



# LINKS



## **Involving Young People in Decision Making Workshop Discussion Notes**

### **Introduction**

During the workshops delegates discussed the following questions:

- How/where in your organisation are young people were involved in decision making?
- What challenges have you encountered when trying to involve young people in decision making?
- What solutions can you think of for the challenges identified earlier?

### **How/where in your organisation are young people were involved in decision making?**

- Young people in the LINKS groups are involved in decision making in a variety of ways:
- Sitting on management committees
- Sitting on recruitment panels for new staff
- Being part of peer support groups such as Health Champions or peer mentoring groups
- Sitting on an advisory group, youth committee, youth forum, Youth Parliament
- Helping to design project activities to meet needs and address issues that they have identified and having regular review/planning meetings with staff/volunteers
- Helping to decide how funding is spent
- Helping to identify the need for change in other spaces that young people occupy, e.g. schools
- On a one-to-one basis to develop personal action/development plans
- Through social action in communities
- Through consultations, questionnaires and evaluation methods
- By organisations being open and flexible

## Challenges and Solutions to Challenges

The following table summarises the challenges to involving young people in decision making and solutions to those challenges:

Type of challenge	Solution
Lack of commitment from young people; issues with completing the project; young people losing interest; negative attitude from some young people; negative group dynamics	Provide incentives including food and fun activities as well as doing the work. Encourage mutual respect among young people in group and ensure that all opinions are heard. Build the young people's team gradually and continuously. Staff/volunteers may need more support and/or training in managing and delivering group work.
Lack of time for young people due to other commitments, e.g. exams, school work, caring responsibilities	Have a flexible approach re times of meetings, duration etc. Considering offering money for childcare. Have different options so young people can choose how much or how little they want to be involved.
Lack of transport	Provide money for taxi, bus or train fares.
Young people not being realistic, e.g. budgets Vs activities desired	Get the young people to research the cost of activities (e.g. by phoning an activity centre/pizza shop/venue or looking online). Then help them to look at the amount of money allocated to activities for each year of the project Vs the budget, i.e. calculate no of young people x Activity + transport = ££ Vs actual allocation. Explain why some activities or ideas may not be possible without further fundraising or why choices need to be made.
Lack of support from other adults, e.g. schools Boards of Governors, others in authority	Provide training for adults to really listen to young people and to demonstrate their support.
Young people feeling they are not listened to and/or valued	Demonstrate respect. Explain why and how decisions have been made. Thank young people for their

	<p>suggestions/work/ideas. If some of these can't be implemented maybe they can generate other ideas that can. Thank young people for the time they spent working in the ideas. Remind staff/volunteers and adults in other organisations about the values of the organisation regarding respect for young people.</p>
<p>Life issues for young people, e.g. at home, school, elsewhere</p>	<p>Listen without judgement. Signpost and enable young people to access specialist help/advice/support from other service providers as necessary. Encourage positive relationships among young people.</p>
<p>Shyness and lack of confidence and capacity among young people</p>	<p>Build the confidence and capacity of young people gradually, with smaller tasks/decision making building up to being able to take on bigger and/or more complex issues as confidence grows. Provide training for young people in different areas (e.g. committee skills; running meetings; campaigning; fundraising)</p>
<p>Keeping it relevant and preventing adults over-controlling discussions</p>	<p>Let young people set the agenda (or at least part of it). Keep checking that the young people understand what is being talked about. Be flexible at meetings - maybe the young people do not need to be at all parts of the meeting if some of the topics on the agenda are not issues they can influence (e.g. compliance with GDPR)</p>
<p>Timescale of projects and workload Vs time needed for genuine involvement of young people</p>	<p>Be honest with funding bodies about the amount of time needed to ensure genuine involvement of young people and all that this involves. Educate funders about the differing abilities of the young people and the necessity to be open to all. Start early in the process with the young people and explain when the</p>

	<p>deadlines are and what needs to be achieved by when.</p>
<p>Legal obligations, especially with regard to HR issues</p>	<p>Ensure that young people have been trained in recruitment and selection, tailoring where necessary documents from organisations such as the Equality Commission. Look at the Labour Relations Agency's website for a list of training opportunities for staff/volunteers who might be supporting the young people on recruitment panels. Be explicit in terms of the expectations and role of the young people regarding HR (or any other area of work in the organisation that is heavily regulated by law).</p>
<p>Mental health issues</p>	<p>Train staff/volunteers in how these might manifest themselves. Have a list of local support organisations/phone numbers to give to young people. Get staff/volunteers trained in the promotion of positive mental health programmes, such as LIFEMAPS from YouthAction. Support young people to access specialist mental health support where necessary.</p>
<p>Fear of judgement by peers</p>	<p>Encourage positive relationships among peer groups. Highlight the benefits of being involved to both the young people who do and those who do not want to be involved. Where possible challenge those who are being judgemental by encouraging their participation.</p>
<p>Lack of staff for 1:1 work</p>	<p>Explore the possibility of utilising volunteers in the place of paid staff, ensuring that they have adequate training and support to do this work. See additional funding for more staff. Explore viability and suitability of group work with the young people instead of or as well as 1:1 work.</p>

No safe place	Ensure that all staff and volunteers, including management committee, commit to creating a space that is both physically and psychologically safe for young people. This may need to be away from the organisation's own premises in a space where young people feel comfortable, including on the street/outdoors. Communication among adults, between adults and young people and among young people themselves should help create and foster the feeling of safety. It may be necessary to undertake training to achieve this with all concerned. A few simple rules/guidelines framed in the positive and devised with the young people can help create the basis for a safe space.
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### Take away messages

- Keep in mind that the involvement of young people in decision making is a *process*, not an event and is **always** voluntary on their behalf.
- There is a need to try multiple ways of involving young people in decision making - some young people might want to sit on committees or other groups while others might prefer more informal mechanisms to contribute their ideas. Young people might also like to utilise different technology to share their opinions and views. All are valid.
- Staff and volunteers engaged in this work need to be supported by the organisation - it is a culture, a way of being, not the 'job' of one or two in an organisation. Training may be required to do this effectively.
- It is OK not to have all the answers to young people's queries - you can say I don't know but I will find out and then report back to them when you have the answer.

