



Northumberland
County Council

**Northumberland
Children and Young People's
Participation Strategy
2022 - 2025**

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What is Participation and why is it Important?

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states “Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

Within Northumberland the Children and Young People's Strategic Participation Group aims to enable children and young people to have a voice that informs decisions and to be proactively involved in the delivery of those decisions.

‘Young people must be in the driving seat to inform decisions, shape provision, and inspect quality. Young people matter. They are important to us now and to our future and we need them to flourish. A very small minority of young people feel no sense of belonging and as a result do not respect the communities in which they live. The vast majority, however, do make a positive contribution and feel misrepresented and undermined by negative images of, and attitudes towards, young people. We need to work together to create a society that is more positive for youth’. (Positive for Youth, 2012).

Participation Strategy Vision

“Participation is a way of working, rather than an event, a project, an unachievable dream or a tick box ...(it is) a culture of participation from top to bottom and side to side.” Shenton, F (2004) 'Everyday Participation: A Practical Guide to Youth Involvement.

This simple sentence holds the key emphasis and vision of this strategy, in that, while there will be a number of specific participation activities, these will be to further embed and enhance the ethos of participation throughout the day to day working.

To demonstrate this way of working there is an expectation that:

- Children and young people will be proactively involved in strategic and political decision making to inform policy and delivery
- Service delivery and policy will respond to the views of children and young people and will be based on their views, needs and aspirations.
- Children and young people will be proactively involved in the implementation and delivery of the participation strategy.

Defining Aims

In keeping with the ethos of “Participation is a way of working rather than an event...” the following principles define how children and young people’s voices are heard and their opinions influence the decision-making process:

1. Promoting positive images of children and young people and their achievements
2. Identify and facilitate effective networks between participation groups
3. Influence financial decision making through a continuum of dialogue
4. Encourage high quality participation work
5. Influence and support workforce development to include participation, knowledge and skills across all partner organisations
6. Continue the development of the Participation of 13 - 25 year olds
7. Develop the participation of 0-13 year old children
8. Develop appropriate communication channels with young people utilising social media.
9. Ensure a positive communication channel between all participation groups through the strategic participation group.

Participation Networks

A wide range of youth participation takes place throughout Northumberland. Many services, agencies, organisations and schools engage in high level participation activities. Some organisations and schools have achieved national acclaim for their outstanding work in this field. The Children and Young People’s Strategic Participation Group aspires to build on existing good practice and ensure greater cohesion across the work.

The Strategic Participation Group will support the network of participation groups across the county to embed participation as a way of working and to maximise high quality opportunities for children and young people to influence the decisions that impact upon them.

Appendix 1 demonstrates the existing network of participation within Northumberland.

Northumberland Children and Young People's Strategic Participation Group

The Strategic Participation group comprises of representation from Health, Voluntary and Community Sector and Northumberland County Council and is supported by NCC elected Members. The group members include those in strategic posts and others in more operational roles across the sectors, all of whom share a commitment to the participation agenda. The Strategic Participation Group is responsible for the development and monitoring of children and young people's participation within Northumberland and embedding the vision of the group within the working practice of partner organisations, departments and services.

Strategic partners are responsible for ensuring that Participation Strategy priorities are shared at every level throughout their organisations and sectors to influence policy, service planning and financial decision making.

Operational partners are 'participation champions' within their service. They implement participation activities and opportunities and advise the group on methodology for engaging with children and young people.

Appendix 2 demonstrates how the Strategic Participation Group fits into the process of young people influencing decisions and change.

Mechanisms That Enable the Voice of the Young Person to Be Heard

Young people are supported and enabled to make their voice heard through various mechanisms within Northumberland County Council and these include:

- Mind Of My Own
- Voice Making Choices – young person group
- Care Leavers Forum
- Youth Cabinet and Parliament
- Mark your Mark Ballot
- Young Carers – link with Voluntary and Community Sector

Participation Standards

For youth participation to be effective and consistent throughout Northumberland it is necessary for everyone working with children and young people to have an agreed base of youth participation practices and standards. Highlighting what is and is not considered effective or appropriate participative practice.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation provides a framework for measuring young people's level of engagement and participation. In this way It is possible to identify what needs to happen to increase the involvement of the young person to maximise their voice and influence.



Professor Lundy's model of participation gives a clear and easy to follow practical approach and checklist to ensure that each activity and engagement holds a focus of the young person's voice at the centre. Lundy's model is a rights-based approach embedding Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) ensuring that the voice and views of the young person are valued and respected.

In a practical sense Lundy's model is broken into four key elements that can be applied to each rung of Harts ladder of Youth Participation. These then ensure that in all situations children and young people's voice is kept at the core of all work.



Core standards:

1. We listen to children and young people and respond appropriately to what they say.
2. We ensure that children and young people's views inform our work.
3. We respond to and support children and young people's individual needs by encouraging them to feel good about themselves and building their confidence.
4. We have a welcoming approach and show children and young people our appreciation of their involvement and contribution towards the development of the service.
5. We are respectful of children and young people's opinions, knowledge and experience.
6. We invest sufficient time to ensure that children and young people can participate in a meaningful way.
7. We ensure that children and young people receive meaningful feedback following their input.

There is an expectation that all organisations and departments that work with children and young people will engage them in a participative process through their way of working and cultural ethos. These core participation standards are a baseline for all participation work with children and young people in Northumberland.

Appendix 1

Network of Young People's Participation



