





Review of HeadStart youth participation activity

Our aim was to review the participation work delivered by HeadStart partnerships. We sought to explore the diversity of participation opportunities facilitated within HeadStart, and to better understand the extent to which participation activities engaged children and young people. In total, we reviewed 76 participation activities from across the six HeadStart partnerships and were able to classify 53. This included contributions from all the programme.

A wide range of youth participation activities have taken place as part of HeadStart. We found that all of HeadStart partnerships were committed to prioritising youth participation within their programmes. An example of one partnership's vision statement highlights their commitment:

Our vision is that through committed collaboration with young people, their families, schools, and the community, Newham is recognised as a place that promotes, values and respects the dignity of all people and builds resilience in our vulnerable young people so they can be champions of their own emotional wellbeing.

and present the types of participation activities that took place across HeadStart, as it captures both the depth and breadth of participation work.

The review process took place in three stages:

Stage 1:

With the HeadStart partnerships, we collated the available information about participation activity within activity and work that took place, the participatory elements and the perceived outcomes for young people.

Stage 2:

We acknowledged that some activities could be placed in one or more sections, so as a result of this categorisation of activities.

Stage 3:

We created a heatmap of activity (Figure 1). The heatmap shows the range of activity types, as well as the frequency with which these types of participation activity were happening across HeadStart.

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I could tell we were listened to by the way workers responded to me when I had ideas, their responses were always positive, and we saw things get done.”

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- Young person, HeadStart participation group

	A: Individual complaint and feedback	B: Surveys ä ñ ç ò ñ è ÿ #	C: Practice Initiatives: time limited focused activity	D: Peer activity, training, research and evaluation	E: Young representatives on advisory boards and shadow groups	F: Young people involved in governance - with or without adults
8. Youth initiated - shared decisions with adults						
7. Youth initiated and directed						
6. Adult initiated and shared decisions with CYP						
5. Consulted and informed						
4. Assigned and informed						
3. Tokensim						
2. Decoration						
1. Manipulation						

Interpreting the heatmap: darker areas indicate activities with the highest frequency, with lighter shades indicating types of participation occurring less often. Blank spaces show no participation activity was (atioMCID 271 >>BDC BT 0 12 -12 0 57>lr625.22icaS.GN 0 150.4846 45.9727 T



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Over one hundred young people collaborated and were involved in the creation, design and development of
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 issues young people felt were important to them that they wanted to teach others about. A focus of the work was reducing stigma.

Summer programme planning

Young people were involved in the organising and co-

Training

A group of young people met to co-produce training for multiple organisations in their HeadStart area. They re-
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 delivery of this training. The training was delivered to
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 and local health providers.

Young people advisory groups

Young people co-developed and co-delivered projects that helped promote the formation of advisory groups within a HeadStart partnership. This aimed to gain insight into how to engage younger audiences in participation work and help build resilience among the community. Additionally, the young people shared views on the project as a whole and supported events delivered in schools (for example, assemblies and awareness events).

Online resilience tool

Around 1000 young people from primary and secondary schools co-designed and co-created a resilience tool around online safety. They did this through workshops and discussion groups over a period of three years. The tool teaches users how to identify both harmful and unharmed behaviour for young people online, in addition
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Youth networks

As part of a resilience-building initiative, a group of young people developed an accessible youth-led space for young people with an interest in politics. The young people used the space to network with one another and discuss issues they were passionate about.

HeadStart Steering Group

The HeadStart Steering Group had a diverse membership of young people, those who support young people and senior decision-makers within the local authority. Steering group members met quarterly

What did young people think?

Not only did each partnership embed participatory practices and activities within their own delivery of HeadStart, the HeadStart Learning Team also had a youth participation group whose aims were to as well as contributing to dissemination of programme young people on this group were also involved in local participation work within their HeadStart partnerships.

We asked the HeadStart National Young Person’s Participation Group (who were aged 10–21) about their experiences with participation in HeadStart. Their feedback was positive, with all young people in the group reporting that they felt empowered to make change. The group believed that workers across the projects they had been involved in actively listened to young people’s opinions and worked towards making changes based on their input.

“ Enjoyed being able to come up with ideas myself but liked a bit of both, young people leading, and, adults leading if I knew less about the subject. ”

- Young person, HeadStart participation group

“ It helped me; I would recommend others to these types of projects. ”

- Young person, HeadStart participation group

Limitations to this approach

Reviewing and categorising participation activities in a large, diverse programme such as HeadStart comes with challenges. We found that some participation activities fit into several categories of the matrix. For example, one activity might consist of several elements, meeting the description for several sections of the matrix. Furthermore, the nature of participation and co-production work is that it commonly evolves – for example, planned participation projects or activities often develop over time, responding to the engagement and needs of children and young people. As a result, some activities are more representative of a project compared to the end of a project.

Additionally, we recognise that the degree to which children and young people are involved in an activity, and the extent to which power is shared with them, is not constant. As a result,

Recommendations on implementing participation activity with children and young people

- Review the capacity for change: can the organisation adopt participation as its approach, and who needs to be included in development plans to make this happen?
- Consider the diversity of opportunities available to children and young people.
- Use examples from the HeadStart programmes in ÷ ë ì ö å õ ì è \$ ñ ê ÷ ò ö ë ò ú ü ò ø ñ ê ó è ò ó ï è ä ñ ç ó groups how they could be involved in decision making, collaboration and co-design of projects.

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We hope that sharing our processes, observations and recommendations will support you when evaluating

References

the participation gap? Tim's Blog <http://www.timdavies.org.uk/participation-gap/>

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