

HIGHLIGHT REPORT

From:	SEND Scrum & Director A Better Start Southend
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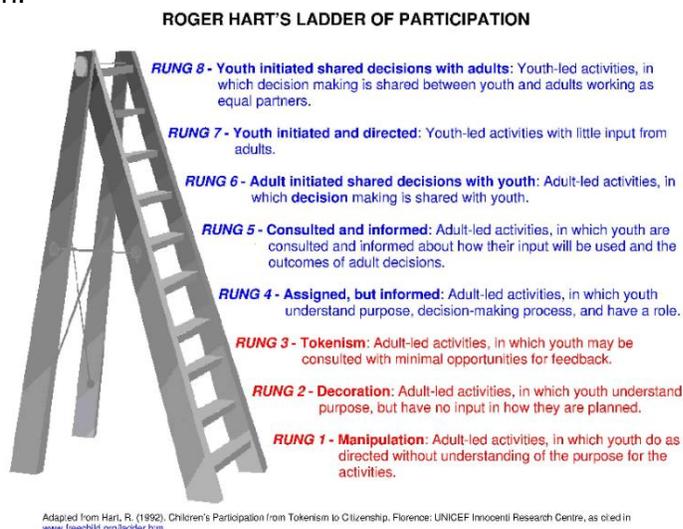
1. Background

The Partnership Board meeting of 28 May 2021 requested the SEND Scrum with the support of Jeff Banks sought to reinvigorate the work and direction of the Voice of the Child task & finish group by considering the progress thus far, consider the innovative ways of engaging with children & young people and drafting a proposal as to how this work is taken forward.

2 x Voice of the Child meetings have taken place (17th March and 29th June 2021) both of which were well attended and has included colleagues across the SEND Team, Educational Psychology Service, Access & Inclusion, Assessment & Intervention, Virtual School, School Nursing, Connexions, Early Help, SENDIASS, SENCo Advisory Team, USP & South Essex Colleges, Multi Schools Council, Clinical Commissioning Group, Southend SEND Independent Forum, Family Action and A Better Start Southend. From both meetings we acknowledge there are gaps and detail is lacking from partners in health and social care and the voluntary/community sector. Additional representatives will be sought for future meetings.

As a starting point the meetings considered ‘What do we mean by Voice of the Child?’

Collectively we agree that is not just about hearing a child or young person’s voice. It is an umbrella term for ensuring we develop engagement in all senses, as illustrated in Hart’s ladder of participation:



Our focus is on ensuring that children and young people’s input is used and the outcomes we achieve comes from shared decision-making but also includes a robust ongoing process of co-

production; continually involving children and young people to review, evaluate, commission and de-commission services.

There are pockets of good practice, and we need that to widen. We want SEND children & young people to share their experiences, stories and what works/ does not work for them and be confident that it is 'heard' by the right people and makes a difference. A broad and holistic focus is key, we often slip back into thinking SEND is all about education and EHCPs, it is of course much broader so we need to emphasise and capture that.

We agree we want to be an exemplar Local Authority, in terms of Voice and Engagement in SEND; embedding children and young people's feedback into systems, processes and design work, in as many (ideally all) areas that we possibly can. We want to empower our young people to believe that their voice informs services on an ongoing basis and not just at the design phase of something new. Ideally we want to develop a Southend model of participation.

2. Progress to date

Participants of both meetings were asked to undertake a mapping exercise; detailing the methods or activity that leads to the gathering of a young person's voice and how that information it is used/who listens to it. Information gathered illustrates that individual teams and practitioners routinely seek the views of children and young people; it is embedded well and some processes are not completed until pupil views are collected and this sets the benchmark for ensuring that views are always sought.

Whilst we are good at gathering individual views we lack the next crucial step. We don't always have sound processes that ensure the views of young people are acted on, that views and feedback is coordinated or that we can demonstrate it has informed services or provision. We agree that we must take the time for reflective practice and see the impact feedback is making and importantly that feedback is returned to young people so that they can see the difference and impact too.

The meeting agreed that this work deserves its own platform; rather than a task and finish group or as a sub group. The aspiration is that the partnership board will hear directly from young people.

To date the Local Offer Team has been gathering stories from children and young people in an ad hoc way – off the cuff comments have led to the gathering of 3 'voice' stories and a 4th is on its way however these have relied on the right person hearing the story – and taking it forward. These have started to be shared with SENDOPS and the Partnership Board and they do set the scene and remind members of the user experience, but they are not coordinated, nor do they focus on specific areas where needed.

The working document 'Listening to Children and Young People' was drafted on the back of the first meeting which aimed to move the Southend SEND partnership forward in bringing together the voices, views and experiences of children and young people with SEND across Southend. It remains a crucial document to build on and will lead to better coordination of what we do.

Currently there is a lack resources and there is no identified lead to take this work forward. Therefore, we risk progress being made in this important area and in developing a final strategic approach.

3. Innovative ways of engaging with children & young people

Below are some examples detailing what we know is happening:

Lucy Bissell / Educational Psychology Service (EPS) have run successful surveys and consultations with a great number of young people engagements – linking with schools and settings has been a key driver in participation.

EPS have started to experiment with using short videos to share feedback to children and young people as an update to their engagement (using Powtoon - The Visual Communication Platform)

Your Say Southend has lots of interactive and visual tools. The Local Offer team and the Elected Home Education Team are both using this as an engagement tool.

Schools use a range of person-centred approaches / resources / different and creative ways of engaging SEND CYP, including those with limited speech/non-verbal i.e. visuals, ICT / PowerPoints, interpreters to really allow views to be shared.

Some schools are supporting pupils to use PowerPoint presentations to share their views for annual reviews.

The EHC hub is much more creative in the way young people can share their views as part of an assessment or annual review; videos and photos are being used really well; which feels more person centred.

USP College described the best information they got once was by having a creative mood board session between peers and adults. Then the questions were not scaffolded but the information was allowed to flow, generating a really good conversation.

Really good engagement work is happening in established groups; Southend Youth Council, Southend YMCA, the SEND schools council and the Multi Schools Council – seek to widen opportunities for SEND young people to participate in these groups and develop mechanisms for this to happen

The Consultation and Engagement Officer has a number of ways that has helped drive engagement:

- Building engagement through schools (either done in form groups, assemblies or via the student council) by building relationships with named contacts in schools.
- linking their voice and input to the Citizenship curriculum and politics etc.
- Schools and settings need to understand the value of what we are asking young people
 - identify the value for schools to get involved - demonstrate what is a concern for their pupils and provide a report for their own school/youth group to take forward.
 - coordinate, prepare and plan for upcoming surveys/engagements so that schools are familiar with what is being asked.

4. Proposals on taking it forward

Post inspection we have talked about tapping into the existing work that is already going on around voice across other parts of the council and wider partnership and how we could potentially make this inclusive for all children and young person engagement and not just be SEND specific. There will always be a need for dedicated questions on SEND but if we are

creative we can expand the field and get greater participation – with that will hopefully come a network of expertise we can tap into across the partnership.

As the Voice of the Child work grows we need to continue to push boundaries and explore all options around engagement and participation. We agree that creativity is key and that we cannot and should not rely on traditional questions and answers which may feel tokenistic. Children and young people need to recognise the value with any engagement – what makes is meaningful to them is the outcome – what is in it for them? What difference will they see?

From the outset the Voice of the Child group should coordinate and drive improvements in the collecting and acting on young people' voices but also then in terms of quality engagement and participation. Our commitment will be that listening to the 'voice' will play a role in developing local area provision and our young people will see their footprint in the services and support they receive.

To do so we need to sufficient time, resources and commitment from partners to:

Consolidate work - map what is collected and shared

- gather intelligence on what we are already doing as a partnership in gathering Voice
- what is captured every day / regular practice (own school surveys, AR's, other reports)
- identify and agree examples of good practice as well as different & exceptional ways
- how do we capture it all?
- identify what is innovative in Southend in the ways we engage with C&YP

Coordinate & make best use of what we are told

- Identify how we use what we are already collecting.
- How do we bring it together and how we use it collectively?
- Develop a central place for co-ordination of stories, feedback and experiences.
- Map out the focus on specific areas (for example at boards or when we need intelligence).

Drive improvements (the vision)

- evidence how we truly involve children in surveys and services perhaps by using a system of sharing a 'Listening and Learning Hub' across services
- develop opportunities and activities to get to know and to connect with the young person (for example a joint Local Offer team and SAVS group beach clean)
- embed opportunities for young people with SEND to become peer advocates or paid work experience so that we build confidence with young people in the community to get involved more in the SEND agenda in the borough.
- Develop and support peer champions to be involved in this work and develop their skills in contributing to other forums.
- ensuring children & young people know how their feedback is used and understand how they make a difference / have led or influenced change.
- use feedback to endorse what we do well as an area – shape new delivery/the offer

Leading the work

This work will require committed and consistent leadership and someone that can take it forward from within Southend Borough Council, to coordinate activities and resources spanning the different networks.

This work could be taken forward as a standing group or project team, undertaking a test and learn approach; ideas that are tried and evaluated as the group develops and embeds. The work should be fully scoped and planned, as SEND Project Officer Carron Jacobs could take this on.

It will need the right people and members that have the skills or roles needed to help inform and drive our vision forward outside of our traditional SEND bubble of expertise/lens. Representatives from teams and groups will need to commit and understand what they are taking on. It's crucial we have a representative from the communications team to support this work and an equal spread of representatives across education, social care and health, but equally those underrepresented groups in youth offending, care system and those educated at home.

Local authority officers / teams are not always getting into schools, settings or places where young people meet due to the COVID19 restrictions – this infrequent contact with children and young people will limit their true voice being heard and therefore community organisations and voluntary groups are a very important aspect of this work. A co-lead from the community should therefore be appointed to support this work to ensure it is kept on track.

5. Recommendations / Discussion / Decisions required from Partnership Board

- Recommend the Voice of the Child becomes a standing group (project?) so that it has the gravitas to continue to push the agenda on how we engage children & young people.
- Direction on membership who outside of traditional SEND bubble of expertise can we enlist (fresh voices / creative services / communications colleagues)
- Recognition given that as the work develops the board may need to consider additional resources.
- Consideration of a project lead for Voice of the Child and an identified community lead to support this work.