

Involving children and young people in Independent Visitor services



Purpose of this resource

This resource has been developed for National Independent Visitor Network (NIVN) members and other professionals who contribute to the provision of Independent Visitor (IV) services with looked after children and young people.

This resource aims to provide guidance for IV services to support, promote and strengthen the involvement of care-experienced children and young people in service development and delivery.

Project Overview

The NIVN is committed to ensuring children and young people with experience of care and IV service provision have a voice in the development and strengthening of services across England and Wales.

In 2013 NIVN created a set of quality practice standards and toolkit to raise awareness of the IV role and raise standards across England and Wales; [National Standards for the Provision of Independent Visitor Services](#). The Welsh government then commissioned a further process to rework the standards to their national context [Practice Standard and Good Practice Guide](#).

Both documents include specific standards to promote children and young people's involvement across IV services. They place the needs, wishes and views of children at the centre of the IV relationship and promote their engagement in shaping how services are designed, delivered and reviewed.

"We want independent visitor services to listen to our experiences, ideas and suggestions about how best these services should be run. We should have the opportunity to be involved in focus groups, events and young person advisory groups/panels. These should take place at times that we can attend and should be fun and interesting".

[Practice Standard and Good Practice Guide](#)

Standard 4 of the [National Standards for the Provision of Independent Visitor Services](#) states:

Children are given the opportunity to participate and be actively involved in the development of services. Children's views, opinions and skills are used and recognised and influence the service delivered.

- 4.1 Services involve children in: designing leaflets, promoting the service at Children in Care Councils, training and interviewing independent visitors, developing panel questions and feedback forms, and organising activities.
- 4.2 Children are given the opportunity to participate in the planning, monitoring and review of the service.

Legal Framework:

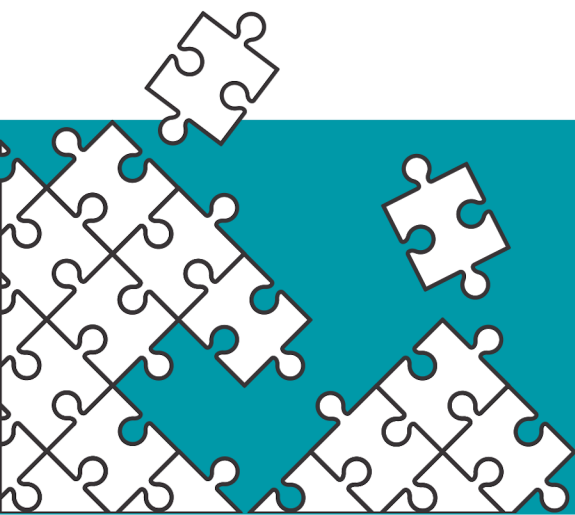
From Participation to Co-production

The right of children to participate in decisions that affect them is enshrined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Children Act 1989 and reflected in both sets of quality practice standards.

The Children Act 1989 provides a framework for the development of children's rights-based services and establishes child-centred principles to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people.

The UNCRC is a legally-binding international agreement setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities. Ratified by the U.K government in 1991, it is the first piece of international legislation that set out children as the subject of rights, rather than recipients of protection.

Article 12: Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.



Participation is commonly used to describe the process of listening to and engaging with children, but there is no set definition and many different models that outline this process. We have appended a diagram illustrating one such model, based on the 'Degrees of Participation' by Phil Treseder.

The concept of Co-Production is included in [Care Act 2014](#) statutory guidance. Like participation, co-production has no set definition but rather can be approached as a set of underpinning values to achieve more equal partnership between people who use services, professionals and carers. The Care Act 2014 offers the following definition:

"Co-production" is when an individual influences the support and services received, or when groups of people get together to influence the way that services are designed, commissioned and delivered".

The following principles of equality, diversity, accessibility and reciprocity are described as 'critical values' for putting co-production into action.

- **Equality – everyone has assets**
 - Co-production starts from the idea that no one group or person is more important than anyone else and everyone has skills, abilities and time to contribute.
- **Diversity**
 - Co-production should be as inclusive and diverse as possible. Particular efforts may be needed to ensure that seldom heard groups are included.
- **Accessibility**
 - Making everything accessible is the way to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate fully in an activity in the way that suits them best.
- **Reciprocity**
 - Reciprocity means people get something back for putting something in.

Appended to this document is a guide to co-production produced by The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and diagram that highlights where different forms of involvement sit in relation to co-production, like consultation and engagement.

Benefits to participation

Benefits for children and young people can include:

Reward and Recognition

Recognition for involvement in an initiative and activity such as certificates and awards and reward offer such as vouchers, other forms of in-kind or cash payment or access to other activities.

Connection

The chance to connect with people who have similar or shared experiences helps everyone to feel understood, respected and like they belong.

Shaping

Opportunity to shape and influence something the child has direct experience of or insight into, such as IV.

Rights and entitlements

Understand the rights and entitlements of children and young people and specifically care experienced children and young people. Learn how to promote and protect their own rights and those of other care experienced children and young people.

Personal and Professional development

- Develop practical skills such as presenting ideas; public speaking; problem-solving
- Develop interpersonal skills such as communication, negotiation, teamwork, decision-making
- Enhance self-confidence and self-esteem
- Feeling valued and successful
- A feeling of ownership over the services the child accesses
- Gain experience that can be put to use in future employment (work can be shared on CV/Job applications)

Benefits for IV services

Connection

Effective partnership working can strengthen relationships between social care professionals and care experienced children and young people.

Shaping

- Priorities for children and young people can be identified
- Improved, better targeted and more effective services for children and young people
- Supports effective service planning, development and evaluation
- Better use of finite resources
- More equal power relationships between professionals and service users

Rights and entitlements

Supporting and enabling effective participation contributes to the implementation of important legislation, policy and standards at a service-user and organisational level. A rights-based organisation applies human rights values and principles to itself at all levels. It promotes participation, accountability and non-discrimination through its policies and practice.

Personal and Professional development

- Strengthen skills, knowledge and confidence to develop co-production with children and young people in the design, delivery and review of services
- Gain further insight into the needs and priorities of children and young people
- Have fun and feel motivated

Barriers for IV services

Involving children and young people to effectively shape policy and practice can be challenging for a variety of reasons. These may include:

For IV Services

- Meaningful collaboration or co-creation of activity with children and young people Some issues include: access to target group, time, venues, skills, motivation and wider resources
- Communication barriers such as language or cultural differences
- Organisational barriers: policy and procedure that obstructs or inhibits participation

For children and young people

- Children and young people's interest and motivation
- Lack of clarity on what the offer is as well as ask
- Time and competing priorities
- Accessibility; group size, communication and cultural needs and preferences; travel

What is your *participation offer?*

It is important to be clear on the approach to participation you are going to take, to engage children and young people in your service. You can set this information out in a participation strategy or plan. Below are key considerations to think about when developing your approach:

- Ensure you are clear about what you are asking and offering and be honest and transparent with children and young people about the level of influence they can expect to have.
- Set out your objectives and consider the most effective method to engage children and young people and clearly identify different groups and needs.
- Consider what resources your organisation has to offer and partnering with other organisations or services eg. Participation.
- Ask children and young people what they want, they should be advising you – e.g. where and when they want to meet.
- Acknowledge that projects and initiatives can be developed by children and young people themselves and that these may sit outside of your own plans. Be open to new ideas and ownership of projects and initiatives.
- Feedback to the children and young people about the impact of their engagement. This will encourage them to get involved in the future if they are able to see the difference they have made and include them as equal partners.

Who are your target groups of *children and young people*?

It's important to identify different groups of children and young people whom you wish to engage with and consider the best and most inclusive way to do this. Some of these groups include:

- Younger children
- Children and young people with communication/language barriers
- Children and young people with disabilities
- Children and young people from different faiths and cultures
- Children with emotional and behavioural difficulties

A 'one size fits all' approach is often not suitable for these different groups. Consider some creative ways to support as many different children and young people to shape service planning, development and delivery that responds to diverse needs.



Involving children and young people in decision making...

Based on the 'Degrees of Participation' by Phil Treseider

INVOLVE

Children and young people initiated and directed

Children and young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.

Assigned but informed

Adults decide on the project and young people volunteer for it. The young people understand the project, they know who decided to involve them and why. Adults respect young people's views.

Children and young people initiated shared decisions with adults

Children have the ideas, set up projects and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct, but offer their expertise for young people to consider.

Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children and young people

Adults have the initial idea, but young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but children are also involved in making the decisions.

Consulted and informed

The project is designed and run by adults, but children and young people are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.

INFORM

CONSULT

Coproduction
Codesign
Engagement
Consultation
Informing
Educating
Coercion

Doing with
in an equal and reciprocal
partnership

Doing for
engaging and involving
people

Doing to
Trying to fix people who are
passive recipients of service



National Independent Visitor Network Project Team:

sarah.walker@barnardos.org.uk
rebecca.jordan2@barnardos.org.uk
jessica.tinwinsmith@barnardos.org.uk

IVnetwork@barnardos.org.uk