

The Eurochild Annual Conference ‘Building an Inclusive Europe: The Contribution of Children’s Participation’

Milan from 13-15 November

Organised by Eurochild with the Italian National Ombudsman for Children, Municipality of Milan and Network of Child Rights Organisations the conference aimed to explore how children’s participation contributed to policy in practice change in the areas of health, education, social inclusion and migration. A background document for the conference was prepared by Professor Laura Lundy, Centre for Children’s Rights, Queens University and Dr Helen Stalford, European Children’s Rights Unit, University of Liverpool

(<http://eurochildannualconference2013.org/en/background-document/>)

The conference was a mixture of direct inputs from speakers from across policy and practice as well as workshops and inputs from children and young people. It included a forum of good practice in participation featuring 12 inputs from organisations across Europe presented in ‘speakers corners’ and stands from a further 20 organisations.

A conference website is available at;

<http://eurochildannualconference2013.org/en/>

In the main conference CYPSP presented a workshop on the participation of children with disabilities in the work of the CYPSP Regional Planning Groups on Disability and Transition. The presentation is available from the CYPSP website;

(<http://www.cypsp.org/publications.htm> > under general reports). This work was undertaken by CYPSP in association with Participation Network. The presentation was followed by a wide ranging discussion on a number of issues including-

- a. The importance of supporting existing participation networks to reach young people rather than always seeking to set up separate structures for participation. This was referenced in respect of the importance of trust in underpinning participation practice and the importance of young people working with adults they trusted.
- b. The importance of ‘closing the loop’ in terms of always going back to young people to tell them what you did with the information you received.
- c. The importance of taking a structured approach to participation. In this context the ‘Ask First’ Standards prepared by Participation Network and set out in the CYPSP Northern Ireland Children and Young People’s Plan (2011-2014);

- (http://www.cypsp.org/publications/cypsp/action-plan/cypsp_action_plan_2011-2014.pdf) were very well received
- d. The importance of participation by particularly vulnerable children was extensively debated and there was considerable interest in the CYPSP/HSCB Regional Subgroup work on 'Think Family' (For example see; http://www.cypsp.org/publications/subgroups/think_family/Regional_Think_Family_Sub_Group_flyer.pdf)

The conference closed with a debate focussing on how participation can make a difference in children's lives. Participating in the debate Professor Pat Dolan, UNESCO Chair and Director Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway raised two very interesting points

- a. The importance, in the context of service delivery, of respecting children views as critical evidence of the effectiveness (or otherwise) of interventions in their lives.
- b. The importance of focussing our intention as much on what we actually do with the views of children and young people as on the process of participation.

The conference was preceded by a meeting of the Eurochild Thematic Working Group on Family and Parenting Support. CYPSP has membership of this group. This group is supported in its work by UNESCO and a full report on the deliberations of this group will be in the next e-zine.



Children and young people share their views on improving participation of children and young in service design