

How children and young people's voices influence services planning

CASE STUDY:

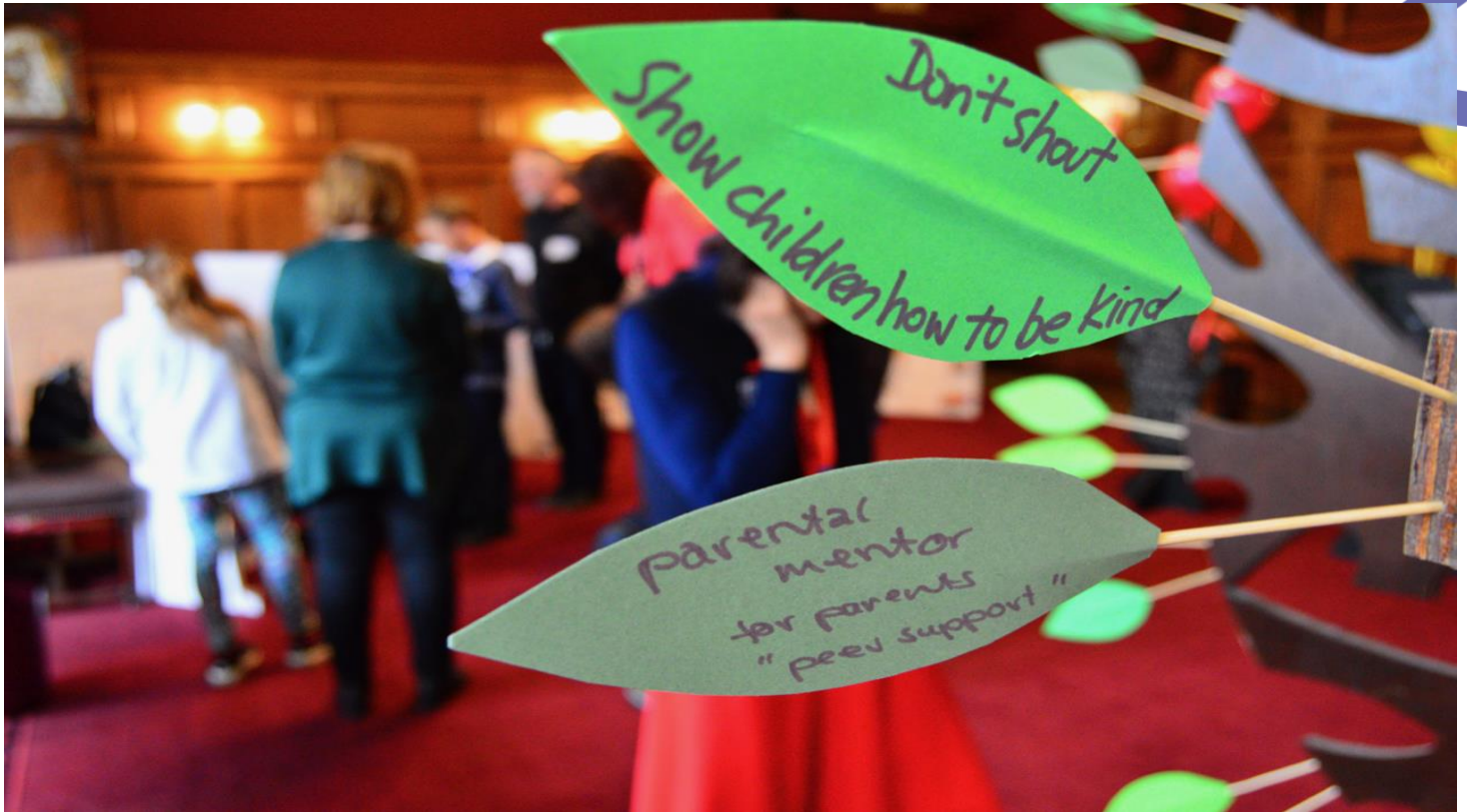
What Kind of Edinburgh?

getting
it right
for every child

 **Children
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[The National Third Sector GIRFEC \(NTSG\) project](#) is a partnership between [Children in Scotland](#) and the [Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland \(CPPS\)](#). Thematically, it works to connect, engage and influence.

The NTSG project supports local and national third sector organisations to strengthen their roles as core partners in children's services planning and delivery and, in doing so, improve outcomes for children, young people and families. The project facilitates third sector organisations to connect with each other and with the statutory sector, helping the sector to influence local and national policy. The 'engaging' strand of the project seeks to identify and support good practice by organisations and partnerships in listening to children and young people and how their voices influence the planning and delivery of services.

Linked to the project's 'engaging' theme, this case study has been developed by the NTSG team in collaboration with partners from the *What Kind of Edinburgh?* project. It is part of a series of case studies looking at examples of third sector engagement practice with children and young people and how this shapes [children's services planning](#). Each case study provides a snapshot of the different methods and models of engagement with children and young people as well as illustrating how their voices have contributed to the ongoing shaping of services within the wider planning process. The NTSG project has considered the practice in the case studies in line with the [National Standards for Community Engagement](#).

If you have identified any examples of good practice, we welcome your feedback and suggestions for future case studies. For further information relating to the NTSG project please contact the project team at: girfec@childreninscotland.org.uk

Case Study Name: City of Edinburgh Council and Children's Parliament – What Kind of Edinburgh?

Case Study Area: Edinburgh

Age range of children and young people involved: 10-18

What is *What Kind of Edinburgh?*

What Kind of Edinburgh? is a project that has been run in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council (Young Edinburgh Action) and Children's Parliament. The project ran a series of participation workshops with children, young people and senior adult duty-bearers (designated as 'champions') from services around Edinburgh. These events were to support children and young people to be involved in the delivery and shaping of the services provided.



Background to *What Kind of Edinburgh?*

In 2017, Edinburgh Children's Partnership were successful in a bid to the Scottish Government to develop and deliver an approach to their engagement with children and young people which is based on a model drawn from Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights. The project was called "Putting rights at the heart of planning for children and families in the City of Edinburgh". Three main events were run in partnership with the Children's Parliament and Young Edinburgh Action (YEA), which took a rights-based approach to consider how participation can be achieved in the planning of children's services and most importantly how it can be sustained.

While these events were successful and supported engagement of children and young people in the Children's Services Plan 2017-2020, there was a recognition of the need for ongoing work to be carried out around engaging children and young people in the services planning process. As part of Edinburgh's commitment to listening and responding to the voices and opinions of children and young people in the design, delivery and monitoring of its Children's Services Plan, the *What Kind of Edinburgh?* project evolved from this pilot.

What Kind of Edinburgh? was delivered by the [Children's Parliament](#) and [Young Edinburgh Action](#), on behalf of Edinburgh Children's Partnership in a year-long process. The project was funded by the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian to promote the strategic engagement of children and young people, as well as support the public bodies who form the Partnership to meet obligations defined in the Children and Young People Scotland Act.



Overview of programme

- Running of rights-based workshops in Primary 6 classes across eight schools, two each in North, South, East and West.
- Discussion with teachers and school management took place to nominate children. 24 children across the schools then took part in the project.
- From Young Edinburgh Action, invitations were sent out to high schools, locality youth work teams, third sector organisations, and the army welfare service. Twenty young people from a range of backgrounds were chosen to take part.
- Initial 'meet and greet' with the children and young people and champions (a group of senior decision-makers from different sectors working in Edinburgh services) to build relationships and explain the programme.
- Five workshops were based around the Children's Partnership's five priorities for the Children's Services Plan.
Event 1: Fairness (equity) Event 2: Best start in life Event 3: Health & wellbeing
Event 4: Achieving your best in education (Attendance & achievement) Event 5: Empowerment & participation
- At the end of each event, champions were asked to write a pledge seeking to take forward an aspect of the discussion from the day. A selection of champions was then asked to feedback on how their pledges had developed at the following event.
- Between workshops, Children's Parliament and YEA worked with participants on issues concerning the upcoming theme of the next event, thus enabling them to become 'participation ready'. Time was also put aside for the children and young people taking part to feed back to their class as well as gain their classmates' views.



Assessment of project methods

The NTSG project has studied the *What Kind of Edinburgh?* example and the methods used.

Each method has been considered in relation to the National Standards for Community Engagement (NSCE) as a means of appraising the project's practice.

- a description of the main elements of effective community engagement practice (see diagram below).
- performance statements which can be used to assess high quality participation and engagement results.

7 National Standards for Community Engagement



(NSCE, February 2019)

Working Together

The NSCE standard of 'Working Together' states that "We will work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement." To do this, the project worked with children and young people from a variety of backgrounds and areas, as well as adults across the statutory and third sector.

In order to reach the standard of 'Working together', the Children's Parliament and YEA worked with the children and young people to undertake issue-based work around Edinburgh's five priorities on a preparatory basis, which supported them to become 'participation ready.' Their work involved supporting participants to develop their skills and confidence throughout the engagement.

Developing children and young people's skills and confidence was a major part of good participation and engagement work.

"I have gained confidence and the skill to speak out. I've lost the fear of speaking out loud and that's great because now I can say things I want to say." (Participant)

Through the preparatory sessions, children and young people gained confidence to ask questions, learned to interact with the activities and developed their understanding of rights and participation. A key part of the weekly sessions was to explore the upcoming issues in advance of the workshops with champions. This allowed the children time to consider issues and topics in advance, giving children the confidence and understanding to participate effectively in the gathered workshops.

'Working Together'

Project Practice

Issue-based work around Edinburgh Children's Partnership's five priorities was undertaken on a weekly basis between events. This helped to support and develop children and young people's skills throughout the engagement.

Over the course of the events, consistency of champions helped facilitate mutual trust and respect between stakeholders. The activities and games conducted were a key part of building on this.

Intergenerational dialogue presented opportunities for stakeholders to discuss issues in an open, honest and clear manner. Communication enabled ideas for action and change to be developed in partnership with the children and young people.

Creating an engagement process **based on mutual trust and respect** was a central part of the project. To enable this, the project saw consistency of the champions as an important way to build relationships with the children and young people. Joint activities and games were a key way of breaking down barriers and building mutual trust and respect. As well as this, the project provided opportunities for the champions, children and young people to engage in discussions around shared areas of interest and concern, thus developing a mutual understanding of perspectives and a deeper level of trust and respect between stakeholders.

"It was a timely reminder that children and young people do have very clear views about what matters to them and I don't think we always pay attention when designing and developing our services" (Champion)

Champions, children and young people were given specific activities to encourage dialogue and focused on asking and answering questions about the issues at hand. This gave the opportunity for **communication between all participants to be open, honest and clear**. Through intergenerational dialogue, children and young people were able to openly express the reality of situations for them. Champions were also able to answer questions children had about presenting issues in an honest and clear manner. They were able to explain why some of the issues were not being dealt with in the way that children and young people would like or expect and develop ideas for action and change in partnership with the children and young people.

How we know we are meeting the NCE standard for 'Working Together'

"Participants are supported to develop their skills and confidence during the engagement."

"The community engagement process is based on trust and mutual respect."

"Communication between all participants is open, honest and clear."

Methods

The NSCE 'Methods' standard states: "we will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose."

The What Kind of Edinburgh? project aimed to use **methods which were appropriate for the purpose of the engagement**. In this case underpinning the project with a child rights-based approach meant that intergenerational dialogue was embedded throughout the project. The intergenerational dialogue gave champions the opportunity to listen to children and young people and consider how they might take the dialogue forward in their own contexts. Ongoing dialogue also meant that children and young people could keep champions accountable.

In addition to this, **a variety of methods were used throughout the engagement to make sure that a wide range of voices were heard**. This was best encapsulated in the planning at the beginning of the project. The Children's Parliament and YEA were given a brief to gather a wide variety of children from a range of demographics within Edinburgh. In order to hear from a wide range of children and young people, the brief highlighted the importance of trying to ensure the participation of 'seldom heard' groups of children and young people to give them the opportunity to have their voice included. The Children's Parliament ran a series of children's human rights workshops with Primary 6 classes across several schools based on geographical location. They then worked in conjunction with teachers and school management to identify candidates who were

keen and enthusiastic to engage, as well as those who were perhaps least likely to be chosen but considered to have valuable contributions to make to the process and topics. Considerations were also given to the support these children would require in order to participate without compromising their own wellbeing. As a result, 24 children from a variety of demographics and with a diverse range of needs took part in the workshops and events. YEA also approached high schools, youth groups and community groups to reach out to a wide range of young people, including those who are traditionally hardly reached or seldom heard. Twenty young people took part as a result of this.

Over the course of the project, **a number of creative methods were used to encourage maximum participation and effective dialogue**. Creative methodologies incorporated problem-solving, art, drama, self-reflection and team-work activities. Creative methodology was used to describe concepts, making them relevant to the children and young people. An example of this was the use of creative methodology to describe the meaning of "equity". Children and young people were split into teams and given a task to build the tallest tower using marshmallows and spaghetti. However, each group started with different amounts of resources, meaning that at the end of the task the towers were very different. When this was explained to the groups, they immediately understood the concept of equity as a result of the activity they had just taken part in. This, in turn, created greater participation and dialogue around the subject of equity and what this could look like for children across Edinburgh.

'Methods'

Project Practice

The project was underpinned by a children's human rights-based approach to all participation and engagement methods, keeping children and young people at the centre.

The project ran a series of workshops in schools and worked with teachers to try to capture a wide range of voices including typically 'hardly reached' children and young people.

A range of creative methodologies were used to support a better understanding of concepts. This, in turn, encouraged fuller participation and more effective discussion amongst the participants.

How we know we are meeting the NCE standard for 'Methods'

"The methods used are appropriate for the purpose of the engagement."

"A variety of methods are used throughout the engagement to make sure that a wide range of voices is heard."

"Full use is made of creative methods which encourage maximum participation and effective dialogue."

Planning

From the start, the What Kind of Edinburgh? project had a clear purpose for the engagement process – to ensure that children and young people could shape children’s services planning process. The engagement process was carried out through careful planning and a shared understanding of the project’s needs and ambition.

The project planned sufficient resources to support an effective engagement process. This involved financial support from the City of Edinburgh Council as well as NHS Lothian to provide staff, venues and tools to support participation and engagement. Using staff who were trained to facilitate effective participation and engagement was crucial. In addition to this, appropriate engagement activities and resources were carefully thought through and provided to support effective project engagement. Venues were also considered in relation to the children and young people and how this may affect their participation.

Partners were involved at the start of the process in identifying and defining the focus that the engagement would explore.

A management group was formed of partners from: City of Edinburgh Council (Young Edinburgh Action), Children’s Parliament, and NHS Lothian. Together, they decided that a focus on specific issues would encourage more meaningful engagement. This then prompted the engagement events to focus on Edinburgh’s five key strategic objectives in the Children’s Services Plan.

A clear and agreed engagement plan was then put in place through the construction of a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ between Children’s Parliament and City of Edinburgh Council. Through this document, partners agreed what the outcomes of the engagement process should be, the indicators used to measure success, and the evidence that should be gathered. The memorandum allowed the partners to have a mutual agreement of the project purpose, participant specifications, programme outline, project outcomes and project outputs. The What Kind of Edinburgh? management group was then able to use the memorandum to guide the project and agree on evaluation mechanisms to monitor progress and plan next steps.

‘Planning’

Project Practice

The project was funded by the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian to consider aspects of meaningful engagement such as staff, venues and tools.

City of Edinburgh Council, Children’s Parliament, Young Edinburgh Action and NHS Lothian worked together to agree on the focus of the engagement events.

A clear and agreed engagement plan was put in place through the construction of a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ which allowed the partners to have a mutual agreement of all aspects of the project.

How we know we are meeting the NCE standard for ‘Impact’

“The project planned sufficient resources to support an effective engagement process.”

“Partners were involved at the start of the process in identifying and defining the focus that the engagement would explore.”

“Partners agreed what the outcomes of the engagement process should be, the indicators used to measure success and the evidence that should be gathered.”

Project Challenges

One of the main ideas of the project was to have the same project champions throughout to allow the best chance to build relationships with the children and young people.

However, complete consistency over the six months proved to be a challenge due to work demands, job changes, annual leave, or other work commitments. The building of relationships was still successful, with many of the champions being able to commit to the entire process. Those who were unable to commit to every event mostly maintained a link with the project by sending a colleague to represent the organisation. This meant that they were able to keep up-to-date with project progress as well as maintaining a relationship with the children and young people via a colleague. The result was that children built up trust and confidence to express their views and opinions, and adults were better able to support the children to understand their roles as champions.

Some initial challenges also came with the forming of relationships between the children and young people themselves. At the first few events, it was evident that the children and young people were not mixing as well as hoped and were, to some extent, inhibited by one another. Some of the children were intimidated by the young people, while some young people felt they couldn't be as honest as they wanted to be with certain issues because of the presence of younger children.

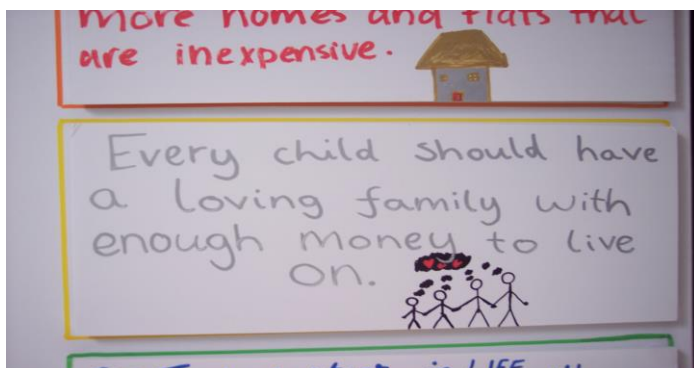


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It was the feeling there was somebody across the table looking and listening to you.

(Participant)

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As part of the post-event evaluation, the team reflected on how this could be overcome. They established that part of the issue was to do with the layout of the building, as well as needing more opportunities for relationship building.

The team then implemented ice breakers and team building opportunities. There was also a change of venue at each event which supported a change in layout. As a result, the children and young people were able to form good relationships and work together in an open and supportive environment.



NTSG Reflections – What can we learn from *What Kind of Edinburgh?*

The *What Kind of Edinburgh?* project has demonstrated a successful method of engaging with children and young people and has successfully put into practice the National Standards for Community Engagement. There are several lessons to be learnt from the *What Kind of Edinburgh?* project that other local areas may wish to consider.

1. Taking a rights-based approach is a key method which underpins children and young people’s engagement.

A rights-based approach keeps children and young people at the centre of the engagement process. It allows them to highlight their needs, views and experiences so that they can influence decisions made with and for them (Children’s Parliament, 2017).

2. Recruit a range of cross-sector champions who will provide consistency where possible.

Consistency will enable stronger relationships to be built between adults and young people, and therefore more open and honest dialogue around the issues being presented. Good cross-sector coverage also ensures opportunities for all agencies to be involved in taking action.

3. Work in partnership with third sector organisations who can initially share their skills and methodologies to recruit and engage children.

The project has developed a methodology for engagement that is jointly owned by children, young people and adult duty-bearers, which might then be shared as a model of good practice for meaningful and ongoing engagement.

4. Ensure that there is ongoing communication and dialogue about the engagement work being undertaken.

Ongoing and preparatory work supports more meaningful and effective engagement as it builds relationships and creates deeper dialogue. One-off events can often result in tokenistic engagement. In the case of *What Kind of Edinburgh?*, options for the future are under discussion and, in the meantime, dialogue around children’s services will continue through, for example, locality Youth Talk events.

5. Provide opportunities for feedback on how promises have been taken forward.

At the end of each event, champions gave feedback on how they have moved forward with their pledges, even if that meant they were not successful. The project also presented opportunities for children and young people to become a ‘live-link’ between their classmates, school and the project champions.

“[The project] was not just about participation, but also having fun. But if it does get harder, you have someone there to support you.”
(Participant)

How is *What Kind of Edinburgh?* influencing Children's Services Planning?

"Sometimes we think we know best... we don't. I have been reminded of this." (Champion)



What Kind of Edinburgh? has enabled instant impact on planning to occur through the project champions and their pledges. The project was a way of immediately informing champions in senior and strategic positions of changes they could act upon immediately, as well as influence in the future.



An example of instant impact was applied by one of the champions who worked in Edinburgh's planning department. The champion took copies of the children's views gathered at the 'fairness' event. He was then able to influence his team in their planning by sharing with his team the views of what fairness looked like to children and young people. He is also aiming for these views to be part of informing the Edinburgh City Plan for 2030.



The Children's Parliament and YEA have summarised the calls that children and young people made around Edinburgh's five priority areas in the form of [a magazine](#). The magazine has been presented at the Education, Children and Families Committee and the Edinburgh Children's Partnership board for comment and suggestions on how these views might be used as a part of a basis for informing the strategic objectives in the Children's Services Plan 2020-2023. For the Children's Partnership, this will mean analysing what children and young people have highlighted and matching this up with Edinburgh's strategic objectives.

Although funding for the project has currently ended, further funding options are being investigated to support continued city-wide engagement work as part of *What Kind of Edinburgh?*



Youth Talk Edinburgh is a current project which engages with young people across four Edinburgh localities.

Subsequent to *What Kind of Edinburgh?*, Youth Talk has been highlighted as a possible forum to continue this strategic engagement.

Youth Talk programmes are currently running across four Edinburgh localities in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council and the NHS Lothian Health Promotion Service.

While *What Kind of Edinburgh?* focuses on a city-wide approach, Youth Talk aims to facilitate the involvement of young people in service planning at a local level. In theory, this forum could be used to feed into and discuss strategic children's services planning.



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For further information about the *What Kind of Edinburgh?* Project, please contact

John Heywood: john.heywood.2@edinburgh.gov.uk

Jade Mooney: jade.mooney@edinburgh.gov.uk

David Maguire: david.maguire@edinburgh.gov.uk

For further information about the National Third Sector GIRFEC Project at Children in Scotland, please e-mail girfec@childreninscotland.org.uk