

Working for you



'Living Here'

22nd June 2006

Event organised in partnership with:

connexions

YORK & NORTH YORKSHIRE



connecting youth culture

1.0 Background information

- 1.1 Harrogate Borough Council (HBC) wanted to understand what the priorities were for young people living and growing up in the Harrogate District and it approached the countywide Voice, Influence and Participation group to assist it in this task.
- 1.2 In March 2006 HBC, in partnership with Connexions York and North Yorkshire and Connecting Youth Culture devised a project to find out the views of young people aged 11 – 18 living in the Harrogate District, so that HBC can provide appropriate services and opportunities which meet their needs.
- 1.3 The objectives of the project were:
- To increase the opportunities for young people in the Harrogate District.
 - To make Harrogate District a better place to live, work and visit.
 - To obtain information on young people's needs in the Harrogate District to support the implementation of the Children and Young People's Plan.
 - To extend and improve HBC's consultation and engagement of young people.
- 1.4 The intention was to engage with existing groups that represented a diverse range of young people. The groups would have the opportunity to work with artists to translate their messages into creative formats which would be presented at an event in June 2006.
- 1.5 Councillors and managers from HBC would be invited to the interactive event. They would have the opportunity to engage with young people and to consider not only the messages being conveyed but the future options for the Council with regards to young people's participation.

2.0 What is already known about young people's needs?

- 2.1 Following the production of the national children and young people's strategy '*Every Child Matters*' (DfES 2003 www.everychildmatters.gov.uk) North Yorkshire worked with partners to establish a Children and Young People's Plan (2006 Children & Young People's Service, North Yorkshire County Council). This plan sets out under the five key outcomes from 'Every Child Matters' how services should work better to improve the lives of children and young people. These headings are:
- Being Healthy
 - Staying Safe
 - Enjoying and Achieving
 - Making a Positive Contribution
 - Achieving Economic Well-being
- 2.2 Findings from consultations and direct work with children and young people on identifying issues of importance to them were used to inform the plan. The

plan highlights priorities including the following which also are of interest to the Borough Council

- Improve access to sports and fitness activities.
- Children and young people want places to play and hang out where they feel safe and free from threatening behaviour and intimidation.
- Ensuring children and young people are involved in decisions about matters and services that affect them.
- Further develop and improve 14-19 year old provision in local communities and schools working with key partners and other providers.

2.3 HBC produced its Community Plan in 2004 which features its intentions for improving the quality of life for all its communities. The plan contains a great deal of information on the population profile, environment and service provision within the Borough but there is little direct reference to the needs of young people. There is an acknowledgement that further research into the longer term engagement of young people is required. (*Your Plan- Your Future HBC 2004 Appendix A objective: opportunities for young people.*)

3.0 Engaging with young people.

- 3.1 There is ongoing involvement of young people across agencies, including HBC to determine their needs and to seek their ideas on improving services. What is often lacking is the coordination of this activity, sharing of good practice and providing feedback to young people on what the outcome of their involvement has been.
- 3.2 In developing the 'Living Here' event the intention was to utilise existing structures and mechanisms for engaging young people. Members from the VIP network were contacted and the young people who they worked with were invited to participate.
- 3.3 With participation activity it is often easy to target those that are most willing or easy to engage but the principle should be that it is inclusive. The range of groups that were involved in the event illustrate that, with the support of key workers it is possible to gain the commitment and involvement of a diverse range of young people. For details of contributors and their presentations refer to Appendix A.
- 3.4 To enable young people to effectively participate it is essential that they have an appropriate level of awareness to enable them to make informed judgements and comments. In preparing for the 'Living Here' event all the groups were provided with statements and questions to stimulate discussion (Appendix B) and given some suggested activities. Following the awareness raising session the young people worked with an artist to translate their ideas into a creative format. Using creative and performing arts is often an effective medium for gaining and retaining young people's interest, especially with those who find auditory and written learning difficult.

4.0 The 'Living Here' event

- 4.1 The event took place at the Pavilions, Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate on Thursday 22nd June 2006. The event was held in early evening to enable all young people, including those at school or in employment to attend.
- 4.2 A market place format was used to encourage interaction between the young people and the guests. The aim was to create a relaxed environment in which both the young people and the guests could ask questions, explore issues and enjoy the evening. Verbal feedback from both the guests and the young people suggests that this was achieved.
- 4.3 There were 12 groups involved in the event (See Appendix A) with 38 young people in attendance. These were representatives of their groups and approximately a further 40 young people were indirectly involved through their contribution to the production of the presentations or their involvement in consultation exercises.

5.0 Key messages.

- 5.1 Whilst the original objective for the event was to identify young people's needs the specific messages being provided were not dissimilar to those already included within the Children and Young People's Plan. These included issues relating to:
- Better and cheaper transport.
 - Places to go to socialise that are appropriate to the age and interests of young people who use them.
 - Staying safe, it is not just adults who feel intimidated by young people. Young people themselves can feel unsafe in their communities as a result of a small minority of their peers behaving inappropriately.
 - Access to affordable housing especially for young people who do not have a supporting home environment.
- 5.2 Young people in general enjoyed living and learning in Harrogate District. They recognised the benefits as well as the disadvantages of living in rural communities but also could empathise with their peers who were more disadvantaged than them.
- 5.3 There were two themes emerging from what the young people were saying, irrespective of their chosen topic area.
- 5.3.1 One related to the increasingly negative perception that they believed adults and communities had with regards to young people. This negativity was exaggerated by bad publicity and sensationalising of stories by the press.

- 5.3.2 The other indicated that young people wanted to see some action resulting from their involvement in consultation exercises and more recognition for the role they can play in decision making. They wanted to be valued and have their views seen as a credible contribution to the planning process.

6.0 Evaluation of the event.

- 6.1 38 young people and 34 guests attended the 'Living Here' event. A list of the delegates is included in Appendix E.
- 6.2 The event was not intended to be an end product but a stimulus for further action. It illustrated for HBC staff and members an alternative approach for engaging with their young people and allowed them time to reflect on how best to harness the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm of young people.
- 6.3 It is usual that those who attend events are usually those already interested and committed to the topic or issue that is being addressed. The evaluations from the guests support this supposition.
- 6.4 Instead of asking guests to complete an evaluation form at the end of the evening they were invited to consider various questions prior to viewing the displays, during the event and as they departed. Their responses are summarised below.

7.0 Evaluation responses

7.1 Question 1: Think about your views with regards to young people and the role they should have in decision making. What are these?

- 7.1.1 Total responses = 25.
- 7.1.2 There was unanimous support for involving young people in decision making with the following suggestions.
- 7.1.3 There were a number of responses that indicated that the Council did involve young people but possibly not as effectively as it might. Comments included the need to provide feedback, respect what young people say and act on what they tell us.
- 7.1.4 There was a general appreciation of the effort required to engage young people (or the public) effectively. Positive involvement will be reliant on good quality information, awareness raising and support.
- 7.1.5 Resources were mentioned but not necessarily in relation to the resources required to undertake participation work but in terms of the resources available to action things, it is therefore important to make young people aware of the constraints on decision-making.

- 7.1.6 Several people felt that through effective participation young people could be helped to take an interest in their community and that their role within that community should be valued.
- 7.1.7 HBC should seek appropriate ways to get young people involved with emphasis on flexibility, fun and making it relevant. It should identify where it could appropriately devolve some decision-making to young people and their communities.
- 7.1.8 Recognise that it is hard for adults to remain in touch with youth culture, even when they think they do. Need different approach to raise young people's involvement, possibly through other young people.
- 7.1.9 Most respondents strongly advocated the involvement of all sectors of the population and wanted there to be opportunities for all young people, including those with disabilities or those who are hard to reach to be involved.
- 7.2 Question 2: "Young people bring the bad press that they receive upon themselves because they show no respect for each other, adults, their community or the law"**
- 7.2.1 This question reflected the feedback received from many young people during participation exercises that suggests that there is a lot of negative press surrounding them. This bad press serves to reinforce the public's negative image of youth.
- 7.2.2 Total responses = 20 13 disagreed and 7 partly agreed with the statement.
- 7.2.3 The responses were all 'pro' young people and acknowledged that the media and press often choose to focus on the negative aspects of a situation in order to sensationalise stories.
- 7.2.4 There was general agreement that there is miscommunication and misconception surrounding young people with the majority being caring, sensible and responsible.
- 7.2.5 There appears to be less tolerance in the community towards young people socialising in public. Any noisy or exuberant behaviour is labelled as anti-social or threatening.
- 7.2.6 There is a need to counter the bad press and identify the good news stories.
- 7.3 Question 3: In relation to the levels of participation what level do you think Harrogate Borough Council tends to operate at?**
- 7.3.1 Total responses = 17
- 7.3.2 The responses against each of the eight levels of participation were as follows:

- Unable to assess level due to lack of information x2
- 8) Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults x2
- 7) Child-initiated and directed x0
- 6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children x0
- 5) Consulted and informed x1
- 4) Assigned and but informed x4
- 3) Tokenism x7
- 2) Decoration x1
- 1) Manipulation x0

7.4 Question 4: Do you think Harrogate Borough Council should establish a young people's participation strategy which sets out how young people will be involved in the design, development, monitoring and evaluation of services?

7.4.1 Total responses = 19

7.4.2 There was unanimous support for the development of a young people's strategy with the following suggestions.

7.4.3 Several respondents favoured the establishment of a young people's forum or youth council, with the expectation that this would have representation from a range of young people and would not be elitist.

7.4.4 The involvement of young people from the outset in contributing to the strategy and deciding on the best model for involvement was seen as important.

7.4.5 Due to the support required to establish the strategy and to implement it there was recognition that there would need to be ownership of the strategy from all levels in the Council and a dedicated lead.

7.4.6 It was acknowledged that there is existing good work across the Council and with partner organisations that needs to be built upon.

7.5 Question 5: Think (again) about your views with regards to young people and their role in decision making. Has it changed since the start of the event?

7.5.1 Total responses = 16. 6 people felt their views had changed and 10 did not.

7.5.2 It was unlikely that there would have been significant shift as there was already unanimous support for the involvement of young people in decision making indicated in the responses to the first question. It is also more likely that people sympathetic to the involvement of young people would have accepted the invitation to attend the event.

- 7.5.3 Of those who had changed their views the main reason was because they had altered their understanding about how to engage young people, not whether you should engage them.
- 7.5.4 The use of different approaches including the use of music and arts to get messages across was cited as one of the learning points.
- 7.5.5 A couple of respondents felt that they were more positive about young people's involvement now they had seen how capable they were of expressing their views.

8.0 Conclusions.

- 8.1 Young people generally enjoy living and learning in Harrogate district.
- 8.2 Their priorities and needs are accurately captured in the Children and Young People's plan.
- 8.3 Young people believe that there is an increasing negative perception by adults and communities with regards to young people. This was supported by guest who believed that there is miscommunication and misconception surrounding young people.
- 8.4 Young people wanted to see some action resulting from their involvement and they wanted to be valued and have their views seen as a credible contribution to the planning and decision making processes.
- 8.5 There was unanimous support for involving young people in decision making.
- 8.6 HBC does involve young people but possibly not as effectively as it might. It should seek different ways to get young people involved and it should identify where it could appropriately devolve some decision-making to young people.
- 8.7 There was unanimous support for the development of a young people's strategy with involvement of young people from the outset as important.
- 8.8 There would need to be ownership of the strategy from all levels in the Council, resources allocated to participation activity and a dedicated lead.
- 8.9 Existing good work across the Council and with partner organisations needs to be built upon.

9.0 Recommendations.

- 9.1 Harrogate Borough Council, in partnership with young people should establish a youth strategy that sets out the mechanisms and commitment for delivering participation activity. This should include a sustainable means of gaining young

- people's involvement in the development, delivery and evaluation of the strategy, for example through a Youth Council (or similar).
- 9.2 The Council's should define its local targets for delivering on the Children and Young People's Plan priorities and agree how young people will be involved in monitoring and evaluating progress against outcomes.
- 9.3 It may be valuable to have an identified lead (Councillor and/or senior manager) for youth. These people need to be committed to the principle of participation work and have the status to ensure the implementation of the youth strategy.
- 9.4 The Council should be active in countering the negative perceptions of its young people. It should use its influence to raise the profile of positive images of youth.
- 9.5 The Council, as a large employer, a service provider and advocate for community development should support young people through a varied provision of personal, social and learning opportunities. This may include:
- establishing a trainee scheme for local young people with a commitment to supporting vulnerable or disaffected young people
 - providing resources to encourage young people to enhance or make changes to their communities
 - educating young people in innovative ways about democracy
- 9.6 Awareness raising and training should be made available to Council staff to enable them to more effectively develop participation work within their department. Consultation activity and participation work should take place within the context of the Council's youth strategy and should be coordinated and shared across departments.

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Living Here ~ Contributors

Appendix A

'H' Boys

A group of young people who have been working on a music project specifically targeted at young carers and young people who are in care. The 'H' Boys used the event to create a rap to respond to some key questions about what it's like to live in Harrogate area. They also did a rap about the key outcomes as identified in 'Every Child Matters'.

The words from both raps are contained in Appendix C.



YPGs

A group of young people who are in care and care leavers brought a display and a DVD that they had produced to illustrate some of the issues that face them. One of their key concerns is the availability of affordable housing when they leave care.

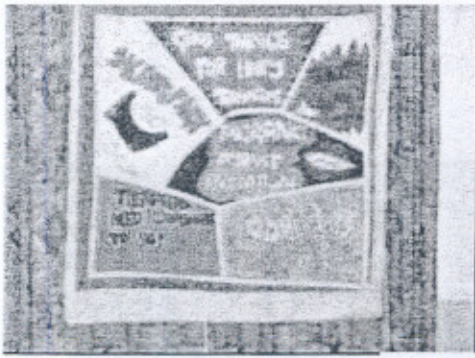
Henshaws College

Students from Henshaws College had produced a DVD using music, sounds and words to promote the messages from Every Child Matters, in particular those related to enjoying and achieving.



TRAX

The young people from TRAX articulated the range of issues of importance to them through a large display of pictures and text. They highlighted the value of having places to go and accessibility of services for young people.



YOT

The young people from the YOT had created masks, a sculpture and banner with the theme of respect and on not labelling young people without giving them an opportunity to prove themselves.

Bilton Youth Club

The young people from Bilton Youth Club produced cartoon posters with their messages about what it is like to be a young person in their community. The main message related to stopping older people having negative perceptions of young people.



Boroughbridge High School

Students from their Year 9 & 10 student council presented their messages about living and learning in their community through a series of images and posters. Transport costs and accessibility, places to go for education and socialising and awareness about issues related to problems caused by and encountered by young people were all highlighted. A full set of the posters are included in Appendix D



Young People's Development Workers

The YPDWs work across North Yorkshire to improve the involvement of other young people in the design, development and evaluation of services. Their theme was participation and they used the 'participation ladder' to create an interactive stall.

