

## background story

# Who's asking?

Youth consultation is becoming almost fashionable, but how do we truly involve young people in consultation?

**M**oving towards involving and empowering young people involves a significant cultural change for many organisations, embedding new values and ways of working into established practice. But – as the examples show in this edition, young people's voices can be heard – and those views can be heeded.

## Making a difference

Consulting with young people can be tricky. It poses several questions such as...how do you get young people to actively take part in a consultation? ...how can you keep them engaged in what can be a long process?

One essential requirement in truly engaging young people is that something happens with their views....they must not only be heard, they must be seen to be heard, if their trust and involvement is to be maintained. And the more they actually participate in decisions about planning, funding and monitoring progress, the greater the sense of involvement and ownership.

## Youth involvement

As the following pages suggest, youth workers – with their commitment to youth participation – are increasingly putting their own angle on youth consultation. For many it is not just consultation with young people....it is consultation with young people by young people.

Young people themselves are running the consultation process – they are asking the questions, not just giving their answers.



# Online OPINIONS

**Emma McEwan** reports on how UK Youth Voice is testing out the potential of 'e-consultation'.

## Background: About Movers & Shapers

Funded by the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) UK Youth's three-year 'Movers and Shapers' programme is giving disadvantaged young people, aged 13 – 19, support to influence the provision of key services.

Young people in 'influence groups' will seek the views of over 1,500 young people, in order to use them to develop, pilot and disseminate new models of practice with public and private service providers. These include health care, parenting agencies and UK Youth itself. Local groups have already been set up around England

UK Youth Voice is the youth-led group within UK Youth that is dedicated to giving 16-25 year olds a voice. As well as organising the annual youth conference [see ▶](#) the Youth Voice section for more on the conference, the group campaigns on issues identified at the conference and through their own meetings and consultations.





As part of their involvement in UK Youth's 'Movers & Shapers' programme, Voice is currently looking to use the power of the internet to listen to other young people. E-consultations were considered the most appropriate method of reaching out to the target groups, with print outs for those unable to access the internet also being made available.

Emma McEwan is E-Reach Worker with UK Youth.

Movers & Shapers from the local influence group in Coventry are carrying out research with young people and parents on 'What is it to be a good parent?'

## Survey design

With support through the Young Researcher Network, UK Youth Voice looked at many approaches to compiling surveys. They are using these guidelines:

- Give your survey a title that will get people's attention!
- Keep it short, looking at what is essential, useful and unnecessary for inclusion.
- Put your questions in a logical order – ask a general question, then ask more specific questions.
- Use simple language that everybody would understand.
- Start with interesting questions – engaging early with the respondent to keep their attention.
- Relax your grammar – don't make it sound too formal.
- On more sensitive subjects, ask questions in the third person, as it is less threatening for a respondent to answer, rather than being challenged directly. For example, "How do your friends feel about talking to their parents?" rather than "How do you feel about talking to your parents?"
- Avoiding leading questions – as they demand a specific response.
- Don't make the list of choices too long, it can be difficult to evaluate all of them.
- Avoid difficult 'recall' questions – memories can be unreliable the further back you go – keep it recent and relevant.
- Use closed questions, which are easier to analyse, rather than open-ended ones, which make the respondent justify their answer in words.
- Pre-test your survey – to identify and iron out any problems.

## Joining in on the surveys

UK Youth Voice are currently conducting e-consultations with young people on the following.

- **Young people who are members of youth groups** can carry out the survey designed to help improve the organisational structure of UK Youth Voice itself. [go ▶](#) to take the survey.
  - **Young people who have been to UK Youth's Activity Centre at Avon Tyrrell** can give their feedback on the experience as part of a review being carried out by UK Youth Voice. [go ▶](#) to take the survey.
  - **Young people who have taken part in the Youth Achievement Awards** can give their views on the scheme via the third survey. [go ▶](#) to take the survey.
- If young people with whom you work are in the target group for a surveys, why not encourage them to join in? UK Youth Voice will present the findings at the annual conference next month. [see ▶](#) the Youth Voice section for more on the conference

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# Young consultants

Following on from our main Feature, these two linked activities are designed to involve young people in consultation.

## 1 Getting in focus

### Aim

A way of identifying interests priorities from a larger group.

### Resources

Flip chart paper and plenty of 'Post-it' notes!

### Method

Divide the group into sub-groups of three or four and distribute flipchart paper.

Explain the general rules – that all ideas and contributions should be accepted and respected, and no contributor should be 'put down'. Give a time limit within which sub-groups should come up with as many ideas as possible. Give everyone Post-it stickers to write on.

Make sure everyone understands the question or task they are being asked to tackle, e.g. 'What information do we need to discover from our survey/consultation?'

Suggest that groups work as follows:

- Write the question in the middle of flipchart paper, with circles around it indicating what is: Essential/Useful/Desirable.
- Ask them all to write down at least two ideas or points in response to the question or task.
- Everyone places their Post-it's on their group's flipchart paper, sticking them into the relevant category, sharing their thinking as they do so.

Ask each sub- group to feed back their ideas – and the thinking behind them – to the whole group until you have a full group list of what is Essential/Useful/ Desirable. You can take the ideas to the next stage by using 'Questions, questions', right.

## 2 Questions, questions

### Aim

To encourage young people to think about how to phrase questions. This activity can follow on from 'Getting in focus' above. [This example focuses on issues of youth homelessness and being a young carer, the process can be adapted to any topic.]

### Resources

Download and print off copies of the 'Survey design' information on page 15 of this edition of the Source. Time allowance: 45-60 mins.

### Method

Break off into four groups (two groups for Homelessness, two for Young Carers). Give groups the following brief and encourage them to use the 'Survey design' guidelines:

You are a research agency. You have been commissioned by a charity to find out about the lives of young people in the UK who don't get their voices heard. Specifically, the charity wants to know about two target groups:

- Homeless young people
- Young carers

Your task is to develop a short survey of up to 10 questions to find out the information above. Each group to prepare four copies of the questionnaire. (Allow half an hour in break out groups)

Groups can use their ideas from the 'Getting in focus' activity to identify the most important information they need. The 'Survey design' guidelines will help them to phrase and structure the questions.

After working on the brief, each group joins up with the other one working on the same theme. Group members pair off to interview each other, as a role play.

When pairs have finished, they join with the rest of their theme group and compare results. Did they get the information they wanted? Were interviewees able to answer the questions appropriately? Did they have to explain any of the questions? How could they have improved it?

Each group then spends 15 minutes reworking their questions.