as relationships, drug and alcohol awareness. A further focus of the programme would be to ease the transition from primary to secondary school and would therefore concentrate on those in the last year of primary school and the first year of secondary school. The young people are currently awaiting the outcome of their application.

(For more information on West Lothian Youth Action Project see p.38).

Table 3: Methods used to involve children and young people in internal decision making

Focus groups	15.9%
Activity sessions	15.9%
Individual interviews	14.7%
Use of the arts	13.3%
Use of e-mail/internet	12.2%
Other	11.9%

As can be seen from Table 3, questionnaires, focus groups and activity-based sessions are the methods most often employed, although the overall usage of all methods is fairly evenly spread.

The case studies suggest both methods and the environment in which they are

Taking the initiative

used are central to successful involvement of children and young people:

“It is essential to ensure that it (consultation) takes place in the right environment. The children have to feel relaxed. That is why the setting of play works so well. The children feel supported and secure and this makes them feel empowered.”

Liz Hawksford, Playback

Numbers of children and young people involved

The numbers of children and young people involved in internal decision making varied greatly from one organisation to another. Small-scale local projects tended to involve smaller numbers whilst national and well-established organisations indicated that they had involved high numbers in different projects over a considerable length of time.

Ages of children and young people involved

The responses also showed a wide variation in the ages of the children and young people involved. Almost a quarter of organisations responded said that they involve young people aged 12 to 16; whilst few organisations reported involving children under the age of 5. Table 4 shows the proportions of the different age groups involved.

Table 4: Ages of children and young people involved

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Under 5 years	15.1%
5 to 11 years	19.0%
12 to 16 years	24.3%
17 to 18 years	22.8%
19 to 25 years	18.8%

Identification and recruitment of children and young people

The children and young people involved in internal decision making were identified and recruited by organisations in a number of different ways. These include:

- Through existing youth and community groups.
- Through peer nominations and elections.
- Through detached youth work.

Promoting participation

- Through referrals, for example from social work departments.
- Through advertising and word of mouth.

Impact on internal decision makers

The survey asked the question: ‘Do you think that the views of children or young people make an impact on decision makers within your organisation?’

On the whole, answers to this question were positive:

“Yes. We believe the only way to ensure the type of service we offer continues to be appropriate and to evolve is to respond to the children’s ideas.”

Voluntary organisation

“Without a doubt. Their views were treated very seriously.”

Primary school

“Yes. It is integral to the programme to keep in tune with current trends . . . young people have a strong impact on decision making.”

Local authority

“Yes. Very often the young people have articulated what managers know needs to change anyway.”

Local authority

“Yes. The purpose of this organisation is to meet young people’s needs and aspirations. This is unachievable if we don’t know what they are.”

Voluntary organisation

“Yes. Activities are arranged with their suggestions. The management committee wants to hear their views and staff are committed to the rights of young people.”

Voluntary organisation

However, some responses highlighted concerns over consultation processes being ultimately tokenistic in nature, or appearing to be so. This was not always intentional but was sometimes due to a lack of resources and time:

“To some extent the views expressed by young people do make some impact. However, there is a concern that it becomes a bit of a token exercise and there is still not a culture whereby children are automatically consulted about issues which affect them. Timescales often make it impossible to consult properly, if at all.”

Local authority

“Yes and no. I think that the views of children and young people can make, and have made, an impact on decision makers. However, the delay in implementing decisions that have taken account of the views and issues raised by children and young people, in my view, minimises the impact as far as children and young people are concerned.”

Local authority

“I think it is difficult to determine. On very local issues they do. On bigger issues it is more difficult due to constraints such as budgets.”

Local authority

Feedback to children and young people involved in internal decision making

A high proportion of organisations (almost 80%) ensure that children and young people receive feedback on their involvement in internal decision making. This can be a key element in ensuring that the children and young people feel that their involvement is valued and has been taken seriously. Failing to provide timely feedback to participants runs the risk of the involvement process being perceived as tokenistic:

“If children and young people are not provided with evidence that they have been listened to and that their views have been taken into account, then in their experience they are making no impact on decision making.”

Local authority

Feedback was provided for children and young people by a variety of different methods. These include:

- Through meetings and discussions.

Promoting participation

- Through publications: for example, bulletins, newsletters or reports.
- Through children's and young people's plans and ideas being put into action.

In what ways are children and young people involved in external decision making?

Around 70% of organisations responded that children and/or young people have been involved in decision making on issues external to the organisation. Whilst this is a significant number, it is notably less than the 90% which involve children and young people in internal decision making.

However, recent developments would suggest that much is being done to increase the strength of the voice of children and young people in policy making, both at a local and a national level. Examples were listed in the survey responses. Among these was the recent Youth Summit Electronic Consultation which was run by the Community Education Branch of the Scottish Executive and the International Teledemocracy Centre at Napier University. The electronic consultation ran from May 2 to June 12 2000 and any young person with access to the Internet could participate. After logging on to the consultation website young people could read about the top 20 issues facing young people in Scotland today, read other people's comments and add their own and also vote for the 10 most important issues for young people in Scotland. The electronic consultation tied in with the Scottish Executive-funded Youth Summit held in June 2000. At this event young people had the opportunity to communicate with Scottish Executive Ministers both face to face and via e-mail. Over the whole consultation period almost 600 young people made comments via the website on a wide range of policy issues. The results of the consultation can be viewed at www.teledemocracy.org

Many local authorities also consult with children and young people on what they need from their services and how these should be provided. This can then influence the policy of the authority. An example of such an initiative is the Children's Rights Service based within the Social Work Department of Glasgow City Council. The service has consulted with looked after young people in a review of the services provided by a number of care homes and young people have also been involved in the creation of a new care home. Thus, children and young people are involved in influencing region-wide policies and services.

Numbers of children and young people involved in external decision making

As with internal decision making, the numbers of children and young people involved in external decision making varies widely. From some organisations only two or three children may have been involved in external consultations whilst in others hundreds have been involved, such as in the ‘Our Lives’ consultation carried out by the Save the Children Fund (see p.34).

Methods used in involving children and young people in external decision making

As can be seen from **Table 5**, focus groups and questionnaires are the most frequently used methods of involving children and young people, closely followed by activity sessions and individual interviews.

Table 5: Methods of involving children and young people in external decision-making

<i>Method</i>	<i>% of Organisation</i>
Focus Groups	15.1%
Questionnaires	14.8%
Activity Sessions	14.6%
Individual Interviews	14.5%
Use of the Arts	13.8%
Other Method(s)	13.6%
Use of e-mail/internet	13.5%

Most of the responding organisations used multiple methods and focus groups and questionnaires tended to be used in conjunction. For the few organisations which used a single method, focus groups or questionnaires were again the most popular.

This result was borne out by those organisations interviewed for case studies. Focus groups and questionnaires are seen as one of the easier ways to consult with larger numbers of children and young people. Organisations such as West Lothian Youth Action Project and Body Positive Tayside also stated that they are sometimes asked by the local authority to run a focus group within their organisation on the authority’s behalf to gain the views of children and young people on certain topics. The ‘other method(s)’ used by organisations include:

- Board meetings.
- Informal discussions.

Promoting participation

- Events such as conferences.
- Youth fora.
- Meetings with other bodies in the local community.

Playback illustrates one of the more innovative methods used to involve children and young people in consultation on external issues:

Participating through play

Playback is an organisation which consults with children and young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties in an environment of play. The first Playback consultation event was held in Edinburgh and took place over two days. The event was attended by 26 children and young people. Everyone took part in workshops in art, drama, music and video making as well as a wide range of sport-based activities. This allowed the children and young people to play together in a relaxed yet stimulating environment. They were initially invited to share their views on wheelchair provision but the children and young people took the discussions further and began to talk about many other aspects of their lives and experiences. Friendship, social inclusion and play opportunities were just some of the themes which they discussed. The conference was recorded using multi-media equipment.

Following on from the conference, a premiere of the video entitled 'Night of the Stars' was organised so that the children and young people and their families could view the video and evaluate the conference. From this initial conference and video, a 'Video Resource Pack', has been produced by Playback: offering guidance, materials and suggestions for all those involved in consulting with children and young people.

(For more information on Playback see p.35)

Links with external decision makers

Almost four-fifths of organisations reported that they have links with decision makers or a decision making forum outside of the organisation. In the majority of cases, these are departments within the local authority. However, many organisations also have links with police forces, local councillors and local decision making partnerships. For example, at West Lothian Youth Action Project there are two places on the management committee for young people. The management committee also includes a social work manager, a senior police officer and a representative from the local church and is

Taking the initiative

chaired by the local councillor. The views of young people are therefore addressed directly to people with considerable influence within the community. Similarly, one of the central aims of The Venchie Project is to foster strong links with external decision making bodies including the Craigmillar Partnership.

Impact on external decision makers

The survey asked whether the views of children and young people made an impact on decision makers outside of the organisation. The answers represent respondents' perceptions, rather than an objective 'check'. Most responded that they felt some sort of impact had been made but that it was difficult to gauge the extent of this impact on actual policy making.

“They have made an impact. The local councillor and certain departments of the council are taking them seriously.”

Voluntary organisation

“Yes, although there can be limitations; for example, resources and entrenched models of practice.”

Local authority

“Possibly, but on a very slow basis.”

Voluntary organisation

“The impact on local, regional and national issues has depended on the specific situation. Although decision makers may claim to consult young people, this does not always have an impact on policies.”

Voluntary organisation

“As yet the impact is not significant, but awareness is increasing.”

Health board

Just under 60% of organisations reported that feedback is received by young people on involvement in external decision making. This is clearly less than for internal decision making. This is a point recognised by organisations, where feedback on involvement in external consultations is often out of the hands of project workers. Again there is the danger that, if feedback is not received, children and young people can feel that little value is placed on their contribution. They may feel that those who

have 'real' power in society pay little heed to their views and that any attempts at consultation are merely tokenistic:

“Feedback varies depending on whether decisions are internal or external, there is more feedback when it’s internal. Individual members of the council respond on occasions and thank young people for their participation but this should be more consistent.”

Helen Davies, West Lothian Youth Action Project.

General issues in relation to the involvement of children and young people in decision making

Evaluation of involvement in decision making

Approximately one-third (35%) of organisations reported that they had carried out an evaluation on the involvement of children and young people in decision making. Thus the majority of organisations have not done so. For those who have, the main methods of evaluation included questionnaires, discussion groups, and meetings. These methods were often used both with staff to evaluate their role and also with children and young people to gain their views on the work carried out by organisations.

One of the key constraints on evaluation appears to be lack of resources. For example, Playback try to use video recording to record each of their events and these are then evaluated by staff and by the children themselves. However, they have not been able to record every event due to a lack of funding to provide equipment. It is also the case that some organisations have only just begun to involve children and young people in the decision making process and are therefore not yet in a position to fully evaluate their involvement.

Training opportunities within organisations

Over 60% of organisations reported that they provide, or plan to provide, training opportunities for the children and young people involved with the organisation. This training takes many different forms including:

- Drama skills.
- Peer education skills.
- Peer research skills.
- First aid training.

Taking the initiative

- Volunteering or young leader opportunities.
- Training in organising and chairing of meetings and in minute-taking.

West Lothian Youth Action Project is particularly keen to develop training opportunities within the organisation. Young people always receive a certificate for any workshops or courses which they attend. Strong links have been forged with the local college and project users have been able to receive some free training through this. The project has also applied to become an SVQ recognised training centre in youth work.

It can also be argued that the children and young people receive informal training, which although not officially recognised, does provide them with skills which are of great value, both now and in the future:

“I think we’ve learned a lot of new things and met a lot of new people. We’ve had new opportunities, like being helped to look for jobs. We’re also more confident and get on better with adults.”

Young person, West Lothian Youth Action Project.

Development of good practice guidelines

At 21%, the proportion of organisations that have already developed good practice guidelines for consulting or involving children and young people is fairly low. Under half (41.5%) of organisations have not developed good practice guidelines at all, whilst 30% are in the process of doing so.

Of all organisations which responded to the survey, 90% said that they would be interested in joining a participation network. This highlights the fact that there is a need for organisations to share experiences and information. This would not only help to provide new ideas and insights into participation but would also help to facilitate the development of good practice.

Chapter 4

CASE STUDIES

Six organisations were selected for a more in-depth case study, to investigate five main themes:

- The background and history of organisations.
- The funding and sustainability of organisations.
- The rationale for involving children and/or young people in decision making.
- The identification and recruitment processes involved.
- The methods used to involve children and/or young people in decision making.

The organisations selected, their locations and the primary purpose of each is shown in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Organisations involved in case studies

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Purpose of Organisation</i>
Allan's Primary School	Stirling	To provide education for primary and nursery school age children in accordance with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
Body Positive Tayside with The Riverside Project at Barnardo's	Dundee	To provide support for children and young people infected and/or affected by HIV and AIDS
Playback	Edinburgh	To raise the profile of children and young people with disabilities and to ensure that their contribution as citizens is valued within their local communities and beyond

Carnegie Young People Initiative/Children in Scotland 33

Taking the initiative

Save the Children Fund (Scotland)	Edinburgh	To ensure a better world for children through the promotion of their rights
The Venchie Project	Craigmillar	To provide social, recreational and educational opportunities for children and young people in Craigmillar
West Lothian Youth Action Project	North Livingston	To provide information, support, advice and advocacy services for young people aged 12 to 19 years

Data was collected on these organisations both from the survey responses and also from interviews. Several of the organisations also provided examples of their work in the form of reports and other documents.

Save the Children Fund (Scotland)

Save the Children Fund is one of the UK's largest children's charities. It works in 70 countries around the world, as well as the UK. Over the years, Save the Children has developed a wide-ranging programme, from providing emergency relief to long term development work. A recent piece of work, the '**Our Lives**' consultation, was chosen for study as an example of national involvement of children and young people.

'Our Lives' was a Scotland-wide consultation exercise that sought young people's evaluation of the extent to which the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) had been implemented. At the time, the five-year report on the implementation of the UNCRC was due to be submitted by the UK Government but no plans had been made to consult with children or young people. Save the Children approached the Scottish Office (now the Scottish Executive) with a proposal for consultation. The eventual one-off consultation was supported and partly funded by the Scottish Office. A total of 326 children and young people aged 12 to 18 were involved. They were consulted in secondary schools and also from a wide range of interest groups. Group discussion, a questionnaire and various exercises were used to collect data. Groups of young people were asked to discuss one of five themes from participation, education, health, family life and protection from harm. The final report was published in 1999.

34 Carnegie Young People Initiative/Children in Scotland

Body Positive Tayside with the Riverside Project at Barnardo's

The Riverside Project runs in conjunction with **Body Positive Tayside**. The project itself is still in the early stages whilst Body Positive was initially established in 1992. The two now work together to support children and young people affected and/or infected by HIV and AIDS, with the Riverside Project working with those aged 5 to 18 and Body Positive focusing on those aged 19 to 25. Funding is received from an amalgam of different sources: e.g. Angus, Perth and Kinross and Dundee local authorities and Tayside Health Board. Barnardo's Scotland also makes a contribution in kind through the allocation of time and staff. The feelings of project staff are that, whilst funding is secure at present, more funding could always be put to good use.

Young people are involved in decision making through consultation days, group discussion and a place for a young person on the management committee at Body Positive. Staff try to ensure that the involvement of young people is at the forefront of what they do by consulting them on an ongoing basis. Suggestions or comments can be made to staff, to the management committee or via a suggestion box.

Feedback is recognised as an essential component of the participation process and attempts are made to keep project users as informed as possible through newsletters, noticeboards, discussion and minutes of meetings:

“We always try to let people know what's happening with their ideas. If their idea is not taken on board then it is explained to them *why*. This way people know that their contribution is always valued.”

Marnie Collin, Body Positive Tayside

Playback

“Play stimulates the children and it also relaxes them. If their bodies are active then their minds are active too.”

Liz Hawksford, Playback

Playback was established in 1998. The voluntary organisation grew out of a Scotland-wide survey on wheelchair provision for disabled children, initiated by two mothers who themselves have children with disabilities. This personal experience of disability was one of the driving forces for establishing Playback:

Taking the initiative

“We wanted a better deal for the children. We felt that help and support and things like recreational opportunities just weren’t there. People have to realise that disabled children have the ability to have fun too.”

Liz Hawksford, Playback

Following on from the survey about wheelchair provision it was recognised that there was a need to hear the views of young wheelchair users themselves. A number of options were considered before it was decided that it was best to carry out the consultation in a play environment, (see p.29).

The work of Playback has been ongoing since this initial event. Children and young people have been involved in decision making through consultation on issues both internal and external to the organisation. For example, the children and young people themselves designed and decided on the colours for the Playback logo. Five consultation events have been held to date with some of these events being recorded by the use of multi-media. These recordings are then used by the staff, children and young people to evaluate the events.

Ideally, Playback would like to record all events in this way but this is not possible due to lack of funding. Funding is received from the Scottish Executive and support in kind is given by Capability Scotland through the provision of facilities. Funding difficulties have always been an issue and Playback is currently suffering from a severe lack of funding.

‘Children Decide’ at The Venchie Project

The Venchie Project has been in existence for 37 years. The basis of the organisation is an activity-led youth club with the name ‘Venchie’ coming from ‘adventure playground’. Funding is received from the Community Education Department of the local authority and from the Scottish Executive. The organisation has always sought to involve children and young people in issues affecting them but funding has recently been received from Children in Need to create the ‘Children Decide Post’: a post aimed specifically at involving children and young people in decision making. Funding has been granted for three years and the project is currently at the early stages of development.

Consultations will initially run for a period of 12 weeks, with two clubs of children: one being held on Wednesday evenings and one on Friday evenings. Each

Promoting participation

club will be made up of 12 children, aged 7 to 12 years of age. The children will be selected by a 'lucky dip' of all those who have put their names forward. The main focus of the consultations will be the redevelopment that has been ongoing in the Craigmillar area over the last few years. A new primary school and playpark are to be built in the area and children will be asked for their views on what these should be like. The outcome of the consultation will hopefully be a meeting with various influential bodies in the area to make them aware of the children's views. The children themselves will take responsibility for organising and running the meeting. They will decide on which guest speakers they would like to attend and will construct the questions which they would like answers to.

The children will also be heavily involved in decision making within the clubs themselves. They will have the responsibility for setting the agenda for each meeting and for recording what happens at meetings. One way of recording the events of the clubs will be photographs and the children will choose which camera to buy with available money. The children will also decide on a trip which they will take near Christmas time. Children will themselves be asked to evaluate the clubs through their weekly recordings, evaluation sheets and peer interviewing.

Allan's Primary School

Allan's Primary School is a local authority school situated in Stirling and currently has a roll of 218 pupils. A nursery school is also within the school building. School staff are committed to the philosophy of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the child's right to have a voice is therefore central to the day-to-day running of the school.

Children are heavily involved in all decisions taken within the school through the Pupil Council. Each year, a new Pupil Council is elected. This consists of two children from each year group, except Primary 1 and 2, and the representatives are elected by their classmates. Regular council meetings are held with the pupils themselves drawing up agendas and minutes for meetings and then reporting back to their classmates, and consulting on issues to be raised (see p.22).

Staff are currently looking at additional ways of involving more children who are not on the Pupil Council in decision making within the school. Methods developed include:

- The school operates a house system with each house having a peer-elected House Captain. At the start of the year, the children in each house draw up

Taking the initiative

the guidelines and rules by which the house must abide.

- Two senior pupils sit on the school finance committee.
- A computer group within the school is made up of children who are talented in the use of IT. The children have been designated 'Staff Development Coordinators' and they train staff on how to use IT. They have also visited the teacher training college to teach student teachers there.
- Younger children are also encouraged to make decisions. In P1 and P2 children have 'work tasks'; a set of tasks which must be completed in that school day, and the children themselves decide in which order they will tackle those tasks.

West Lothian Youth Action Project

West Lothian Youth Action Project has been established for seven years and is open to all young people aged 12 to 19 in the West Lothian area. The project has centres throughout the area and also carries out detached youth work. A further aspect of the project's work is the advocacy service. Workers will attend children's hearings, schools and court hearings wherever a young person feels that they need to be represented. The project receives approximately 80% of its funding from West Lothian Council and this helps to cover staffing and building costs. Other funding is obtained through fundraising efforts and from trusts and charities. Some corporate funding has also been received in the past from Lloyds TSB, Marks and Spencer and Nationwide. There are two funding applications currently awaiting decisions: one to the National Lottery which would fund another full-time member of staff and one to The Prince's Trust which would fund a peer education programme designed by some of the young people at the project (see p.23). Whilst funds are relatively secure, they are over-stretched and additional funding would mean that current programmes could be extended and new programmes could be developed.

The project users have a significant say in the running of the project and are currently working on several new ideas which they themselves have initiated. There are two places on the project management committee for young people. The committee meets every six weeks with the young people raising issues that have been marked for discussion by the other project users. The project also has links with the Youth Forum Network in Livingston and two girls who use the project are currently trying to establish a Youth Forum in the Broxburn area.

There are also many opportunities for training within the project. One former

project user went on to become a volunteer at the project and has subsequently gained a place at college and one of the girls currently involved in The Prince's Trust application is also hoping to become a volunteer. In the past, project users have attended residential where they have gained skills in life saving and in using IT. The project has also applied to become an officially recognised SVQ training centre in youth work.

Lessons from the case studies

Why involve children and young people?

Respondents identified three inter-related rationales for involving children and young people, all based on perceptions of children as active rather than passive recipients of services: children and young people as holders of rights, as 'stakeholders' and/or as 'consumers'. All three rationales led to the centrality of listening to children and young people.

First, descriptions of **Allan's Primary School** exemplify the children's rights rationale. Making the children aware that they have rights, which are respected by all members of staff, helps to build a positive ethos within the school:

"It (consultation) is about children's rights and about creating a sense of trust and value. If children are given their rights then they will happily take on their responsibilities. There is a great culture of mutual respect in the school."

Mrs. Breen, Headteacher at Allan's Primary School

Second, **The Riverside Project** and **Body Positive** also felt that involving children and young people ensured they had a sense of ownership of the project. This view of children as 'stakeholders' was also one which was strongly expressed at **Allan's Primary School**.

A third rationale was that children and young people are best placed to speak about their own lives, their experiences and issues affecting them. This was the basis for the **'Our Lives'** consultation: children and young people are the experts and it was felt that a true picture of implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child could not be created without their input.

Inclusion and diversity

Two of the organisations have faced various obstacles in accessing children and young people and involving them in decision making.

Taking the initiative

In the past, staff at **The Riverside Project** and **Body Positive** have found involving children and young people in consultation groups challenging, for two reasons. First, some project users simply want somewhere where they can come and receive a service and do not necessarily want to be involved in decision making. Second, attending one of the groups at Body Positive is effectively a declaration that someone within the young person's family is HIV Positive. It is therefore essential that the environment is one of security and trust, where everyone is going through a similar experience and confidentiality can be ensured.

The '**Our Lives**' consultation exercise encountered difficulties in engaging with young people from black and ethnic minority groups and this is stated in its final report. Possible explanations suggested for this are that black and ethnic minority young people are not generally involved in mainstream youth provision such as youth groups or youth fora, and that youth provision for black and ethnic minority young people is not well networked with other organisations.

West Lothian Youth Action Project specifically targets those young people who may be excluded from mainstream youth provision through its detached youth work. This involves workers contacting young people on the street and working from the young people's own wishes. For example:

- If the young people want to set up groups then they are assisted in doing so.
- If young people have been excluded from local community centres and would like to return project workers will liaise with the centres on their behalf.
- If young people would like to join local centres but feel uncomfortable attending on their own then workers will accompany them initially.
- If young people simply want to continue to meet with youth workers on the street then this is what happens.

The project also has links with other groups of young people who are often excluded such as young people with caring responsibilities and those who are looked after.

Methods used to involve children and young people in decision making

The projects have commonly sought to use additional methods to the more 'traditional' consultation measures such as questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. The examples provided by Playback, Allan's Primary School and West Lothian Youth Action Project serve to highlight these innovative approaches.

40 Carnegie Young People Initiative/Children in Scotland

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

This mapping study found that a large number of organisations report involving children and young people in decision making – and it is highly likely that even more organisations and examples will be identified as the Participation Network develops. Most responding organisations (90%) were enthusiastic about joining the participation network. The findings from this short mapping study do seem to support the strong commitment towards children and young people in decision-making suggested in this report's introduction.

The key messages arising from survey responses and case study interviews can be summarised as follows:

- Of the organisations which responded, more involve children and young people in internal decision making than in decision making on external issues.
- Most organisations involving children and young people in internal decision making report doing so everyday. Children and young people are reported to be involved in management, planning and evaluating.
- Respondents underlined the importance of the methods used to involve children and young people.
- Feedback is more consistent when the decision making is of an internal nature.
- Respondents felt that the involvement of children and young people did make an impact on decision makers.
- A high proportion of organisations have not evaluated the involvement of children and young people in decision making. Three possible reasons are: the involvement processes are still at an early stage; organisations may benefit from guidance on how to go about this; organisations may lack resources to do so. The Participation Network will provide a forum for organisations to exchange ideas, information and experience in this area.
- Few organisations have developed good practice guidelines.
- Organisations specifically for three groups of children or young people were

Taking the initiative

under-represented in this survey: those with disabilities/special needs; those from black and ethnic minority groups; and those for children under the age of 5.

The literature on participation has encouraged a more sophisticated consideration of what is meant by ‘participation’ or ‘consultation’. The terms can be used to describe very different kinds of relationships and very different levels of power between children/young people and adults. Respondents in the mapping study were concerned about consultation with children/young people being tokenistic. This matches the ‘participation ladder’ typology presented by Hart (1992), which labels the relationships at the bottom rungs of the ladder as tokenistic as well. A particular finding of this mapping study was the connection respondents perceived between not receiving feedback and tokenism. This could suggest another diagram to Hart’s ladder and Save the Children Fund’s circle (see page 11): a diagram of the *process*, that requires a feedback loop back into children and young people’s contributions.

This mapping study only begins to chart such a process. The survey results are only a ‘snap shot’ picture of participation. The case studies allowed for some investigation of how particular aspects of children’s/young people’s involvement proceeded; importantly, some evaluation was provided by children and young people themselves. More research is required on this later point, with children and young people evaluating how organisations involve them.

The study reveals particular challenges for Scotland, in ensuring that **all** children and young people have a chance to be involved in decision making. The study found three groups that were arguably under-represented. Lessons from both Scotland and elsewhere could be learnt. For example, the Swedish pre-school curriculum encourages children to develop their views; pre-school children were consulted in Fife about services for them (culminating in the ‘Our Day’ event organised by Fife Children’s Participation Forum and the Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights). One case study reported in this mapping study suggests innovative ways to involve disabled children.

Why are more organisations involving children/young people in internal decision making rather than external? Such a finding may be an artefact of the mapping study methodology, which may have encouraged the former to reply. Equally, it may reflect that few organisations do exist that involve children/young people in external decision making, such as Who Cares? Scotland or Article 12. Hart’s 1992 publication itself implies that children/young people are involved in ‘projects’ rather than

42 Carnegie Young People Initiative/Children in Scotland

Promoting participation

structurally embedded in civic society's deliberations. Young people in Article 12 have themselves highlighted such gaps, by prioritising the lowering of the voting age. Children and young people are largely still in the situation of being 'invited in', at the discretion of adults, to larger policy-making debates.

The introduction suggested that Scotland is in a time of transition, a critical point where systematic and sustainable methods of involving children and young people are being developed and could be translated into standard practice. The mapping study demonstrates that few organisations are presently evaluating children and young people's involvement and few have good practice guidelines. The development of these could be a crucial next step in ensuring that involvement of children and young people becomes a normal and meaningful part of policy making.

Key recommendations

The study has identified several key areas in which organisations must be supported in order to develop their ability to foster participation among all children and young people:

- The need for a cultural shift, so that attitudes encourage participation.
- The need to enable organisations to reach those children and young people excluded by mainstream youth provision and to foster their participation in decision making.
- The methods used in participation must be those which children and young people themselves feel comfortable with. Environment is crucial to the success of the participation process and it is essential that the children and young people feel relaxed, confident and secure.
- Feedback to children and young people should be an essential part of their involvement in all decision making, otherwise there is the danger that their involvement will be viewed as tokenistic.
- Further evaluation is required on the actual impact of children and young people's involvement on decision making.
- There is much scope within organisations to provide training, be it formal or informal, for children and young people but such opportunities are often constrained by budgets and resources. This is a particular area where extra funding could be put to great use.
- The development of good practice guidelines is an area which needs further development. The Participation Network would provide a forum whereby

Taking the initiative

organisations can share experiences, information and ideas, thus enabling the development of good practice.

- Funding is problematic for many organisations, particularly for those in the voluntary sector. With more long-term funding many could realise the potential that they have to extend existing programmes or develop new ones.

Conclusion

Many organisations in Scotland are promoting the participation of children and young people in decision making. Arguably, there are many more than this study has been able to identify. These organisations use a variety of methods and display varying ranges of participation. Much of the work being carried out is innovative and inspiring, as highlighted by the case studies.

There is the need for all those involved in working with children and young people to recognise that participation is a fundamental right of citizenship. Above all, it indicates that children and young people themselves are valued, not only for the citizens that they will become but for the citizens that they are now.

REFERENCES

- Bartlett, K. (1999) Real Engagement by Children in *Early Childhood Matters No.91*, (the bulletin of the Bernard van Leer Foundation)
<http://www.bernardvanleer.org/publicat/ECM91/engagement.htm>
- Green, David R., Political Participation of Youth in the United Kingdom in *Political Participation of Youth Below Voting Age*, (1999), Barbara Riepl and Helmut Wintersberger (eds.). European Centre, Vienna.
- Hart, Roger A. (1992) *Children's Participation – From Tokenism to Citizenship*. UNICEF International Child Development Centre.
- Marshall, K. (1997) *Children's Rights in the Balance*. The Stationery Office, Edinburgh.
- MORI (1997) *General Election, First Time Voters*. <http://www.mori.com>
- Roberts, H. Listening to Children: and Hearing Them in *Research with Children – Perspectives and Practices*, (2000), Pia Christensen and Allison James (eds.). Falmer Press, London.
- Save the Children Fund Scotland (1999) *Our Lives: Final Consultation Report*, SCF Scotland, Edinburgh.
- Save the Children Fund Scotland (2000) *Improving Our Schools*, The Scottish Executive, Edinburgh.
- Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights (2000) *A Proposal for a Commissioner for Children in Scotland*, Insider Custom Publishing, Edinburgh.
- Scottish Executive (2000) *Scottish Office Child Strategy Statement*, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/swsg/child-strategy.htm>
- Scottish Office (1998) *Report of the Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament*, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w5/rcsg-18.htm>
- Scottish Parliamentary Election Study (2000) Unpublished. Personal correspondence 5.10.00.
- Treseder, P. (1997) *Empowering Children and Young People Training Manual*. Save the Children Fund.
- UK Government (1994) *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: The*

Taking the initiative

UK's First Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, HMSO, London.

- White *et al.* (2000) *Young People's Politics – Political Interest and Engagement Amongst 14 to 24 Year Olds*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.
- Willow, C. (1997) *Hear! Hear!* Local Government Information Unit, London.

APPENDIX

Survey of organisations promoting the involvement of children and young people in decision making

(Part of a three year programme funded by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust)

Children in Scotland is undertaking a study on how organisations are involving children and young people in the making of political, collective or community decisions in Scotland. The results of this survey will be compiled in a published report, as part of UK-wide dissemination through the Carnegie UK Trust.

Children in Scotland will be establishing a participation network on the basis of the information collected. The aim of the network will be to facilitate discussion and exchange of good practice amongst organisations seeking to promote children's and young people's participation in policy-making. We hope that you will decide to join!

Name of person
completing questionnaire

Organisation

Telephone number

e-mail address

Address

continued . . .

Taking the initiative

.....
.....

Please note that the information contained on this questionnaire will be held on a database by Children in Scotland and used for the basis of the participation report and network.

Please return this form by **31st July 2000** in the SAE provided to:

Anne-Marie Dorrian
Children in Scotland
Princes House
5 Shandwick Place
Edinburgh EH2 4RG

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Anne-Marie Dorrian Phone: 0131 222 2420
e-mail: adorrian@childreninscotland.org.uk

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE:

The questionnaire is divided in to four sections. These are:

SECTION 1 – BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON YOUR ORGANISATION

SECTION 2 – INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING ON ISSUES INTERNAL TO YOUR ORGANISATION

SECTION 3 – INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING ON ISSUES EXTERNAL TO YOUR ORGANISATION

e.g. local/national government policy

SECTION 4 – GENERAL QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING

For this study, children and young people are defined as under 25 years of age.

The questionnaire should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.

SECTION 1 – BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON YOUR ORGANISATION

- **What type of organisation are you? (please tick all that apply)**

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Primary School | <input type="checkbox"/> | Youth Club | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Secondary School | <input type="checkbox"/> | Youth Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Information Service | <input type="checkbox"/> | Arts Project | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| College | <input type="checkbox"/> | University | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Local Authority | <input type="checkbox"/> | Please specify department | |
| Health Board/Trust | <input type="checkbox"/> | Please specify department | |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> | Please specify | |

Taking the initiative

- **What is the primary purpose of your organisation?**

.....

- Does your organisation aim to support particular groups of children and young people? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Secondary school | <input type="checkbox"/> | Youth Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Boys only | <input type="checkbox"/> | Children or young people: | |
| Girls only | <input type="checkbox"/> | - from an ethnic minority | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mixed sex | <input type="checkbox"/> | - with a disability | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| All children within a particular area | <input type="checkbox"/> | - who are looked after | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> | - with Special Educational Needs | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If 'other' please specify.....

- Would you describe your organisation as: (Please tick)

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| National | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Regional (i.e. covers a local authority area) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Community/neighbourhood | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A specific institution (e.g. school, care home or hospital) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- Does your organisation work directly with or has it worked in the past with children and young people to involve them in decision making?

Yes

If you answered 'Yes' then please continue with the rest of the questionnaire.

No

If you answered 'No' can you specify why not?

.....

If you answered 'No' then please go to Question 25 and return it to us as it is. Thank you.

SECTION 2 – INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING ON ISSUES INTERNAL TO YOUR ORGANISATION

- **Has your organisation involved children or young people in decision making concerning issues internal to your organisation?**

Yes

No

If no, please go to question 16.

- How often does your organisation involve children or young people on decision making within your organisation?

It is part of our everyday work

At least every two months

two to five times in the past year

Once this year

In the past but not this year

- **On what types of issues within your organisation do you involve children or young people?**

In planning the organisation's activities

Asking for new ideas on the organisation's activities

Asking for comment on new ideas for the organisation's activities

In managing the organisation

In providing the organisation's activities

In evaluating the organisation's activities

Please give examples of how this takes place/took place

.....

.....

Taking the initiative

● **How are children or young people involved in decision making within your organisation?**

- As part of the management committee
 - Through consultation on issues affecting them
 - As part of a representative group
 - Other
- If 'Other' please specify
-

● What methods do you use in involving children or young people? (Please tick all that you have used)

- Questionnaires
 - Focus groups
 - Individual interviews
 - Activity based sessions
 - Use of the arts
 - Use of e-mail/internet
 - Other
- If 'Other' please specify
-

If you use e-mail/internet or other computer technology, please describe how this is used

.....

● Approximately how many children or young people have been involved in decision making on issues internal to your organisation?

.....

Promoting participation

- **What age are the children or young people who are involved/have been involved?** (Please tick all that apply)

- Under 5 years
- 5 to 11 years
- 12 to 16 years
- 17 to 18 years
- 19 to 25 years

- **How do you/did you identify and recruit children or young people who are involved?**

.....

.....

- **Do you think that the views of children or young people make an impact on decision makers within your organisation? (Please describe why or why not)**

.....

.....

.....

- **Did children or young people receive feedback on their input into the decision making process?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, please describe how.....

Taking the initiative

**SECTION 3 – INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN
DECISION MAKING ON ISSUES EXTERNAL TO YOUR
ORGANISATION**

- **Has your organisation involved children or young people in decision making concerning issues external to your organisation?**

Yes

No

If yes, please describe

- **Approximately how many children or young people have been involved in decision making on issues external to your organisation?**

.....

- **What methods do you use in involving children or young people?**

(Please tick all that you have used)

Questionnaires

Focus groups

Individual interviews

Activity based sessions

Use of the arts

Use of e-mail/internet

Other

If 'Other' please specify

.....

If you use e-mail/internet or other computer technology, please describe how this is used

.....

Promoting participation

- Does your organisation have links with decision makers or decision making forums outwith your organisation? (e.g. within the wider community, with the Local Authority, or with an MSP)

Yes

No

If yes, please describe

.....

- If you answered 'Yes' to the above question do you think that the views of children or young people made an impact on these decision makers outwith your organisation? Please describe why or why not.

.....

.....

.....

- Did children or young people receive feedback on their involvement?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe

.....

.....

Taking the initiative

SECTION 4 – GENERAL QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING

- Has your organisation evaluated the involvement of children or young people in decision making?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe

- Do you provide (or plan to provide) any training for children or young people involved in your organisation?

Yes

No

If yes, what kind

- Has your organisation developed good practice guidelines for consulting or involving children or young people?

Yes

No

In progress

We would be grateful if you could enclose background information on your organisation as well as copies of any reports, evaluations or guidelines that you have produced in relation to the involvement of children or young people

- Would your organisation be interested in joining a 'Participation Network', receiving information, meeting similar organisations and/or sharing experiences?

Yes

No

Thank you once again for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact Anne-Marie Dorrian.

Tel: 0131 222 2420

e-mail: adorrian@childreninscotland.org.uk



Taking the initiative

Participation Network

A key theme of Children in Scotland's work for the past three years has been the participation of children and young people, which it has sought to promote through such means as participative research, information and training, and involving children in policy consultations and events. As described in the introduction, there is a growing commitment in Scotland to involving children and young people in policy consultations and other means of collective decision making. What is presently missing is an evaluation of 'what works', accompanied by a consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of methods presently used.

Children in Scotland and its members perceived the need to develop a participation network – a network that allowed for the exchange of experiences, to identify training needs and, potentially, to identify means of working together.

The Carnegie UK Trust decided to part fund a three-year programme with Children in Scotland, which has the following aims:

- 1) To map a national picture in relation to the participation of children and young people in decision making in Scotland.
- 2) To create a database of organisations involved in such work.
- 3) To facilitate good practice through the creation of a 'Participation Network' whereby organisations can exchange information, ideas and experiences.

Children and young people can be involved in decision making at both an individual and collective level. This programme concentrates on the latter, with a focus on their participation in politics and policy development. This could include both 'internal' and 'external' participation: i.e. the involvement of children and young people in the internal management and organisational decisions and in issues external to the organisation or group (e.g. a public consultation).

For further information about the network please contact Anne-Marie Dorrian at Children in Scotland.

Tel: 0131 222 2420

Fax: 0131 228 8585

e-mail: adorrian@childreninscotland.org.uk

Carnegie Young People Initiative/Children in Scotland