



How children and young people's voices influence services planning

CASE STUDY:

Angus Youth Engagement Strategy

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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 Angus Council on behalf of the Angus Community Planning Partnership (ACPP). 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: Angus Community Planning Partnership – Youth Engagement Strategy

Case Study Area: Angus

Age range of children and young people involved: 12-18

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 the *Angus Youth Engagement Strategy*

As part of the Scottish Government's Year of Young People (YOYP) and following on from work that had been done around community empowerment, Angus Council was inspired to update their approach to engaging with young people. While the YOYP agenda was a catalyst in this project, Angus Council had a clear plan that they wanted to support CYP voices in a sustainable and genuine way.

In 2018, Angus Council on behalf of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP), revisited how young people in the area are engaged with and committed to co-producing a new approach to youth engagement. Throughout this project, Angus council worked closely with a range of local partners from the CPP, such as Voluntary Action Angus, Police Scotland and Education to co-produce the strategy with children and young people in the community.



Initial engagement process

The work began with an initial survey which considered how young people felt they were engaged with. This was distributed to children and young people across Angus schools and youth clubs. Through this initial survey, Angus Council Communities youth work staff engaged with 260 young people.

A partnership meeting was then held with young people and representatives from across services in Angus including the executive board of ACPP, as well as the wider CPP network. The discussions focussed on how children and young people in the area had been engaged with in the past, and how to improve current youth participation. This event gave young people and partners an opportunity to work together to consider a strategic method of youth engagement via a choice of thematic workshops and a chance to form a small working group to drive forward.

Partnership Workshops

Around 10 young people and 10 partners from the ACPP chose the development workshops. The partners were made up of a multi-disciplinary team with staff from education, third sector and youth work. Throughout these workshops, there was a strong ethos of respect and partnership. The working group was tasked with co-producing a strategy to ensure any engagement work being carried out in the area was done on young people's terms.

Through a range of creative activities, the workshops guided the young people and the partners to begin to develop their own ideas of what they consider to be important when engaging with youth.

The activities and discussions supported the young people to lead on the decision of developing an Angus Youth Engagement Strategy. Having decided this, the remaining workshops focussed on the principles of this strategy and what it would look like in both content and design. They used the National Standards, which raised awareness to the participants of what is already happening. The National Standards, as well as other strategies, were therefore drawn upon as foundational documents, to develop principles for the Angus Youth Engagement Strategy.

The working group then created the Angus Youth Engagement Strategy, a 2-page, high-level document to inform any engagement work being undertaken with children and young people that adheres to these key principles.

Assessment of project methods

The NTSG project has studied the *Angus Youth Engagement* 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, October 2019)

Inclusion

“We will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement.”

Angus Council largely drew upon the expertise of local youth workers to help recruit young people from the 4 localities within Angus. This was to give a wide range of young people the opportunity to be included in this project.

The young people who volunteered to be involved in this project were involved at the earliest opportunity. Rather than consulting with young people after the strategy had been drafted, it was important to Angus that young people were involved in the groundwork of even the initial ideas.

Support

“We will identify and overcome any barriers to participation.”

For the young people in Angus, rurality was identified as one of the greatest barriers to participation. Because of the lack of reliable public transport, young people find it difficult to get to places without the support of adults.

Youth workers in Angus played a key role in supporting young people both practically and personally. For each event, youth workers from each locality picked up the young people in cars and transported them to the events. The events were also moved around to make it more accessible.

In addition to this practical support, the young people were also supported throughout the workshops to be able to have their say or to understand certain aspects of the discussions.

“A lot of the time the police, NHS and other partners, scaled it [the discussion] down so we would know what they’re talking about.” (Young Person, Angus).

Planning

“There is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions.”

Although the idea of reviewing youth engagement came from the ACPP, all partners agreed that in order for this to be long lasting and sustainable, young people should be involved right from the beginning.

The intention of co-producing the project with young people was therefore set out from the very beginning of the process. The partnership shared their intentions with all partners and key players from the Angus community and recognised the importance of getting everyone on board.

The purpose of engagement was made clear to the young people from the beginning.

“The group was really about getting our point across to the adults, so they know what we are aiming for.” (Young Person, Angus).

Working Together

“We will work effectively together to achieve the aims of engagement.”

Throughout the workshops, young people and partners built up relationships, which were key to the success of the youth engagement strategy. The process was based on trust and mutual respect where young people and adults were on a level playing field.

One young person said, “With youth workers we knew them and so they took us seriously from the word go. With some of the others [from the partnership] we built relationships and now they take us seriously.” (Young Person, Angus).

The workshops also enabled both adults and young people to have conversations, which were open, honest and clear. “The adults didn’t always love our ideas. Even though they liked lots of our ideas, they were good at saying ‘no that wouldn’t work!’” There were therefore opportunities for genuine working together where ideas were challenged and co-produced mutually and genuinely.



Photo credit: Angus Youth Engagement Strategy



Methods

“We will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.”

The project chose to use a workshop style method of engagement over a period of six months. This was an intentional method, which hoped to build relationships between adults and young people and, therefore, facilitate genuine inter-generational dialogue to inform the strategy.

One of the main methods used to support maximum participation was eating together. This made a big impact on facilitating dialogue in a casual and relaxed way. “We got fed, it’s something that’s important to us so it gave us the brainpower and the will to continue. The food gave us the opportunity to break down barriers with the adults.” (Young person, Angus)

Eating together was a way of demonstrating the level playing field and mutual ground between adults and young people – the need to be fed and the enjoyment of eating.

Communication

“We will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement.”

From the outset, communication was a key consideration for the Angus partners and the young people. There was a clear commitment to ensure that the work from the project would be communicated as clearly and widely as possible.

“We wanted to use different kinds of communication because no one type fits all. We wanted to use social media and emails to gather their [other young people’s] voices and communicate with them but not everyone has social media and an email.”

Information on the project and most importantly what happened as a result, has been shared widely through a variety of opportunities. A film of the process was created and a ‘launch’ was collectively planned with the young people to promote and demonstrate the work that had been done.

Impact

“We will assess the impact of the engagement and use what we’ve learned to improve future community engagement.”

One of the key ambitions of the project was that partners from across Angus would put the youth engagement strategy into action in their working contexts. As a result, a key output from the project was an event which was arranged 12 months after the launch of the strategy (May 2019).

The aim of this event was to consider youth engagement after 12 months to see how young people had been involved in planning services and to highlight what had changed as a result. ACPP wanted to give the young people space to talk about how they had been involved over the year, co-presenting with partners across three topics: Participatory Budgeting, the Youth Engagement Strategy itself and Corporate Parenting.

There were then workshops based around the ACPP three priorities of “Reducing child poverty, Improving mental health and wellbeing and Improving accessibility and connectivity”. These took place across four tables with a mix of young people and ACPP partners at each.

Giving young people the opportunity to be involved in and present at the event highlighted Angus’ priority to value the voices CYP and close the feedback loop for the young people involved in each area of work. The event was also an important way to promote accountability for the adults representing services and to challenge them on how they are involving young people.

However, there was key recognition from ACPP, that an event on its own will not embed the strategy into all areas of Angus work. This is an ongoing process, which aims to weave the strategy thorough all strategic developments until it becomes second nature. However, this means relying on key players to be committed and passionate, as well as reminding others in the partnership to embed this strategy throughout their own work.

NTSG Reflections – What can we learn from the *Angus Youth Engagement Strategy*?

The *Angus Youth Engagement Strategy* has demonstrated an effective method of engaging with children and young people and has successfully put into practice the National Standards for Community Engagement. There are several key successes from the project that other local areas may wish to consider in their own contexts.

1. Use different methods of communication to connect with young people.

Through the involvement of young people in this project, the Angus partners learned that although adults often think that social media is the best way to connect, young people may feel their social space is encroached upon. Others may not have social media and prefer to be contacted in other ways.

2. Plan opportunities for on-going commitment and accountability to the strategy from the beginning of the engagement.

Follow up and accountability are crucial ways of giving people responsibility. It is important that people are held accountable in order to put the strategy into practice.

3. Work with local politicians who are already engaged in the Children's Rights agenda.

ACPP particularly drew upon the support of two newly elected members, who had a specific interest in how they can encourage young people to be politically active. This raised the profile of participation and reinforced the importance of youth engagement within local services.

4. Involve key players from the CPP who are committed to listening to children and young people from the outset.

The consistent commitment from these professionals supported genuine inter-generational dialogue and helped young people to feel valued in their views.



Photo credit: Angus Youth Engagement Strategy



How is the *Angus Youth Engagement Strategy* influencing *Children's Services Planning*?

The Angus Youth Engagement Strategy is a tool co-produced with young people, which continues to be embedded and used throughout services in Angus.

The strategy is being embedded throughout all strategic development, for example, through Fairer Scotland Duty, local Impact Assessments and Community Council Consultations. It is a clear demonstration of the ACPP's desire to move away from consultation and towards co-production of services.

The on-going challenge remains for key champions throughout Angus CPP to continue to remind partners and colleagues of their commitment to the engagement strategy, as they make strategic decisions. This can sometimes mean that champions who took part in the project bear the responsibility of championing the strategy and reminding colleagues to use it at every opportunity. However, there is a strong commitment across the partnership to continue to champion, embed and support the voices of children and young people in all aspects of children's services planning.

The Angus partnership, through consultation with communities, has developed three priorities:

- reducing child poverty
- improving mental health and wellbeing
- improving accessibility and connectivity

The youth engagement strategy is being used to further consider how CYP will be involved in developing the services within each priority area.

This project has been a genuine and meaningful way of engaging with young people in the Angus area. It has involved young people from the outset and has demonstrated a commitment to empowering young people to bring about better outcomes within services. Going forward, Angus CPP has the desire to further develop the strategy to consider co-production of services in partnership with CYP.

“We need to actively shift the way that public services engage with young people.”
(Depute Chief Executive of Angus Council)

For further information about the Angus Youth Engagement project please contact Jennifer Miller at: millerj@angus.gov.uk



Further reading

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

Care inspectorate's 10 steps to successful children's services planning (Appendix D)

Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/guidance/2016/12/statutory-guidancepart-3-childrens-services-planning-children-young-people/documents/00512307-pdf/00512307-pdf/govscot%3Adocument>

Children in Scotland participation and engagement guidelines:

Available at: <https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Principles-and-Guidelines-FINAL.pdf>

Children's Parliament (2017) Healthy, Happy and Safe: A Children's Rights Approach for Scotland.

Available at: <https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Children-with-Disabilities-Report-for-CYPCS-Final-2016.pdf>

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014: Statutory Guidance on Part 3: Children's Services Planning.

Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/guidance/2016/12/statutory-guidance-part-3-childrens-services-planning-children-young-people/documents/00512307-pdf/00512307-pdf/govscot%3Adocument>

Scottish Government (2017) Planning children's services: a model for engagement.

Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/modelengagement-children-young-people-planners-development-childrens-services-plans/pages/13/>

The National Standards for Community Engagement.

Available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5943c23a440243c1fa28585f/t/5c000b516d2a737f69d510e7/1543506813945/NSfCE+online_October.pdf

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Available at: https://www.unicef.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf

7 Golden Rules for Participation. Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland.

Available at: <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/education/golden-rules>