

WALES YOUTH AGENCY

ENABLING YOUNG PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN SHAPING THE YOUTH SERVICE

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 27th

10.00am NEWTOWN TEACHERS

CENTRE

INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE YOUTH SERVICE.

Participation of young people in developing initiatives and contributing to the running of their club or project has long been held to be a central objective of youth work. The following quotes are from influential documents produced within the last decade which lend support to this idea.

One of the tenets of the youth service is that because of their relatively non-directive approaches and less rigid structures, youth organisations are better placed than many other institutions to develop the confidence and proficiency young people require if they are to participate more fully in the work of organisations and society.

HMI Wales Education Survey 13 1984

In our discussions with young people we found they were especially concerned with the general context of their lives and the need for their views about society was to be run to be taken seriously. They wanted to have an effective say in the running of organisations and in other decisions concerned with their welfare. They did not accept the claim sometimes advanced that giving young people decision making authority did not work, and even that young people did not want it; but felt that even those who claimed to believe in young people's right to make decisions were sometimes unwilling to accept the implications of this, when decisions were actually made.

Thompson Report

Participation by young people in the planning of youth provision is desirable. ***There is no single model for achieving this*** - although we are sympathetic to the ideas put forward by the Wales Youth Forum which may be suitable for some LEA's. We think that the formal approaches based on representatives of young people participating at the club, area or county level need to be supplemented by more informal approaches and market research to gauge the views of young people. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive.

Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte- Youth Service in Wales-Management Issues for the 1990's

Our view is that young people want participation at a variety of levels both in and outside the youth service. Therefore it is the responsibility of those working in the youth service and of society, at large, to ensure that opportunities for participation exist. ***These should not follow any "standard" pattern.*** Rather there must be a concerted effort to ensure that the opportunities are relevant to particular groups of young people, in specific places - and within a time scale which young people can relate to.

Consultative Group on Youth Work Training 1984

WAYS OF INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE

The quotes emphasise the need for a range of approaches which involve young people to be adopted. They all require different roles to be adopted by workers and they need not be mutually exclusive of each other.

There are three broad strategies which have been developed to achieve participation by young people. They are:

The Representation Model
The Interest/Issue Based Model
The Market Research Model

It should be noted that these models are not exclusive of each other.

THE REPRESENTATION MODEL

This involves young people acting on behalf of other young people and representing their views on official bodies. This can range from the traditional members committee, through to local youth councils through to young people working on national bodies.

Example 1: In response to recommendations from a study which looked towards the next century Llanidloes Town Council liaised with a local youth worker to convene a committee of young people and adults from a range of local organisations. The purpose of the group is to advise the town council on services for young people.

Example 2: A community council at Hawarden in Clwyd worked with a local sixth form to convene a shadow community council composed of young people. The purpose of the shadow council was to canvas young peoples views on facilities that the council were considering developing.

Example 3: Gwent Youth Action - This group came together following a county conference for young people financed via Europe. The group is concerned with canvassing other young people for their views on issues which affect young people and then lobbying for services which address these issues.

THE INTEREST/ISSUE BASED MODEL;

This is characterised by young people taking action to develop an interest and involves them in the organisation and tasks needed to achieve their aims.

Example 1: A community worker employed by the Development Board for Rural Wales has been working with a group of young musicians in Blaneau Ffestiniog. The group have come together to plan a series of gigs for the winter months and use the proceeds to purchase equipment which will form the basis for a pool of gear to be used by local bands.

Example 2: Deeside Skateboarder Club - This club had it's origins in some community profiling carried out by Alyn & Deeside Community Agency. Skateboarding was seen by

many people as a problem. It was also a major issue for young people as there was nowhere locally for people to skateboard without upsetting other members of the community. Thus young people formed a club in order to campaign for provision. Most club members were aged from 15-18.

They organised a committee which included 2 parents and met the Leisure manager of Alyn and Deeside District Council to discuss provision. They also organised local petitions. For two years running they built a temporary ramp at local festivals and thereby recruited 55 members. Eventually after three separate council meetings at which the issue was discussed the council offered a site, well away from housing. The club committee then raised funds to buy equipment and made a short video to highlight the issue. They raised £2000 and received a promise from a local apprentice training school to construct the equipment.

However, after three years of effort a lot of the original group had moved on. The current situation is that a keen group of 15 year olds are now trying to gain adult support which will be felt to be needed in order to manage the facility. The group have received support and advice from Alyn and Deeside Community Agency and a local video project.

Example 3: Capital Connection - a young peoples group at City Centre Youth Project, Cardiff. The group have organised a residential and arranged informal education sessions around issues such as contraception and Aids/HIV. The group came together following a successful application for Funding from Europe (Priority Action in the Field of Youth) and is an example of an issue based approach combined with a representational model. The group are keen to support young candidates in local elections and possibly Parliamentary elections. They recognise that a significant number of young people either do not vote or are not aware of why they vote and consider this an opportunity to campaign on youth issues and gain support for them.

THE MARKET RESEARCH MODEL:

This involves workers in undertaking research with young people in their community or other settings to enable them to express what their concerns and interests are. The role of the worker then involves enabling meetings to happen between young people and relevant bodies or organisations at which possible courses of action or services are discussed, or to work with young people and influence providers to organise their delivery around young peoples perceptions.

Example 1. Sealand Manor - This is a small, yet isolated estate in Clwyd which has always attracted attention with regards to young people. The local community council have recently worked in partnership with a local community agency, the youth service and Social Services to undertake a short period of outreach work designed to enable young people to express how they see their needs. This was followed up with a meeting of young people to check out what they saw as important and a meeting between young people and the community council. A further meeting was held by the various professional agencies involved to discuss possible responses.

Example 2: A community social worker in Clwyd has undertaken surveys in two areas of Connahs Quay, Clwyd to discover from young people what kind of provision they would like to see. One of the surveys led to a short term project over the summer period working with young people firstly in a small Portakabin and then on the streets. The other survey was carried out in conjunction with staff from a country park and will be used by the staff there to inform the development of work with a group they have been concerned about, who hang out in the park.

THE PROCESS OF PARTICIPATION

Participation is about working with young people, rather than working for them. It is about treating them as equal partners in the process of learning and development. It is about supporting them to achieve at their pace and on their terms. Thus the process is as important as the goal. Goals, ideas, activities are a product of discussion between young people and workers. Rather than a structure devised by men in grey suits without any reference to the young people for whom it is intended to benefit.

THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH WORKER

The role of the worker has to change from being someone who organises things for young people to becoming someone who helps young people to organise things for themselves. This is not always easy. It is often quicker to do things yourself and young people are not always going to get it right first time. However remember that you can give someone a fish and feed them once. But if you teach them how to fish they can feed themselves for a lifetime.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN ?

The HMI report on the youth service in Wales 1984 says that where young people shoulder real responsibility, such as drawing up and implementing rules or using monies, are involved in action as well as discussion, and are rendered accountable for the consequences of their decisions or action then participation involves experiences of real value. Furthermore greater progress is gained when the youth worker enables young people to master progress and provides an aid for decision making and action, and is in a position to offer praise and recognition.

What this means is that the youth workers role as an enabler involves involves them in supporting young people to carry out tasks and make decisions.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION:

There are many reasons why workers are reluctant to get involved in enabling young people to develop their own ideas and interests. Some of them may be due to:

The Adult - Young Person Relationship: This is based on a notion of age superiority in which the experience of adults is given a higher status to the ideas and inexperience of young people.

A resistance by workers at all levels to hand over power to young people.

Youth workers and young people have a perception of the worker as a provider of services and of young people as consumers of services.

The bureaucratic nature of many young peoples organisations

However these are mainly attitudinal barriers and may be overcome through training, lobbying and persistence.