

## **Barnardo's Participation Project facilitates the involvement of children and young people with disabilities in the CYPSP planning process.**

### **Background**

Since its inception CYPSP Children with Disabilities and Transitions working Groups accepted the responsibility placed on statutory agencies to respect the rights of all children and young people and seek their views as service users. Sections 19 and 20 of the Health and Social Care Reform Act 2009 place responsibility on health & social care bodies to seek the views of service users in planning, provision and development of services either directly or through representative bodies.

Barnardo's Participation Project is a rights based Participation and Advocacy Group that facilitates the involvement of children and young people with a range of disabilities and conditions, in high level strategic children's services planning. Having implemented tried and tested principles of good participation practice since 2002 the Project was mandated by CYPSP to lead the development of a model of young people's involvement in CYPSP.

Experts in involving children and young people in strategic partnerships argue that the ultimate in best practice is when adults and young people share decision making. In order to build such a partnership it was vital to develop a sense of ownership by the young people and design a method of non tokenistic influencing that would make the multiagency CYPSP accountable to either make change happen or explain to the young people why change can not happen.

### **Getting Started**

It was also imperative to involve as many young people from across the five Health and Social Care Trusts as possible (a) to seek the views and experiences of a range of young people and (b) to compare the views of young people on their experiences of disability issues across the province.

The timing of the setting up of the young peoples group was an important factor. It was essential the young people were not dictated to or influenced by decisions that may already have been made by CYPSP. Consequently the young people needed to come together and decide on a process by which they wanted to be involved before the CYPSP Working Groups commenced.

The initial steps were to identify young people who wanted to participate. Then acknowledging the empowerment of young people as one of the vital components of good participation practice it was necessary to identify a way by which the young people would receive the support they needed. Other voluntary and statutory agencies were invited to nominate young people involved in their services on the basis that they would provide them with the necessary support.

### **Developing a model of young peoples Involvement**

The first young Peoples Meeting was held in Fleming Fulton school in March 2011 Seventeen young people experiencing a range of disability issues attended the meeting. They were informed about the work of the CYPSP CWD and Transitions Working Groups and about their right to have their say in the process and asked to consider if they wanted to be involved.

The Young people were also asked to think about how they would like to participate in the process and at subsequent meetings they drew up a process of young people's involvement in CYPS.

Some young people suggested that they should sit in the working groups while others felt it would be very intimidating. However after much deliberation the young people proposed;

- To meet as a Regional Young Peoples Group every three months
- To elect Group Facilitators, Barnardo's Project Manager and Project Advocacy Worker, to attend CYPSP Meetings on their behalf and advise the working groups of their views.
- To meet with the chairs of the working groups twice yearly in order that they could ask questions and receive answers re the progress of the CYPSP working Groups
- To keep their involvement on the CYPSP Working Groups under review.

The young peoples proposed process of involvement was fed back to the CYPSP Working Groups and was adopted as a model of good participation practice to be replicated across CYPSP. This model has since been promoted as a model of good participation practice at European level.

### **Young People inform the CYPSP Action Plans**

In order to inform the agenda of CYPSP working groups and ensure that the young people's views helped shape the strategic action plans it was necessary for the young people to identify the issues they wanted reflected in the action plans. Still ahead of the commencement of the CYPSP Working Group Meetings the young people were facilitated to identify the issues they faced in health and social care, education, employment and learning etc.

The young people shared their experiences using a path format. This medium of participation enabled them to discuss many issues, identify priority areas, identify agencies that could help make a difference and set realistic goals that could be implemented in the Working Groups Action Plans. The path which was developed over many months also reflected much good practice across the province which could be shared to help build consistent service provision for children and young people and their families.

When the Working Groups reached the stage of setting their action plans they were presented with the young people's path and the issues are reflected in the

Action Plans for the CWD and Transitions Working Groups. The young people have also been involved in the CYPSP Sub Group on Passports/communication tools.

## **Conclusion**

The Partnership between the Young Peoples Regional Group and the CYPSP illustrates a tried and tested model of involving young people with disabilities in high level children's services planning. The work also reinforces the benefits to decision makers of seeking the views of children and young people. As one young person said "why not ask us after all we are the experts its our lives they are talking about".

In order for Barnardo's Participation Project to develop a model based on good participation practice it was necessary to develop partnerships not only with CYPSP but with the young peoples support agencies which highlights the benefits of partnership working. The partnership with agencies such as Cedar Mencap, Autism NI, Jordanstown School for Sensory Impairments, Flemming Fulton School, the Children's Hospice NI and 6<sup>th</sup> Sense allow young people to seek the views of their Peers in their own groups. This helps to ensure there is a broad range of views. The Agencies also support the young people to attend meetings.

Most importantly is the contribution the young people make and how they have benefited from being involved in the influencing process. This was evident recently when the young people who travel to Cookstown Leisure Centre requested to meet every two months instead of every three months. They said they would like to meet more frequently so as to discuss issues they want raised at CYPSP or to respond to issues raised at CYPSP Children with Disabilities and Transitions Working Groups.

Barnardo's Participation Project have faced challenges in establishing the involvement of children and young people in such high level strategic planning, for example some young people have left the group due to timeframes with other agencies or young people get frustrated when they don't see immediate progress. However the young people have said they keep coming back because they know they have a voice and they have been listened to because what issues they have raised is written in the action plans.

For further information on Barnardo's Participation Project and the Young Peoples Regional Group please contact;

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