

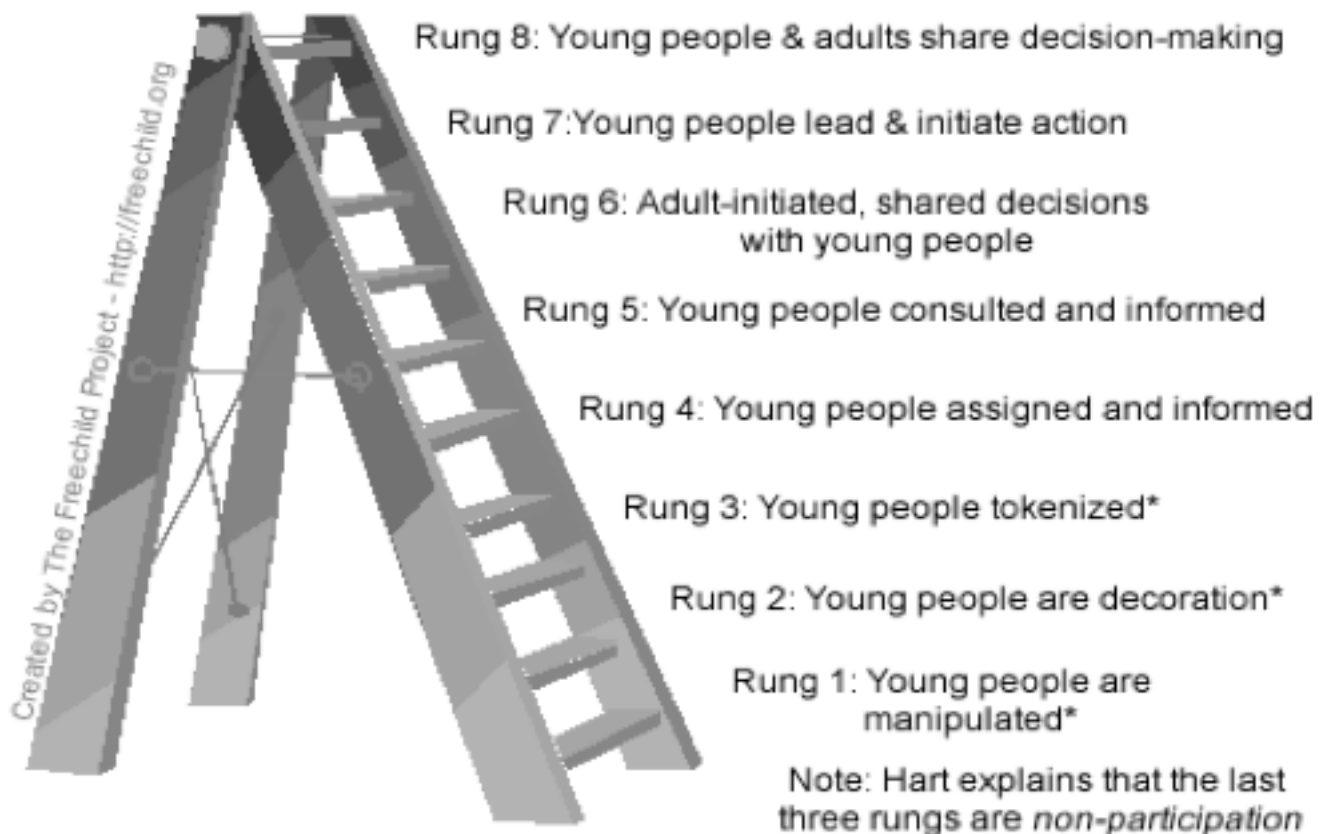


Ladder of participation

Throughout the participation agenda, Roger Hart's 'Ladder of Participation' is often used to explain the different approaches and practices that organisations take in involving children and young people in decision making. This can be applied just as well to parent carer participation. (see appendix 3)
The true measure of whether co-production has really been successful is when a date for a review of the project / piece of work is set and co-evaluation occurs.

Fig 1

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*.
Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Making participation easier for parents and carers

Good practice suggests that there should be at least two parent/carer representatives on each decision making Board.

How you can make meetings accessible to parents/carers

- Parents/carers are often prevented from participating in meetings because of their times and the locations where they are held. The suggested good practice is for meetings to be held between 10am and 2pm (avoiding the school run) on a weekday, avoiding school holidays, with only occasional meetings to be held during the evening and weekend.
- It is important that families are given all information necessary before the meeting in a format that is best for them. Information should be clear and easy to understand and should not use acronyms/ jargon.
- Understand that parents and carers have very busy lives and don't always have time to read and fully digest lengthy documents prior to the meeting. Summarise these during the meeting prior to discussion.
- To ensure transparency and accountability, professionals should ensure there is an appropriate paper trail e.g. agenda, minutes of the meeting. This will enable parents who cannot attend meetings to be kept informed.
- Feedback from meetings is essential and parents/carers should be informed about what has or has not changed and the reasons behind the decisions. If professionals fail to respond to parents/carers they will become disillusioned with the process and may not engage in the future.
- When parents/carers are invited to meetings they may incur expenses. Decide beforehand if reasonable expenses are to be paid

An expenses policy is required which specifies the occasions when parent/ carers can claim expenses and the appropriate rates.

Remember

We must remember that parents and carers volunteer their own time to support partnership working. They have very busy lives, with other commitments and responsibilities. To actively encourage and support parents and carers to participate, practitioners need always to be mindful of the practical barriers to parent carer participation (e.g. times of meetings). We must also be aware of other factors (most of which would be covered by good planning and basic courtesies) that may significantly affect how a parent or carer feels as well as their ability and/or willingness to participate fully.

Paying attention to the basics - such as identifying a contact person for parent carer representatives, ensuring full introductions in meetings, ensuring parents and carers have the same information as other partners in advance of meetings, offering support and additional explanation when needed – will help parents and carers to feel welcome, valued and supported. This can make all the difference!

Conclusions

There is no “right” way to introduce participation. The starting points for children, young people, and parents/carers are different in each case, based upon what they want and the type of participation required. Participation is not created simply by modifying existing structures – it entails a change of attitude and outlook.

Most services in some way are expected to support and develop participation, however many are afraid that what they do will be seen as ‘tokenistic’ and false by both their users and other organisations.

All organisations have to start somewhere and in this document we try to point you in the right direction by giving you some general guidelines to follow, and dismiss some of the myths!



Appendix 1

Useful Tips for Co-production

1. Be clear about what you want as an organisation, and be open about the extent and possibility of shared power and decision making.
2. The best starting place for co-production is at the beginning. Right at the start of a piece of work, consider who should be involved AND involve them immediately.
3. Involve the people whose families use the services under discussion or review.
4. Come to the table without a fixed agenda and build that agenda with those involved.
5. Decide together what you are going to do, how you are going to work together and agree the desired outcomes. Wherever possible, stick to the work plan.
6. Be true to the aims of co-production! Remember, parents and carers offer a unique perspective and insight. Parent carer participation is helpful!
7. Be open to persuasion and challenge. Be willing to change direction and/or to review decisions. Use the free expertise and knowledge shared by parents and carers to make positive changes.
8. Make sure that everything in the co-production process is equally accessible to everyone taking part. Information, minutes etc. should be circulated to all.
9. Actively facilitate discussions, ensuring that everyone who wishes to has an opportunity to speak, and that others listen. Take steps to ensure that no one person or group monopolises the conversation.
10. Be ready to offer additional support and explanation to help individuals to participate. Everyone can contribute given the right support.
11. Be organised and prepare well. Don't waste everyone's valuable time!
12. Avoid making impromptu decisions and having key discussions outside of planned meetings as part of "everyday office life" that parents / carers cannot possibly be a part of.

Appendix 2

Practitioners Good Practice Checklist

1. Are there at least two places for parents/carers representatives?

It is good practice to have parents who have children of different ages, different needs/disabilities, and represent different groups. They can also support each other.

2. Have the representative parents/carers received information for the meetings in the most accessible format for them?

This may be via e-mail or by post. Papers will need to be printed off for parent/carers ready for the meetings and sent out well in advance.

3. Is there an identified key professional who has responsibility to support the parent/carers representatives?

These key professionals can:

- Meet parents/carers beforehand to answer any questions and discuss the agenda.
- Explain the purpose of the meeting, terms of reference, objectives and overall structures.
- Outline what the group can and cannot do.
- Let parents/carers know about members of the group.
- Explain how the meeting is to be run i.e. formally or informal discussion.

- Discuss what to do if they are unable to attend.
- Identify any training the parents/carers may benefit from to help them in the meetings.
- Deal with paying any expenses to the parents/carers.
- Thank the parents/carers for giving their time.
- Ensure appropriate feedback is given to any parents who give their time.

4. Are the meetings planned at a time which enables parents/carers to attend?

The National Standard is for meetings to be held between 10am and 2pm (avoiding the school run) on a weekday, avoid school holidays and occasional meetings to be held evenings and weekends.

5. Is the language used in all the meetings and in all paperwork jargon free and easy to understand?

Parents may need an explanation of terms / abbreviations.

6. Have parents/carers received reasonable out of pocket expenses for attending strategic meetings?

Reasonable expenses include travel costs, photocopying/printing costs and any other out of pocket expense incurred to enable parents to attend the meeting.

Appendix 3

Ladder of participation

The Ladder of Participation is based on 8 levels. The levels show an incremental increase in active involvement, level 1 being the lowest in terms of service users having very little influence on decisions to level 8 illustrating true involvement. Hart felt that the first three rungs were non participation. The ladder is shown with slight modification to make it applicable to parent carers. The ladder will help your organisation determine where you are in terms of participation and help you focus and improve your approach if desired.¹

Degrees of participation³

Level 8: User-initiated, shared decisions with adults

This happens when projects or programmes are initiated by Parents/Carers and decision-making is shared between Parents/Carers and the organisation. These projects empower Parents/Carers while at the same time enabling them to access support and expertise of the Local Authority and/or its agency partners.

Level 7: User-initiated and directed

This step is when Parents/Carers initiate and direct a project or programme. Local Authority and/or its' agency partners are involved only in a supportive role.

Level 6: Local Authority-initiated, shared decisions with users

Occurs when projects or programme are initiated by Local Authority and/or its' agency partners but the decision-making is shared with the Parents/Carers.

Level 5: Consulted and informed

This happens when Parents/Carers give advice on projects or programs which are designed and run by Local Authority and/or its' agency partners. Parents/Carers are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by the Local Authority and/or its' agency partners.

Level 4: Assigned but informed

This is where Parents/Carers are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved.

Level 3: Tokenism

When Parents/Carers appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.

Level 2: Decoration

Happens when Parents/Carers are used to help or “bolster” a cause in a relatively indirect way, although the Local Authority and/or its' agency partners do not pretend that the cause is inspired by Parents/Carers.

Level 1: Manipulation

Happens where the Local Authority and/or its' agency partners use their Parents/Carers to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by the Parents/Carers.

¹ Please note: It is important not to view participation as a hierarchical model where organisations feel that their involvement of service users is judged as not good enough if it is not high enough on the ladder. Organisations need to start from a point that is realistic for them and then develop participation as their collective confidence, trust and skills increase.

²(Adapted from Hart, Roger (1992) Children's participation from tokenism to citizenship.)

Copies of this booklet may be obtained in large print, Braille, on audio cassette or in other languages. To obtain a copy in an alternative format please telephone 01344 352000.

Nepali

यस प्रचारको सक्षेपं वा सार निचोड चाहिं दिइने छ, ठूलो अक्षरमा, ब्रेल वा क्यासेट सून्नको लागी । अरु भाषाको नक्कल पनि हासिल गर्न सकिने छ । कृपया सम्पर्क गनुहोला ०१३४४ ३५२००० ।

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