



Research and resources about participation

Section 1: Understanding participation – what the
research says

Section 2: Models of participation

Section 3: Useful websites, books, articles and resources
on participation



Section 1:

UNDERSTAND PARTICIPATION – WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

A comprehensive literature review on participation of children and young people was carried out as part of the Participation Project. A variety of resources were explored and over a hundred articles and publications were reviewed.

The references:

- were published in the last five years (1998-2002).
- came from a range of countries around the world including Australia.
- were only in the English language.
- were from Internet and database searches using the following key words: children and young people, participation, involvement, case planning and decision making, out-of-home care, looked after children and young people.
- mainly talked about children and young people aged 12-17 years, although some did refer to children aged 8-12 years.
- rarely referred to children under 8 years.
- that are most useful are provided at the end of this module.

What the literature review found

The benefits of participation:

- Participation gives children and young people a say about what is important to them.
- Participation allows a child or young person to 'own' decisions that are made about their lives.
- Participation increases the self confidence and skills of children and young people.
- Participation empowers children and young people.
- Participation can help protect children and young people. The failure to listen to children and young people is a recurring theme in many inquiries into abuse.
- Participation of children and young people gives adults the opportunity to show respect for the views of children and young people.
- Participation of children and young people can be a catalyst for the wider participation of all parties involved.
- Participation of children and young people leads to more accurate and relevant decisions for the child or young person and, therefore, improves the quality of decision making for the organisation. Organisations can become more efficient and effective in meeting the needs of children and young people if they listen to kids.

Participation — what happens if it doesn't happen?

Children and young people can feel left out, that they have no control over what happens to them and resentful that their views are not sought or seriously considered. It is difficult to take ownership of decisions if you have no part in making the decision. This makes it very hard to 'live' with the decision.

Barriers and challenges to participation:

Dealing with 'If it's not broken...' attitudes.

The main factor that works against children and young people having their say in meetings is usually the attitudes of adults. They may say things like:

- "We've had meetings for years and not involved kids and have been able to make good decisions for them-why change things now?"
- "It's easier if I do it myself"; or
- "They (the child or young person) don't really want to be involved".

Most research in the area of participation points out that we live in a society where adults do not generally listen seriously to what children and young people say, do not consult them about their views and do not encourage them to take part in decision-making.

Children also say quite clearly that adults don't listen to them. This is a key area of concern for any organisations working with kids. Participation has to be part of the organisation's culture.

Barriers to access in decision making forums

Barriers can include holding meetings in places where children and young people feel uncomfortable, at times when children cannot attend, not providing appropriate refreshments at meetings and not giving children and young people expenses to attend meetings. All these things affect children and young people's ability to participate.

Lack of preparation and information

There is often a lack of pre-meeting preparation to discuss with the child or young person what will be discussed at the meeting and to prepare them for their participation.

Written materials may include language that is difficult for a child or young person to understand. Workers often address correspondence to parents or carers rather than directly to the child or young person.

There is often a lack of post-meetings to discuss what happened at the meeting and how the child or young person felt about it.

Participation: how can organisations make it happen

In order to facilitate participation the following is required:

- recognise that childhood is both related to, and separate from, the adult world.
- treat children with respect.
- acknowledge the power difference between children and adults.
- recognise that what children and young people have to say may not be the same as what adults want to hear.
- acknowledge and encourage the involvement of children and young people.
- involve children and young people in formulating questions.
- engage marginalised children and young people.
- consult children and young people to get their ideas.

Give the right support by:

- providing training for adults, children and young people.
- offering a supportive adult environment where staff and carers are competent at creating a participative approach.

- making space so that children and young people can say what they mean.

Do the right thing by:

- providing information to children and young people about how they will be involved in decision-making forums.
- having clear objectives and parameters for decision-making.
- preparing children and young people for what will happen in meetings, who will be there and what will be discussed.
- taking into account the needs of the child or young person, such as when they can get to meetings, how they will get there and whether they need special support to help them participate.
- rethinking how meetings are run and whether they can be made shorter, smaller and more informal.
- encouraging children and young people to have a support person with them in a meeting, such as a friend, relative or worker that they trust.

Always follow up by:

- giving feedback about what is going to happen after the meeting.
- listening to what the child or young person thought about the meeting.
- taking seriously the feedback they give about how things could be made better for them.
- making sure they can contact you later on to discuss any other issues that are important to them.

Participation should be by choice, fun, challenging and enjoyable! True participation rewards both the kids and the organisation working with them!

Participation across the ages

Research shows that the older the child or young person, the more likely they are to be involved in decision-making. In Thomas and O’Kane’s (2000) study in the United Kingdom, older kids in care were invited to case planning meetings more frequently than younger ones.

Unfortunately, however, many older children and young people in care are still not included in decision-making forums concerning them. Therefore, when their views are sought it may be difficult for them to feel comfortable and confident in having their say, as this has either not happened in the past or has occurred infrequently.

The literature shows that younger children and children with disabilities are rarely encouraged to participate. The relationship a worker has with a child or young person is one of the key elements that facilitate participation. It takes more time to build a relationship with younger children, especially those who have little or no verbal language. This is also true when working with children or young people who have disabilities that affect their communication. Therefore greater efforts need to be made by organisations and workers to ensure they can participate on more than a token level.

Participation in case planning for children and young people in out-of-home care

There are often a large number of adults involved in making decisions about children and young people in out-of-home care compared with children and young people who live with their parent/s. In fact, many of these adults may have never met the child. Further, some studies report that large numbers of children and young people did not even really know why they were placed in care.

There is limited information about how to practically involve children and young people in out-of-home care in case planning. Positive attitudes and resources are necessary for the participation of children and young people.

Children and young people also need to be involved in broader issues, such as helping to evaluate services and develop policy and procedures.

The final say

The review of the literature showed:

- there is a clear case for participation, how it can happen and what stops it from happening.
- there is a need to develop practical tools to assist children and young people to participate in decision-making, particularly for those in out-of-home care.
- there is a need to focus encouraging participation for much younger children and children and young people with disabilities.

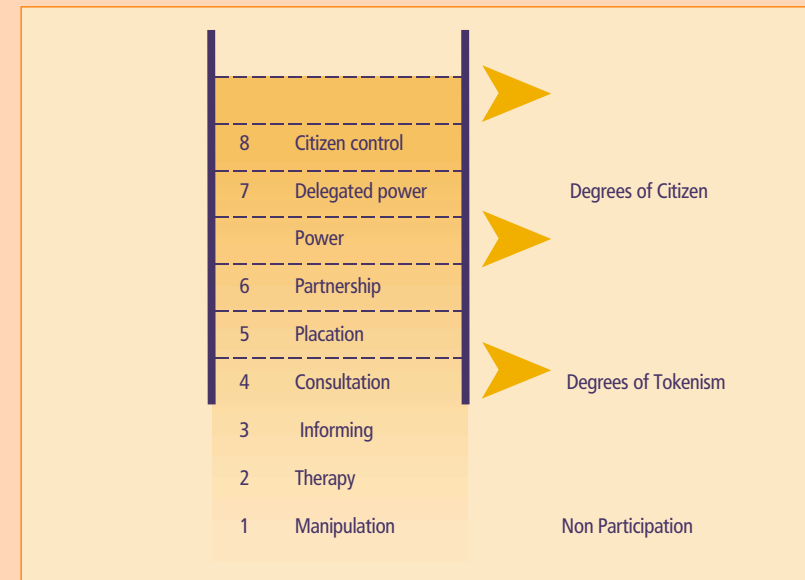
Section 2:

MODELS OF PARTICIPATION

A number of participation models were identified in the literature review carried out during the participation project. These models show how effective participation can happen.

Arnstein:

The earliest model of participation appears to be Sherry Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969). She described the level of real citizen involvement in the public planning process in the USA. Her model relates to adults' participation. At that time, citizen involvement became a practical demonstration of developing communities using principles of democracy and rights.



Society's changing view of children has led many writers to adapt Arnstein's model to one where children and young people can be supported to participate in decision-making.

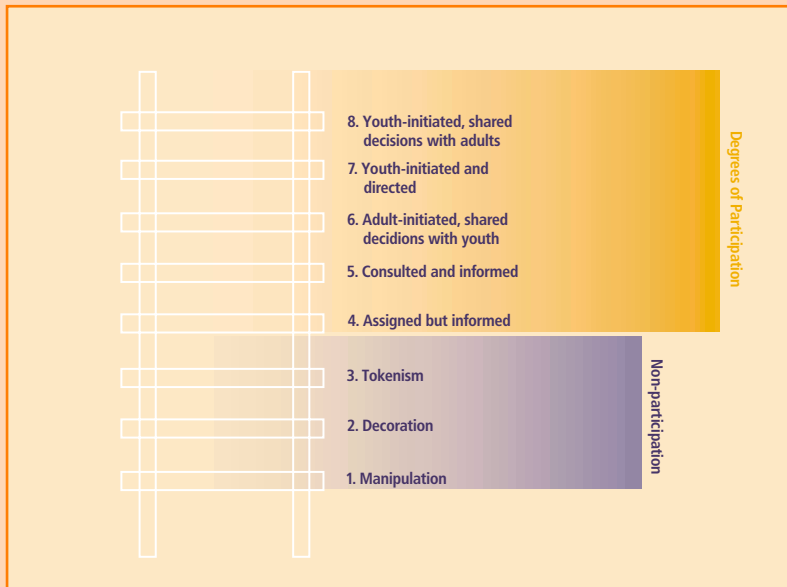
Hart:

Roger Hart was the first to adapt Arnstein's model to work with children and young people. Hart uses a ladder consisting of eight rungs as a framework for his model of participation.

Rungs 1-3 represent non-participation by children and young people and the remaining rungs represent degrees of participation.

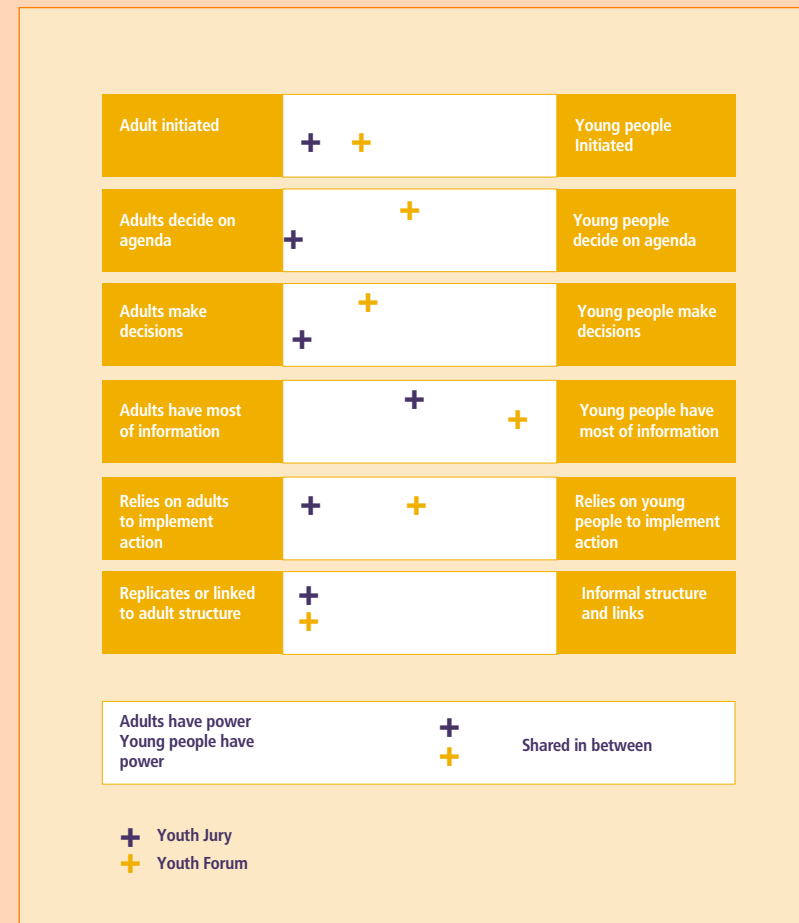
The usefulness of this model is limited as it assumes participation at the lower levels is less valuable than those described on the higher rungs. However, non-participation can be a form of participation as long as the child or young person has had the opportunity of making the choice about whether they wish to participate or not.

Adapted from: Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation, Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship, UNICEF



Lardner:

Clare Lardner's model uses a grid, rather than a ladder, to represent how participation occurs. According to Lardner, the ladder model assumes that it is better to aim for the highest level of participation possible. However, she argues that different levels of participation may be more appropriate to different situations. She makes the link between the concepts of empowerment and participation and developed a grid model that better represented these complexities.



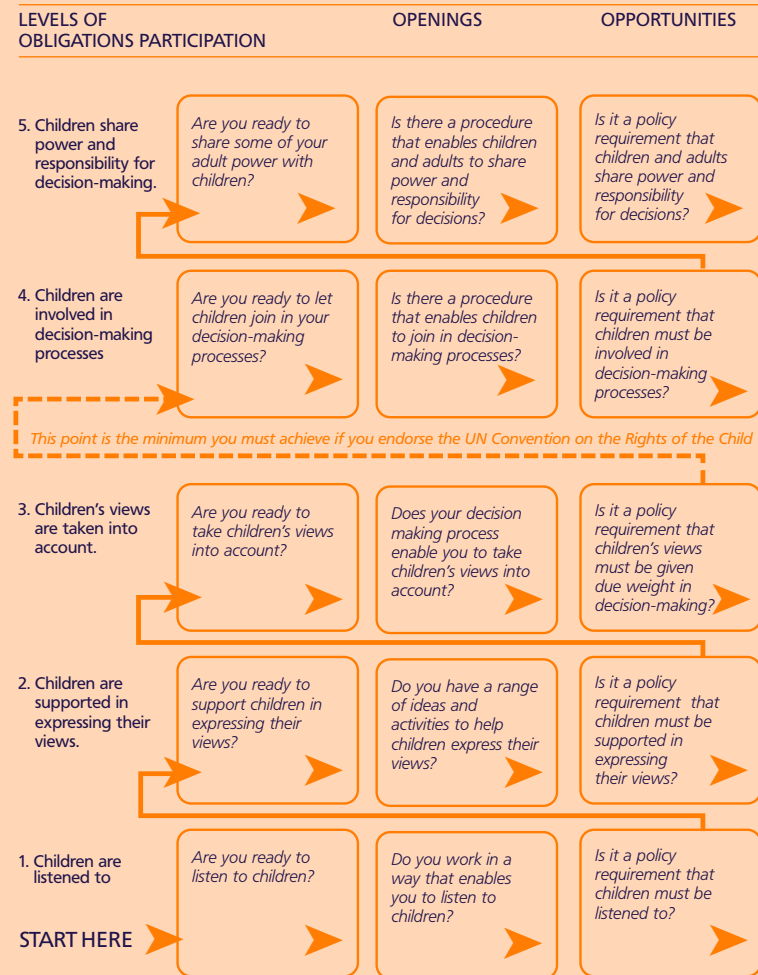
Treseder:

Phil Treseder’s model is similar to Hart’s and Lardner’s in that it uses the concepts of child and adult initiated participation. Treseder says that children need to be empowered to be able to participate and that organisations have to assist them in this.



Shier:

Shier’s model is based on five levels of participation, along with three stages of commitment at each level of participation called ‘Openings’, ‘Opportunities’ and ‘Obligations’.



An opening occurs as soon as a worker is ready to operate at that level and they make a personal commitment to work in a certain way. It is only an opening, because at this stage, the opportunity may not be available.

Opportunity occurs when the needs are met that will enable the worker or organisation to operate at this level in practice, such as having the appropriate resources, skills and knowledge.

Obligation is established when it becomes the agreed policy of the organisation that staff should operate at this level.

This model may be useful in looking at the participation of children and young people, particularly in case planning, as some of the concepts are relevant to the NSW context. For example, Section 10 of the *Children and Young Person's (Care and Protection) Act 1998* obligates workers and carers to ensure the participation of children and young people in decisions that have a significant impact on their lives.

Making participation a reality: what's needed?

From looking at the variety of participation models, it is quite clear that there are three key elements that must exist before effective participation can happen.

- Knowledge
- Opportunity
- Support

Knowledge: A child or young person needs to be given information about what is happening to them in language they understand and a format that is appropriate for them. For example, in case planning it is essential that a child or young person has basic information about what a case plan is, what happens in a case plan meeting and how they can participate. For a child undergoing treatment for a medical condition, they may need information in plain language to explain their condition and their treatment.

Organisations often rely on their workers to provide this information but don't put anything in place to ensure that the information is available in a simple format that can be given to the children and young people they work with.

Opportunity: As well as having information, a child or young person needs the opportunity to participate. Organisations need to ensure that they have ways to involve children and young people so they can have their say in decisions that affect their lives.

For example, in case planning, one major organisation has a form which records the views of the child and young person in relation to their individual case plan. This form is then kept on their file.

There are many ways an organisation can guarantee that opportunities exist for the participation of children and young people. As mentioned before, for participation to be effective, it needs to be part of the organisation's culture, reflecting the importance the organisation places on children and young people and on giving them a say in the decisions that affect their lives.

Support: Children and young people find it easier to participate with the support of someone who they know and trust. This can apply to all children and young people, but it is particularly true for children and young people in care as they often feel powerless about what is happening to them.

Some children and young people are not used to speaking up for themselves. They need help to do so, especially if adults often don't want to listen to them. "We live in a society and culture in which children and young people are generally not listened to, consulted or involved in decision-making. Children say very clearly that adults don't listen to children. They ignore them, leave them out, interrupt, redefine or over-ride what they say." (Thomas and O'Kane 1998)

Support can be provided by a range of different people: parents, carers, teachers, workers, friends, relatives. It should be up to the child or young person to decide who they trust enough to be a support person to them.

Section 3:

Useful websites, books, articles and resources on participation

Books and articles

Calvert, Gillian, 2000, *Participation*, speech at World Forum 2000, Sydney.

Cashmore, J., 2002, *Promoting the Participation of Children and Young People in Care*, Child Abuse and Neglect Vol. 26 Issue 8 August 2002 pp 837-847.

Cashmore, J. and O'Brien, A., 2001, *Facilitating Participation of Children and Young People in Care*, in Children Australia Vol 26, No.4 2001 pp. 10-15.

Child Protection Council NSW, 'Having a Say'. A Report on the 'Giving Voice to Children' Project, about children and young people participating in processes and decisions which relate to their care and well-being, NSW Child Protection Council.

Chisholm, R., 2000, *Children's Participation in Family Court Litigation*, International Society of Family Law, 10th World Conference, Brisbane, Australia, 9-13 July 2000.

Commission for Children and Young People NSW, 2001, *Taking PARTicipation Seriously*, NSW Commission for Children and Young People.

Community Services Commission, 2001, *Loud and Clear; Voices of Children and Young People in Foster Care*, Issue 3, Feb 2001.

CREATE Foundation, 2000, *Consultation & Participation Models for Children and Young People in Care*, www.create.org.au.

Cutler, D. and Frost, R., 2001, *Taking the Initiative: Promoting Young People's Involvement in Public Decision Making in the UK*, The Carnegie, United Kingdom.

Dalrymple, J., 2001, *Safeguarding Young People Through Confidential Advocacy Services*, Child and Family Social Work 2001, No. 6, pp 149-160.

Department of Health, 2002, *Listening, Hearing and Responding Department of Health Action Plan: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People*, Department of Health, England.

Family Court of Australia, 2002, *What to Consider in Children's Matters*, www.familycourt.gov.au/guide/html/considerchild.html.

Henderson, P., 2000, *Children's Participation: Time for Change*, Childrenz Issues Vol.4, No.2, 2000.

Kaplun, M., 1995, *Promoting Youth Participation: a rights perspective*, National Children's and Youth Law Centre, UNSW.

Kiraly, M., 2001, *Give Everyone a Say: The Involvement of Young People in Selecting Program Staff*, Children Australia 2001 Vol. 26, No. 1 p.20-26.

Parkinson, P., 2001, *Child Participation Principle in Child Protection Law in NSW*, World Congress on Family Law and Children's Rights, Bath, UK.

Mason, J. and Falloon, J., 1999, *A Children's Perspective on Child Abuse*, Children Australia Vol 24, No. 3.

National Resource Centre for Consumer Participation in Health, 2000, *Feedback Participation and Consumer Diversity: A Literature Review*, Consumer Focus Collaboration Publication.

O'Brien, A., 1997, *Consumer Participation for Young People in Care*, Australian Institute of Family Studies Family Matters No. 46 Autumn 1997 p. 56-58.

Parkinson, P., 2001, *Child Participation Principle in Child Protection Law in NSW*, World Congress on Family Law and Children's Rights, Bath, UK.

Press, F., 2000, *Children's Rights in Policy and Practice*, Macquarie University, Sydney.

Rajani, R.R., 2000, *Real Adolescent Participation Checklist*, www.unicef.org/teachers/protection/adol_list.htm.

Sinclair, R., and Franklin, A., 2000, *Young People's Participation*, Quality Protects Research Briefings, Department of Health, UK.

Spall, P., Testro, P. and Matchett, R., *'Giving a voice to children' A Report to Children and Young People*, New South Wales Child Protection Council.

Thomas, C. and Beckford, V., with Lowe, N. and Murch, M., 1999, *Adopted Children Speaking*, British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, London.

Willow, C., 2002, *Participation in Practice Children and young people as partners in change*, The Children's Society, London.

Youth on Board, *Sure Shot Intro Session: an introduction to youth in decision making. 14 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision Making*. A General Overview, Somerville, Massachusetts.

Models of participation

Arnstein, Sherry, 1969, *A Ladder of Participation*, Journal of American Institute of Planners 35, 1969, pp. 216-224.

Hart, Roger, 1997, *The Theory and Practice of involving young citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care*, Earthscan.

Lardner, Clare, 2001, *Youth Participation – A new model*, www.lardner.demon.co.uk.

Shier, H., 2001, *Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations*, Children and Society Volume 15 (2001) pp107-111.

Treseder, P., 1997, *Empowering Children and Young People*, Training Manual, Save the Children Fund, London.

Websites

Carnegie Young People Initiative (UK): www.carnegie-youth.org.uk

Child-friendly Initiative (UK): www.childfriendly.org

Commission for Children and Young People (NSW): www.kids.nsw.gov.au

CREATE Foundation (Australia): www.create.org.au

National Resource Centre for Consumer Participation in Health (Australia): www.participateinhealth.org.au

Quality Protects-Department of Health (UK): www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects/

Save the Children Fund (UK): www.scfuk.org.uk

The Children's Society (UK): www.childrenssociety.org

Resources and toolkits

Thomas, N., Phillipson, J., O'Kane, C. and Davies, E., *Children and Decision Making: Toolbox and Training Pack*, International Centre for Childhood Studies, University of Wales, Swansea, United Kingdom.

Kirkbride, L., *I'll go first, The planning and review Toolkit for use with children with disabilities*, The Children's Society, United Kingdom.

Children's Rights Officers and Advocates (CROA) and Department of Health, 2000, *Total Respect ensuring childrens rights and participation in care*, Training manual and Course handbook, London, United Kingdom.