

Be part of it



A strategy for children and
young people's participation
in The Children's Society's
work and activities

1 Introduction

The Children's Society is committed to creating positive change in the lives of children and young people, and to ensuring that they share in deciding what these changes are and how they are achieved. It is through these positive changes to their lives, relationships and communities that we can judge the success of our work with children and young people.

The Children's Society works in partnership 'with' and 'for' children – looking at the world through their eyes. This is the foundation of who we are as an organisation and how we make decisions. But it's only through children's participation and our acceptance that they 'may know better than we do what is best for them' that we can truly understand and respond to their needs. Their participation in our work is vital, and they have much to contribute.

Children and young people currently have a say on issues such as staff recruitment, strategy development and as Trustee Board members. But their talent and resilience has inspired us to strengthen their existing involvement and reach a shared understanding of participation so we can create real change.

Participation is about change, about challenging ourselves to work together in new and exciting ways. Through this new strategy we will share power and responsibility with children and young people in all areas of our work. We will also tackle the barriers preventing them from taking part, and by doing so we hope more children will learn what participation can bring – the ability to change their lives, their relationships and their communities for the better.

This document sets out our vision of what we want participation to mean in The Children's Society, what we are committed to and what action we want to take to turn that vision into practice. Whether you are a child or young person, work directly with them or in other areas of the organisation – such as Corporate Services or Fundraising and Campaigns – everyone contributes to our work and its impact on children and young people's lives. That's why we need your support to make it work. Participation is everyone's responsibility and we will work together to achieve it.

Our vision of participation

For The Children's Society, participation means creating and promoting positive opportunities for children and young people of all ages and abilities to get actively involved in all areas of our work, if and when they choose to do so.

Opportunities to:

- have their say on issues that affect their lives and to be listened to
- contribute to and influence policies and services so that they are designed and delivered to reflect their needs
- have their participation acknowledged, supported and recognised.



What it isn't

Participation ISN'T

- just for those children and young people or staff working directly with them – it needs the commitment of everyone in the organisation to make it work in their activities
- an added extra – it's at the heart of what we do
- what we allow children and young people to do – it's their right to choose to get involved or not
- quickly or easily achieved... it's an ongoing, two-way discussion that we want all of you to take part in – using your ideas and daily experiences.

The benefits

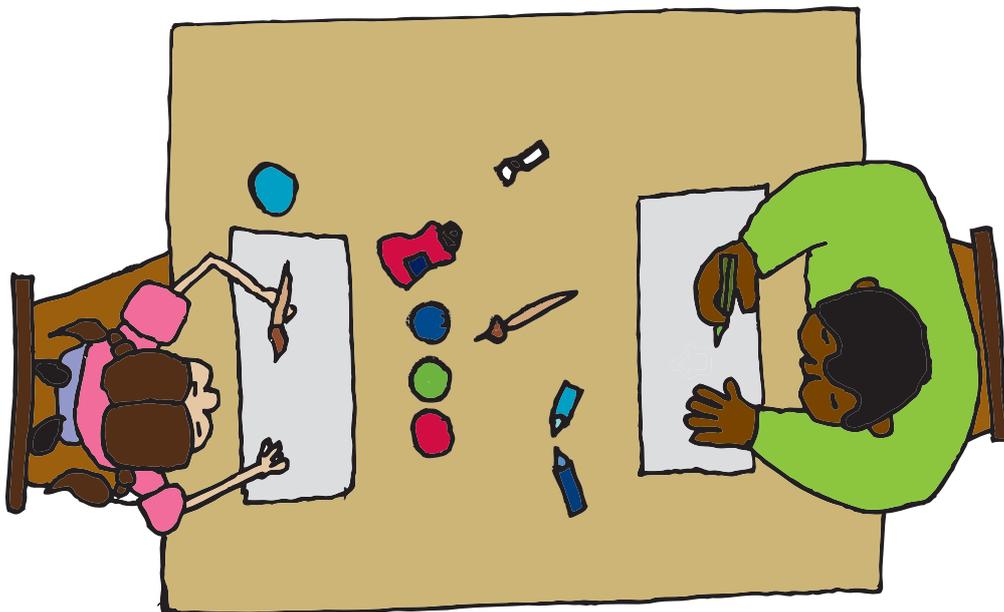
Participation can bring benefits for everyone in The Children’s Society.

For children and young people and for staff, it offers the chance to:

- develop new skills and talents, and gain confidence in their abilities
- play a real part in decision-making and in the charity’s future development
- improve understanding of their own and each others’ rights, needs and views
- build trust, improve relationships with one another and have fun together
- learn more about our work
- feel valued, listened to and part of what we do.

For the charity, it offers the chance to:

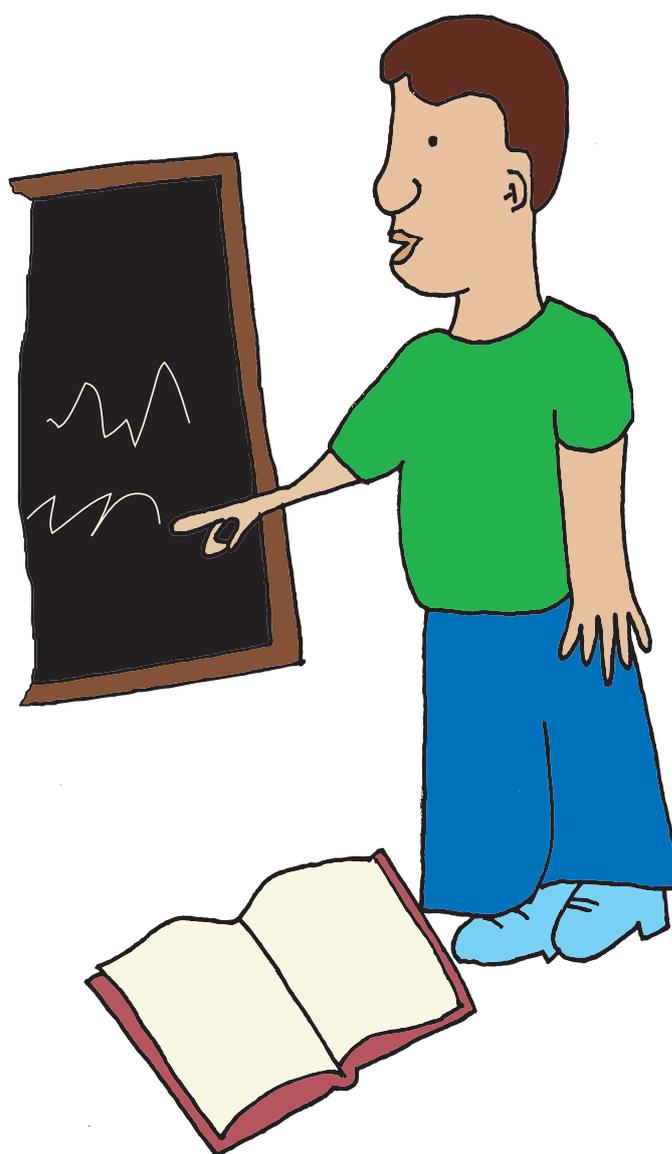
- develop more effective services that truly reflect what children and young people want and need
- raise new ideas that challenge the way we currently do things
- ensure decision-making within The Children’s Society is more democratic
- be seen as an ‘unique’ organisation that shares power and decision-making with the children it works with, and one that government and funders will want to support.



Why a strategy? Why now?

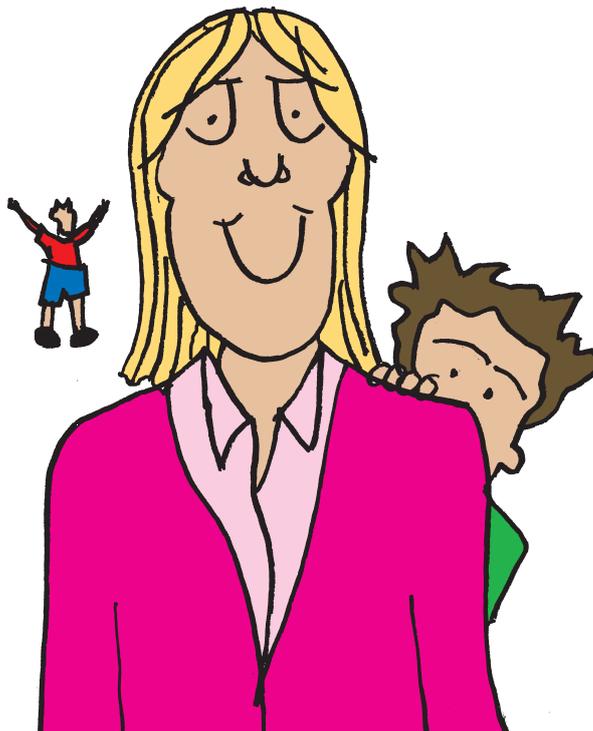
In recent years increasing attention has been given to children and young people's rights through debates in parliament and legislation. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Government's green papers, *Youth Matters* and *Every Child Matters*, championed the rights of children and young people to have their say in decisions that affect their lives and for those views to be taken into account.

Participation has been a key priority in The Children's Society's work for a number of years – we were one of the first charities to encourage children and young people to be part of our decision-making process. But while participation has developed across the organisation, with many examples of good practice, there has been no consistent approach. This, and the requirement by government and funders that participation is central to our work, means we need a strategy based on shared values and understanding throughout The Children's Society. We want to build this strategy on that existing good work – not 'reinvent the wheel' – but to build something bigger and better.



Principles for effective participation

This strategy, the result of work carried out by the Participation Strategy Group, sets out The Children's Society's main beliefs and commitments towards children and young people's participation in the organisation. These seven principles were arrived at by analysing the responses of nearly 1000 children and young people and staff to our Priority Search questionnaire. This asked: 'How can we make it easier and better for you [children and young people] to take part in all our work?' These principles reflect the responses most frequently given as their top priorities for good participation and are based on other work¹ that sought children and young people's views.



¹Refugee and Homeless Team – questionnaire for children and young people and their families about their involvement in The Children's Society work with refugee children; flipchart material from Wagoan; Lancashire Children's Rights service – charter of engagement; the Rap Group – I need to know (PACT); children and young people's participation in decision making in Newcastle (TCS Voices); My charter of expectations (LEAP project); Children's Voices – an active citizenship project for children aged 5–13 (TCS Oldham); disability project complaints; Young Life conference.

1 We want everyone in The Children's Society to value and respect all children and young people, staff and volunteers, to celebrate difference and say no to discrimination.

“ I think they should treat young people as they would like to be treated themselves. ”

cyp quote

Our commitment

To work towards creating a working environment where staff, volunteers, children and young people acknowledge and respect each others' rights to have different opinions but where prejudices and assumptions are challenged so that positive and trusting relationships can be built. .

“ It doesn't matter who you are, what age, or anything else, you can respect other people's opinions – even if you don't agree with them. ”

staff quote

What we will do

We will work to build positive and trusting relationships between staff and children and young people. We will find ways to celebrate difference, to challenge and explore stereotypes and assumptions, and to review any existing policy or procedure that encourages inequality. We will put in place measures to ensure that all children and young people have an equal chance to take part, whatever their race, gender, disability, sexuality, culture or faith.

2 We want to give children and young people the chance to explore a wide range of creative options to express themselves.

“ I’m not good at talking but drawing pictures helps me show how I feel. ”

cyp quote

Our commitment

To ensure that all children and young people – particularly those with physical or learning disabilities – have meaningful and accessible ways to communicate their views and needs both within and outside the organisation. We want to create a ‘safe’ place where children and young people, whatever their abilities, can express themselves creatively, take risks and learn in an enjoyable way that makes taking part real to them and their lives.

What we will do

We will listen to how children and young people want to communicate and support them by providing resources to fund innovative and effective ways – such as creative writing, artwork, audio, video or online – to help them express themselves fully.

“ Children need more of a say in what they do – and more say in how they do that. ”

staff quote



3 We want children and young people of all ages and abilities to have the opportunity to understand and influence the way things happen in The Children's Society.

“ I think you should be allowed to be part of the plan – but you can only do that if you understand how things work. ”

cyp quote

Our commitment

To make sure that children and young people can contribute to our procedures and policies by using language and processes that they can clearly understand and follow so they feel comfortable giving their views.

“ Sometimes children get told what happens, but not always how or why – and they need to know to make sense of it all. ”

staff quote

What we will do

We will provide advice and guidance so that all staff are able to produce clear, easy-to-understand procedures and policies that take into account children and young people's age, abilities and experience. This will enable children and young people to comment on and review procedures and policies relevant to them, and to make informed decisions.



4 We want all our written and spoken communication with children and young people to be in clear and simple language they can all understand.

Adults need to use language that we can understand – not lots of big words that we don't know. »

cyp quote

Our commitment

To use clear, straightforward and relevant language in the written materials we give to children and young people or when we speak to them. The language used should be appropriate to the age, background, abilities and culture of those it aims to reach.

If you use too much jargon talking to the children, they just switch off from what you're saying. »

staff quote

What we will do

We will ensure staff have guidance on how to produce written materials and how to talk to children and young people. This will tackle issues such as using plain and inclusive language, and avoiding jargon. This work will have an input from children and young people who know better than we do what they don't understand.



5 We want every child, young person, staff member and volunteer to have access to the skills, information and support they need to take part in our work, and have that participation valued and acknowledged.

“ If we’re going to be involved more, we need to be taught how to do that. ”

cyp quote

Our commitment

To make sure all children and young people, staff and volunteers get the help they need to participate and that children and young people have an input into staff training aimed at helping them participate. This could mean training in, for example, computer skills, confidence or literacy, information on The Children’s Society, or sharing good practice. To ensure that the contribution of children and young people and staff is recognised and celebrated.

What we will do

We will ensure that funding and time are made available to offer all staff and children and young people the training and learning opportunities they need to be able to take part – new skills, methods, techniques and attitudes. We will also make resources available to set up ways of acknowledging and accrediting children and young people for taking part and for the skills they have gained.

“ It would be good to have some way of celebrating what young people do and achieve. ”

staff quote



6 We want children and young people to be able to clearly see and understand the impact of their participation on our work and to provide them with ongoing feedback on our progress.

☒ We want more feedback – otherwise you don't know what's going on or if what you've said is taken on board. ☒

cyp quote

Our commitment

To create, challenge or change policies and processes so that they are clear and honest about children and young people's involvement and ability to influence a process or decision. There are certain areas of work where an equal share in decision-making isn't possible and this should be acknowledged. We will provide ongoing feedback to children and young people so they can see the impact of their participation.

☒ Children tell us they want to know more about the processes that affect their lives – and we need to keep them constantly up to date. ☒

staff quote

What we will do

We will ensure that children and young people are made aware from the start of a process just how much they can influence the situation. We will also set up measures and set aside time for children and young people to receive regular feedback on what has happened, how exactly their contributions have been used, and how they have or have not influenced change.



7 We want The Children's Society to be a 'learning organisation that is open to change and that has effective methods of sharing good practice both within and outside the organisation.

It'd be good to have more events to find out what people in groups in other areas do well. »

cyp quote

Our commitment

To learn from our participation experiences and share them, both within the organisation to build up a consistent approach to participation, and outside so that The Children's Society becomes known for its high quality work with children and young people.

What we will do

We will put measures in place to record what does (and doesn't) work so we can review our work and collect, publish and widely share our good practice with children and young people, staff and other agencies. We will also look at ways to celebrate our achievements and share our successes.

I'm sure there's lots of good work going on – we just need to share it amongst ourselves and learn from it. »

staff quote



3 The next steps

Monitoring

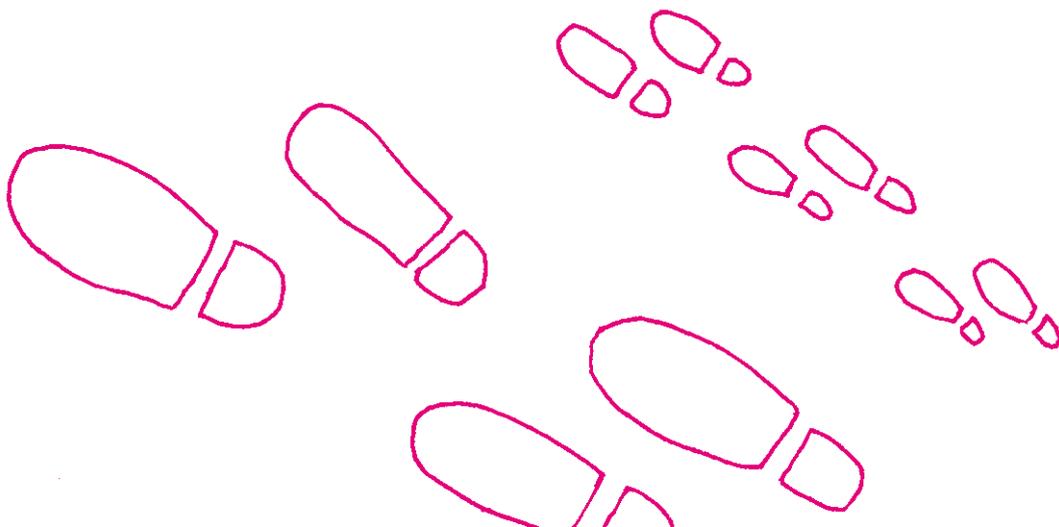
We are committed to finding ways of regularly recording, monitoring and reporting what we do, how we do it and if it is successful or not, as a means of setting future priorities. We will develop ways of doing this, where possible that fit with existing systems, such as through project reports.

Evaluation and review

We are committed to regularly reviewing children and young people's experiences and reviewing our participation plans accordingly. We will set up systems to collect information to measure and evaluate the success of their participation through the positive changes it has had on our work and on their lives, relationships and communities. We will review how we manage and evaluate participation to ensure that children and young people are formally represented through initiatives like CHYPPI.

Making it happen

Following on from this strategy and consultation, a series of documents will be produced to help take participation forward in our daily work, based on those activities we already know work in projects and ideas from staff and children and young people on new ways of participating.





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