

Newcastle
Participation
Unit
magazine

change up

Winter
2008/9



- How Newcastle's young people get to spend £2.25m
- SHOKKage! New gym for under 16s
- Interviewed by the clients: how it works and how it feels

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The *Change up* challenge

Asking the children and young people who use services what they want and trying to give it to them - it's not that hard! And there can be countless benefits and savings when we do give them the services they ask for.

Change up aims to show what can be achieved when any organisation - whether or not it is there to serve young people exclusively - takes the time and trouble to listen and to involve them. We also want to show the many ways in which young people can participate - whether they are helping recruit new staff or working out the best way to spend available resources.

Children and young people in Newcastle are helping to spend the £2.25 million Children's Fund. If they can do that, they can do anything!



News

Newcastle Participation Unit

Newcastle's new Participation Unit brings together Investing in Children, the Children and Young People Engagement Team, the Children's Society and the Listening to Young Children Strategy. We are all working together to help children and young people influence decisions that affect them in the city. We also work with other partners in education, Your Homes Newcastle and elsewhere.

"We have established a really good listening culture in the city," says Investing in Children's Nick Brereton. "Now we are bringing together all our resources and looking at how to convert what young people say into real action and change, that they can see and experience."

We are looking at a new strategy to explain what we are going to offer and how children and young people are influencing the city. Watch this space in the next few months!

Lasting legacy for Voices

A project that has done much to give children and young people a voice in Newcastle closed in September. Over six years, the Voices Project has helped young people participate in projects across the city, for example supporting them to plan and co-host U decide events (see page 4 for more about U decide), and developing their ability to participate in their communities.

Just one example of the project's positive impact is an impressive piece of work that could have a lasting legacy in the city. The Children's Thoughts group has written and produced a book for children called *Being a young Muslim*. The book - full of insightful poems and thoughts about growing up as a Muslim in Newcastle - aims to tackle bullying and racism by promoting better understanding.

Newcastle's young people will not be left without support. Voices coordinator Chris Pinder will continue her work within the Newcastle Participation Unit.



Participation pays

Walker kids get SHOKKage!

Young people at Walker's Lightfoot Centre Youth Forum could see great possibilities for its old, unused physiotherapy unit. They wanted their own gym for under 16s - so they went out and got funding to make it happen.

"The young people said they wanted a gym where different age groups could come in at different times to socialise and get fit," says centre manager Ann Wood. "Without their input, we adults would not have thought of providing separate sessions for different age groups, but they convinced us more people would use it if they felt they could be among people their own age."

The state-of-the-art gym - with rowing machines, treadmills, weights and the city's first-ever dance mats linked to instruction DVDs played on a plasma screen - was designed with the young people's input throughout.

"They chose the equipment, decor and healthy options vending machines," confirms Ann. "And of course they came up with that great SHOKKage name!"

The pics show the gym and some of the forum members, with Belta the Bunny and the city's mayor at the official launch.



Participation pays

Listening to Youth Voice

Young people are experts on their own lives, says Inline's Youth Voice, run by Your Homes Newcastle. And to prove it, Youth Voice has had a major impact on housing and other services for young people in the city. Just one example is the Stepping Stones hostel. A thorough evaluation by the group revealed the need for drastic change.

"People say, 'when I was your age'," says one of the residents. "But you think, this is now, not then. And we are experts on the now. When we go to Youth Voice we get listened to."

The group made formal recommendations about Stepping Stones, and the hostel has now been redeveloped - something the young people point to as an example of what can be achieved when service providers listen to them.

Members of the group are also engaged in a number of peer-education programmes, believing they can best use what they've learned from their own experiences to help educate other young people.



Spending a mint for kids

Children and young people are making an enormous contribution in Newcastle, following the council's decision to ask them to help spend its £2.25 million Children's Fund. Using the U decide format - in which children hear about and discuss projects bidding for funds, and then vote to decide which should go ahead - 150 young people have had the chance to help improve the lives of five to 13 year olds.

At the voting event - co-hosted and organised by young members of the Voices Project - young people heard about projects designed to make their lives better. "It's good for young people to have a say on what adults have thought up," said one. Director of children's services Martin Surtees said, "98% of you want to do this again. We need to listen to that."

Six of the top seven projects voted for by the young people - which will all help children build their self-esteem - went on to get funding.



How to....get the

When you use a service, you want to know the right people are in place to do the job, particularly if they are providing you with support. So, to make sure young people get social workers they can relate to and trust, Newcastle's children's services involves them in the recruitment process.

"We've been doing it for two years now," says looked after children's team manager Adele Wright. "We work with young people who are either looked after, or who have experience of being looked after."

Serious business

Recruiting people is, of course, a serious business, and the young people do a lot of preparation before the interviews, working out what sorts of questions they can use to test candidates for the

qualities they most value. "We look for someone who is honest, on time, and on our level," says interview panelist Anne. "At the same time, they must be able to find the right balance between professionalism and being young-person friendly. We don't want people who make false promises, or who are judgemental."

After a first interview with adults, candidates have their second, just with the young people. As well as the questions, they are asked to list their top six qualities, before being given typical dilemmas and asked how they would deal with them. The young people have introduced a system of asking them to bring in photographs of themselves to help identify them, which can also provide further interesting insights.

right people in place

"It's well worth taking all this trouble," says Anne. "My experience of social workers in the past has been neither too bad, nor too good, but I do know of situations where having the right or wrong type of person in the job can make such a massive difference."

"I've been really impressed with the professional approach taken by the young people," adds Adele. "They stay focused and are very fair in their judgements. When we meet up afterwards to compare notes, we have nearly always reached the same conclusions. This is partly because we adults are learning from them."

Good preparation

But what's it like to experience this kind of approach? "It was a bit

nerve-racking at first, as I wasn't expecting it," admits recently appointed social worker Gemma Robson. "But it was great - the young people had obviously put in a lot of planning. They explained everything in advance, and it was organised and structured. The process helped prepare me for the job, as they used the opportunity to get across what sorts of issues I might have to deal with. It gave me a lot more confidence, and I felt I was going to be able to relate well to the young people I'd be working with."

The last word goes to interviewer Anne. "The youth panel is a good idea, as it gives the young people the chance to have their say and feel valued in the community. It was a good experience, and I would do it again."

Adele



Gemma



What matters to us

Here we take a quick look at what's happening across Newcastle under our children and young people's *What matters to us* priorities.

U decide

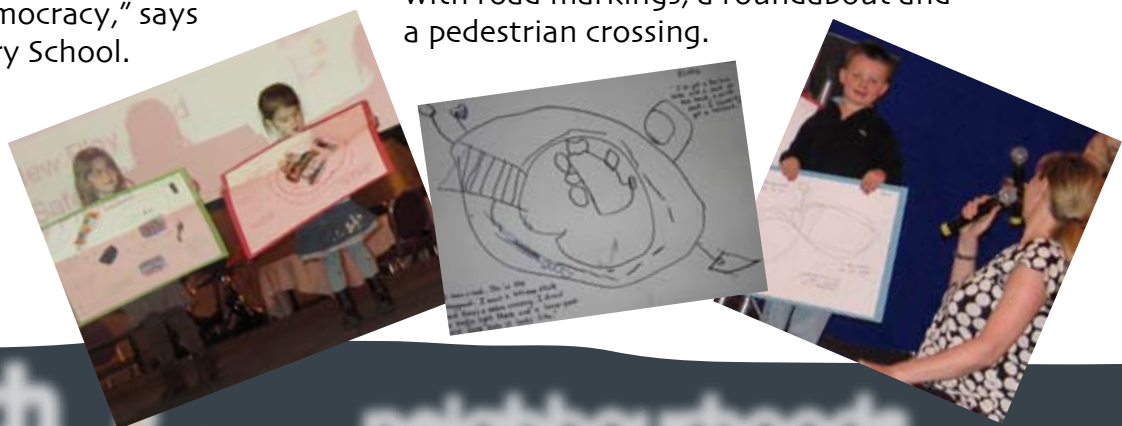
U decide - already mentioned on page 4 - has proved a great hit with children and young people once again this year. In a unique pilot with schools, children were asked to name their top *What matters to us* priority. They chose sport and leisure, and set about coming up with and debating ideas for spending £75,000 to improve sport and leisure for themselves and other children. Ideas ranged from safe play areas to school radio stations. All were debated in school councils and at a joint conference, where the children voted for the ideas they thought should be funded. "It's where kids instead of adults get to do democracy," says James of Farne Primary School.

Monkchester Road Nursery

Under-fives at Monkchester Road Nursery have a brand new, safe bike track after a U decide win gave them the chance to work with council planners.

"The children told us about all the things wrong with the path they used for biking," says head teacher Anne Humble. "It was muddy, wet, narrow and dangerous. So, they made a video, and came up with ideas for a new design, which won them U decide money to put things right."

Council planners put the children's ideas into a proper design plan, and showed them where it would fit on a planning map. All the faults they highlighted are now gone, and the children have a safe, smooth track, with road markings, a roundabout and a pedestrian crossing.



What matters to us

Young Carers

Newcastle's Young Carers have made a powerful DVD to get across the reality of caring as a young person. Four of the group - aged from 9 to 15 - give a realistic account of their caring roles on the DVD, including the often overlooked positives. "They don't want people feeling sorry for them," says Banardos coordinator Doug Laidlaw. "They just want to people to realise that they need understanding and support to access the school, leisure and health services most of us take for granted."

Anti-bullying wins award

Young people working with the Response anti-bullying team have been awarded the Diana Award for their work. The prestigious award recognises young people who make a contribution to society and to other young people. It reflects the importance young people attach to anti-bullying work.

Play Builders

To make the most of a £1million boost for children's play areas in the city, we will work with the play service to involve local children in deciding how the play areas can be improved.

School food children's panel

Getting children engaged with the food they eat at school is the key to better take up of healthy school meals, believes East End Health. "It's not just a matter of putting food on a plate and giving it to children," says director Jamie Sadler. "You have to get them involved in the process."

In eight East End schools, children have conducted surveys among their classmates, and discovered that they want shorter queues, more time to eat, tablecloths, music, and food that looks and tastes better, made from fresh ingredients. "We want all schools on the school food panel in future," adds Jamie. "They will be able to work with the Food in Schools group and school meal providers to improve things."

The project is now expanding into secondary schools.

What matters to us

Ouseburn Farm

A new guide – with a difference – has just been published for visitors to the recently regenerated Ouseburn Valley. Local children have helped develop four themed walks, which put young people themselves in charge as informed walk leaders.

“We wanted children to help us develop the guide, so we could be sure it would work for them,” says Newcastle Community Heritage Project education worker Alison Stancliffe. “They have contributed their ideas and road-tested it at every stage. As a result, this great little book has been a real success with young visitors to the valley over the summer.”

Go to www.newcastlecommunityheritage.org and click on Heritage Education Service for more information about the Ouseburn Explorer.

Making time to listen

So what does young people’s participation really mean for organisations? How can they be sure they are doing it properly, and that the young people they consult know what they are doing? The Voices Project (featured on page 2) has shown participation need not be a hit-and-miss affair, and that making the time to listen pays dividends.

“We have helped young people train for qualifications in participation,” says coordinator Chris Pinder. “They have learned all about topics such as children’s rights under the European Convention, how to participate, how to take part in interview panels and commissioning. It’s all about giving them the skills to take part in and improve things in their lives.”

The young people have also delivered training themselves, to children’s services senior managers, who don’t normally have face-to-face contact with young people at work.

“The training was very practical, getting managers to look at how they include young people; testing what works, and what doesn’t,” says Chris. “Though Voices has come to an end now, we hope that funding can be found to continue this work with our young people in some other way.”



Under 5s focus

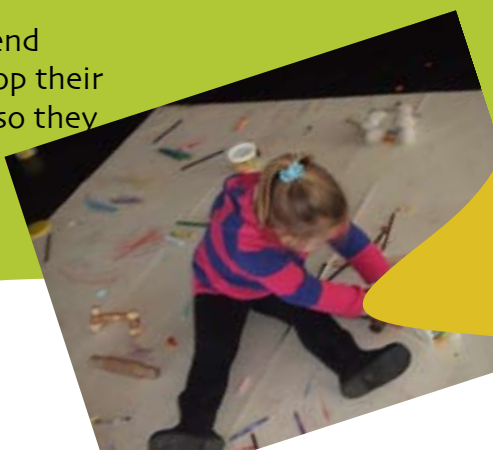
Learning from early years

Children at Cruddas Park Early Years Centre know what's important to them - and they've recently had the chance to tell the Department for Children, Schools and Families all about it.

"Our centre was chosen, along with several others in the country, to contribute to government policy-making," explains head teacher Katrina Fenwick. "The Office of the Children's Commissioner (11 Million) sent in facilitators over eight months to talk to our children about what made them happy and healthy. The children loved being asked for their opinions, and developed scrap books, so they could keep track of their ideas."

Family, friends, pets, being outside, exploring, and having special things to do and to keep, were all important in the lives of the children.

"The whole process was beneficial for the children," adds Katrina. "Not only were they having exciting opportunities to spend time with visitors and develop their communication skills, but also they were learning key life skills, such as decision-making and respecting others' views and opinions."



As part of the project we were lucky enough to have two of our staff trained under the Thomas Coram Listening to Children Project, which means our own skills have been boosted too."

The eight month-long consultation was rounded off with a fantastic exhibition of the children's views, portrayed in photos and their own words, at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art.

"I have learnt a great deal about the lives of children in Newcastle," said children's commissioner sir Al Aynsley-Green. "This exhibition clearly demonstrates the many ways in which we can listen to...the youngest citizens in our society. I will now take forward what they have told me to influence local and national policy."

Under 5s news Participation Unit training in techniques for listening to young people is now underway. There's also some funding for small projects to find out what young children are saying to us - contact the Participation Unit for details.

Learning, listening

Listening to young children

Listening to very young children from the ages of 0-5 helps us see the world through their eyes. If we do it well, they can tell us about their needs, and participate in decision-making.

Now the Participation Unit is running a new programme of training for anyone working with this age group. *Listening to young children* is an innovative approach that builds on Penny Lancaster's training, delivered in Newcastle last year.

"The approach supports early years' professionals to enable young children to participate routinely in the services they receive," explains Chris Pinder. "The training helps practitioners ensure children can make a positive contribution to their own learning, social and health care, and be included in decision-making processes."

There are two-day in-depth courses, or half-day introduction courses available, with the option to deliver bespoke in-house training where demand is high.

Two-day courses: 15 January and 4 March 2009 (attendance at both days essential)

One-day Mosaic Approach course (looking at methods of collecting and analysing young children's views):
11 February 2009

To find out more, and to book, contact Chris Pinder at the Participation Unit.

You're Welcome

Young people in Newcastle's outer west are going to help change the way GP services relate to them. As part of the NHS You're Welcome initiative to make services more accessible, we are working with young people in Throckley and Newburn to find out what they would like to change about GP surgeries and health services for young people. They will sit down with health workers to see what can be done to improve things.

Local Democracy Week

140 young people from schools across the city took part in an event for Local Democracy Week at the Civic Centre in October. In a busy week, they took part in workshops about democracy and decision-making. They also gave feedback on the Newcastle Plan for Children and Young People and identified the top priorities - public transport and safety - for children's services to work on over the coming year. The Participation Unit will work with young people to find out more about what they want to change. We will get the right people together to hear what they have to say, and agree some ways forward.

Bring it on!

what's coming next

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UK Youth Parliament

Newcastle has four young representatives on the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP). Their two-year tenure will end in 2009, so it's time for new nominees to come forward, and 41 young people from across the city have done just that. The enthusiastic group have attended info sessions and submitted their manifestos, which will be displayed online and in voting centres. Election week, from 12-16 January, will give over 12,000 young people the chance to have their say and vote for their favourite candidates, either online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/ukyp or using a more traditional ballot box at one of the city's voting centres. Results will be announced at an event at St James Park on 23 January. Unsuccessful candidates will be invited on to a UKYP advisory group, to help feed in young people's opinions from their areas.



Join our community of good practice!

Investing in Children (IiC) membership is open to any organisation that works with young people in Newcastle. If you can show you respect children's and young people's rights, listen to them and make changes as a result, you can become a member. There is no cost involved. Check out other members and find out more on www.iic-uk.org - just follow the links to Newcastle.



If you have some ideas or news about children and young people's participation that you'd like to share, contact us at Newcastle Participation Unit, Unit 4, Blackfriars, Dispensary Lane, Newcastle NE1 4XN. Telephone: 0191 260 6500 www.newcastle.gov.uk