

How To

Involve 'hard to reach' children and young people

This How To guide aims to provide an understanding of why some children and young people might not make use of the services, organisations and activities that are on offer to them. It also offers practical ideas for enabling those individuals to get involved.

What do we mean by 'hard to reach'?

'Hard to reach' children and young people are those who are not engaged with, or are disengaged from, the usual range of education or other services and



participatory activities that are designed for them. Because of their circumstances and the circumstances around them, they don't realise that there are services that would make their lives better or they choose to ignore these services. 'Hard to reach' can also mean the 'underserved', in other words, those for whom there are no services available or for whom the current services present a significant barrier to access.

Hard to reach

The use of the term 'hard to reach' presents problems, partly because it is used inconsistently. Sometimes it is used to refer to minorities such as minority ethnic or lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) groups. Sometimes it is used to refer to 'hidden populations', that is to say groups of people who do not wish to be contacted such as illegal drug users or gang members. At other times it is used to describe broader groups within the population, such as old people, young people or people with disabilities.

The term 'hard to reach' also implies a similarity within distinct groups, which does not necessarily exist. As a result, it defines the problem as one within the group itself, not with the approach to working with the individuals. 'Easy to ignore', 'difficult to find' or 'children and

young people that services typically fail to reach' are just some alternatives to the term that place the onus of accessibility on those providing the services, rather than the children and young people that the organisation seeks to work with.

The term has its roots in social marketing, a consumer-focused approach using private sector techniques that believes nobody is impossible to reach, it just depends on the approach taken. Paul Vittles commented that 'no-one is hard to reach, just more expensive to reach. It is important to put more effort and creativity in reaching these groups'. (Wilson 2001)

From Brackertz, N (2007) *Who is hard to reach and why?*

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Who are these 'hard to reach' children and young people?

Here are just some examples of groups and individuals who are often disengaged from the usual range of education, other services and activities for children and young people:

- young parents
- Traveller children and young people
- young refugees and asylum seekers
- LGBT children and young people
- young offenders and children and young people at risk of offending
- children and young people living in rural areas
- those not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- children and young people from BME (black and minority ethnic) groups and
- children and young people with disabilities or learning disabilities.

Members of these groups may therefore miss out on vital statutory services related to education and health as well as on having a safe place to stretch themselves and develop new social skills. The way in which children and young people use their leisure time has a big impact on their future. They need places where they can be themselves, but they also need places where they can think positively about their education, health, relationships, sexual identity and future employment, the community they live in and their role in that community.

How do we involve 'hard to reach' children and young people?

In this section we will look at certain groups of 'hard to reach' children and young people and what might stop them from being engaged or accessing services. The section also includes some examples of how different organisations have worked to ensure that specific groups of children and young people can be involved. We have not included all 'hard to reach' groups but the examples provide some evidence of ways of successfully involving children and young people.

Underserved children and young people

Are children and young people really hard to reach or is it more to do with the barriers put up by some of those who provide services for these groups? What is it that some organisations do or don't do that stops children and young people from accessing the opportunities that appear to be on offer?

Some youth centres, for example, may decide to keep boisterous teenagers out because they demand attention and staff resources. In this situation, it may be easier to blame children and young people for ruining things for themselves than to make a genuine effort to create space for them. The range of provision may also be the root of the problem. Once young people reach 16 and aspire to access pubs and clubs, youth clubs can seem boring and irrelevant, while in many communities there is a lack of any facilities for the over 16s.



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NSPCC Participation Through Sport

Sport, alongside other recreational and leisure activities, is particularly valuable in that it is able to address all five outcomes as identified by Every Child Matters. What's more, Participation Through Sport goes beyond involving children and young people in decision-making and attempts to reflect their agenda.

Participation Through Sport is based within the NSPCC Young People's Drop In at the Tim Parry Jonathan Ball Young People's Centre in Warrington, the population of which ranges from children of eight to young adults up to 20. The scheme has been successful in bringing the different age groups who use the Drop In together and in attracting some of the large number of youngsters (Sport England estimates 20 per cent) who do not access local junior sports clubs, after-school provision or commercial holiday activities.

The Sports Leader Awards offer opportunities to older youngsters who struggle in formal education, lack basic skills and qualifications and find it difficult to make the transition to employment. Through the medium of sport, these young

people are able to develop a range of transferable skills in organisation, communication and safe practice. By taking part in these positive activities, they are then better equipped to meet the challenges that face them (Aim High 2007).

Focusing on young people's enthusiasm for sport avoids the tendency to label or stigmatise those who experience difficulties or barriers. Instead there is a focus on developing strengths, skills and resilience and engaging them with an active approach to learning, for example, through a 'tell, show, and have a go' approach.

The Participation in Sport model has been extremely successful in creating a culture of volunteers (over 20 young volunteers deliver a week-long Summer Sports Festival to up to 72 participating children). This has a positive impact on the culture of the Drop In, where there is now less conflict between different age groups, and where younger children increasingly view older young people as role models. Volunteers help with all aspects of the organisation from producing leaflets to being part of the Management Committee.



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Black and minority ethnic children and young people

Membership of youth centres and other clubs rarely matches the cultural and religious diversity of local communities. However, community well-being and cohesion depends on reaching out to some of the most isolated children and young people and making sure that opportunities are open and accessible to them. Ensuring an equal representation of staff from different minority ethnic and religious communities may help to build trust and provide role models. Although there is a call for universal services, which would lead to enhanced individual health and well-being, thus strengthening social capital (Robert Putnam cited in Smith 2001, 2007), it is important to note that there is also a case for targeted support.

Muslim Youth Skills

Young people from a Muslim background face many barriers that prevent them from accessing mainstream services. Similar barriers may exist for groups of other young people, but given the current context, it is particularly important to look at any additional challenges faced by Muslim youngsters, and what can be done in response.

Young Muslims do not enjoy full participation in mainstream services as they do not feel comfortable accessing these services for fear of being misunderstood or discriminated against. Some young Muslims feel a sense of alienation because of this and therefore feel isolated from wider society (Muslim Youth Speak 2006). There has also been a rise in Islamophobia in recent years and an increase in stop and search. Some Muslims feel that the services on offer are ineffective and do not recognise their diversity; they feel that faith and cultural diversity is not fully understood and that the relationship between the two is confused.

To provide a genuine opportunity to young people from a Muslim background, existing barriers need to be broken down so young people can become actively involved in their communities and able to influence decision-making democratic processes.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT)

Most young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face discrimination and exclusion in their everyday life. The lack of visibility of LGBT adults at school and in wider society means that bullying and harassment continue to be major problems for LGBT children and young people, which can affect mental well-being, lead to lower achievement at school and to higher suicide rates, according to a 2007 report published by *Pink News*. These problems in turn, the report says, have a negative impact on the capacity of young LGBT people to manage the transition from school to work and to become confident and independent adults who can contribute to society.



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Tips for working with and supporting LGBT young people

These tips are offered by the Consortium of LGBT Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs).

- **Make no assumption about sexual orientation**
If a young person has not used a pronoun when discussing a relationship, try not to assume one. Use neutral language, such as 'Are you seeing anyone?' instead of 'Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?'. Additionally, let young people identify themselves what their sexual orientation is.
- **Have something LGBT-related visible in your office or environment**
This could be a sticker, poster, flyer, brochure or book. A common sign that most LGBT people will recognise is a rainbow or rainbow flag. If your service subscribes to magazines, you could persuade them to subscribe to the Pink Paper or the local LGBT group's newsletter. Alternatively, many LGBT organisations produce publications, and having a small stack of these in communal areas and visible in offices can be a simple method of creating a positive environment.
- **Challenge discrimination**
As a role model for young people, respond to homophobia immediately and sincerely. Do not let your colleagues or clients get away with using discriminatory language, such as using 'gay' to describe anything in a derogatory way, or referring to people using negative, derogatory and abusive language based on homophobia. If left unchallenged, people will not question the use of such terms. Encourage in-service training for staff on homophobia and its impact on LGBT young people.
- **Learn about appropriate organisations and LGBT projects, helplines etc. in your locality**
Familiarise yourself with local organisations that are able to provide appropriate support for young LGBT people and call the organisation before making a referral to make sure it still exists. Do remember, however, that the young person may not want to talk to someone else at that moment in time, in which case, you should maintain contact with a local support group to ensure the information and advice you are providing is correct.
- **Ensure that anti-discrimination policies within your organisation include sexual orientation**
Often equal opportunities policies do not include sexual orientation. If you notice this omission, draw it to the relevant person's attention within your organisation. It is now a legal requirement to ensure that your service is equipped with anti-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation, as part of the Goods and Services Act.
- **Try to recruit a young LGBT person to your steering/management group or committee**
We would recommend that any service that is working with young people creates a young person advisory group and that the project should try to include a young LGBT person where possible. This steering group can help develop inclusive policies and procedures that show an overall organisational commitment to be being inclusive for LGBT young people. The Consortium of LGBT VCOs has a programme that helps and supports organisations in achieving this, and can offer resources, training and guidance on how to be LGBT inclusive.

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Young parents

The challenges faced by young parents mean that they are often hard to reach. The following example shows how these barriers to involvement can be overcome.

Salvation Army, Wood Green Christian Centre (WGCC)

Through working in their local community of Haringey, WGCC became aware of a gap in the local provision of services for teenage and young parents. A health report published by Haringey Primary Care Trust noted the high teenage pregnancy rates in the area and identified the health, educational, social and economic risk factors facing young parents. In response, WGCC decided to run a Young Parents Group to meet this identified need. Conversations between staff at the centre and young parents helped to highlight some of the specific challenges young parents in the area faced. They included:

- a lack of knowledge about other provision in the local area
- a lack of knowledge about how to claim housing and other benefits they were entitled to
- a lack of emotional support to deal with their situation. Discussions with young parents who attended the course revealed shared experiences of traumatic childhoods and families who became absent and unsupportive towards them once they were pregnant.

WGCC ran their Young Parents Group for eight weeks over the spring of 2008. Following good practice, the Group sought partner agencies, including the YMCA Hornsey and Choices Confidential Pregnancy Advice (Islington) to support the delivery of the programme. WGCC were also innovative in their approach to facilitating access for young parents. They decided to provide childcare for the duration of the day-long workshops, which ran weekly and formed the bulk of the programme.

Another innovative element in the programme was that the Young Parents

Group encouraged young parents to provide support for one another through peer mentoring. Hence there was a focus on group discussion and the sharing of experiences. A residential was organised for the end of the programme. The young parents went to stay in a four-star hotel in Bournemouth and built upon their relationships with one another and reflected upon their progress in a restful environment away from their challenging daily lives.

WGCC implemented a monitoring and evaluation system, which recorded who had attended the groups. Questionnaires were distributed to attendees before and after the programme and testimonies were taken from participants. Debrief sessions were used to reflect upon the effectiveness of workshops in order to adapt and improve future sessions. A recurring theme was that the group had helped the parents become more receptive to the needs of their children. One parent remarked: 'I have learnt so much about how to parent my under five, for example to talk to my child and not shout at her.' The peer approach to young parents' needs also demonstrated its effectiveness in providing emotional support for the parents. A participant summed up what peers of hers had felt about their newfound friend/mentors, saying: 'I am happy I have a group of people I can go to because they would be a lot more understanding of what I would be going through.'

WGCC soon found their Young Parents Group to be oversubscribed. Young parents mentioned the service to friends, leading to the exciting but totally unexpected phenomenon of peer referrals between young parents.

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Children and young people in rural areas

Living in a rural area makes it more difficult for children and young people to access the resources that those in more urban areas enjoy. Broadband internet and mobile phone coverage is often not available, which limits social networking. Public transport is often limited, particularly at evenings and weekends when young people like to access community resources such as leisure centres and youth groups. Their ability to access advice and information, to socialise and to work is therefore restricted. An innovative response is required to deal with these particular challenges.

Using the school bus to get your message across

For many young people in rural communities, the school bus is where they see friends and plan social activities. Some youth organisations use this school-bus opportunity to reach out to young people with important information. With the permission of the bus company, leaflets can be given out, messages can be played on the bus radio or dvd system or posters can be displayed at bus stops.

Some detached youth work projects have used imaginative methods of working with rural youth groups:

- Creating mobile youth projects in specially adapted trailers, buses or canal boats
- Running minibus pick-up services, either to take young people to a youth project or enable a group to meet with their friends from neighbouring village communities
- Creating a meeting place. Some rural community churches and pubs have given over unused space for young people to meet safely. In one case, a coded keypad was placed on the church door so that only local young people and supervisory staff could enter.

These methods all use creative thinking to move beyond the traditional 'meeting' format.

Children and young people at risk of offending

The following case study shows how children and young people have been key to the development of new facilities in Gillingham. Engaging with groups who are growing up in an area of high crime – and with it a higher risk of becoming an offender – has ensured the facilities will be well used, potentially keeping children and young people out of trouble.

Gillingham Youth for Christ (YFC)

Gillingham YFC work primarily in Gillingham North Ward, where there are areas of high social deprivation especially with regard to crime, education and children and young people's aspirations.

"When talking with children and young people in the area, you often hear a desire for things to do, places to go and people to talk to, but for various reasons children and young people frequently appear unwilling to find the things that are out there or make an effort to walk any distance to access the places to go. They also seem to find it tough to talk to those who want to listen.

We have, for over 10 years, run a drop-in centre for children and young people in Gillingham. This became too popular though, so we needed a bigger building. Buildings are expensive so it caused us to think. Children and young people were telling us they didn't want to travel, so we decided to go to their area and provide something on their doorstep, to provide something that the children and young people could manage, develop and call their own.

We set out with a dream to provide places for children and young people in each corner of the town, with a centre in the middle – like the five of a dice over a map of Gillingham. In partnership with local schools, churches, housing associations, councillors, police and our MP, we

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identified buildings in the local community (one our own, two owned by local churches and one owned by a housing association), and sought to transform what seemed like useless buildings into something useful.

Children and young people have been at the heart of their planning and development which has been key to them making use and taking ownership of the facility. Parents have started to get involved and be interested in this provision on their doorstep and in two areas the drop-ins have given rise to community clean-up projects, summer fetes and Christmas parades!

Instead of expecting children and young people to come to us, it is imperative that we go to them and let them know that we think they are worth the effort and important from the outset."

Children and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

Those who are not in education, employment or training may be attracted by the opportunity to get involved in informal or practical training in situations that are different from where they have previously been educated or worked. The case study below shows how practical training to become a youth worker was able to attract some NEET young people. This case study also demonstrates that 'hard to reach' is not worn as a label by children and young people and often an individual's additional support needs do not become apparent until you have spent some time with them.

YouthWorks

A new London Youth project, YouthWorks is funded for three years from April 2008 through the new youth volunteering charity v. It aims to train a new generation of youth workers with a specialism in youth action. Yearly, 12 young people are matched to a London Youth member club and volunteer full time for six months. During this time they

take their level 1 Foundation in Youth Work qualification and also have to design, deliver and evaluate a youth action project in their local community, engaging at least another five young people.

Although YouthWorks did not set out to attract 'hard to reach' or NEET young people, the majority of the 12 young people who accessed the programme can be categorised in this way. It makes sense that young people who have had a more challenging start in life would look at youth work as a possible career. Many of the young people feel passionately that getting involved in youth work is a positive way to give other young people the support they did or didn't receive.

Not only does the project give young people a volunteering opportunity, but they are challenged to take on leadership roles within their placement with an emphasis on engaging other volunteers. Organising a youth action project, even if it is within the community of their club, gives these young people a taste of community activism, encouraging them to look around their environment to see what they would like to change.

YouthWorks also has tremendous relevance to young people who are not looking at youth work as a possible career but just want a new opportunity in which to get involved. During their training, the young people look at areas such as communication, working in groups, leadership and diversity, all of which help them develop as individuals.

The project's early successes can be put down to the amount of support these young people are able to access. A lot of emphasis is put on developing the bond of the group. Feeling part of a group is of huge importance to young people and increases the likelihood that they will stay focused and see the project through. The programme is also backed up with the payment of expenses, residentials and follow-up support on completion of the programme.

Top tips when working with 'hard to reach' children and young people

As a number of the examples demonstrate, involving children and young people in your project or organisation means actively seeking out their views, listening to them and then working in partnership with them to put their ideas into practice. The following tips are designed to give you some things to think about when working with 'hard to reach' children and young people.

- 1. Do your research** – Understanding the local picture is fundamental to your work being a success. Collect background information on the community as a whole, find out who the key stakeholders are, what provision exists and how children and young people are perceived locally. Find out if any other organisations are already working with the groups you have identified and establish whether what you are trying to do will complement or conflict with this work.
- 2. Decide what you want to achieve** – Funders often require projects to work with and will want to see how these projects will improve outcomes for specific groups of 'hard to reach' children and young people. Set out clear goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART).
- 3. Work in partnership with other organisations** – Some organisations are expert at working with specific groups such as those with learning disabilities, young parents or young offenders. Make links with Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and other experts from both the voluntary and statutory sectors. Consider whether working in partnership with the other organisation could provide a better outcome for the young people.
- 4. Be careful not to 'over consult'** – When a range of different agencies consult a particular group too many times, individuals within the group can become disinterested. Remember that participation is more than consultation! (Brackertz et al. 2005)
- 5. Adapt your materials** – If you are producing any materials publicising your organisation, project or activity, consider how 'hard to reach' groups will access these. Children and young people with learning disabilities, for example, may need accessible versions. Organisations such as Mencap can help with this. See the How To guide on involving children and young people with communication impairments in decision-making.
- 6. Find out what the barriers are** – Childcare needs, inconvenient opening times, children and young people feeling that they can't access your project because it's in the 'wrong postcode', low aspirations: these are just a few examples of the barriers that can prevent children and young people from getting involved. Talk to them, take their needs on board and be open and honest about what you can do to help them participate. For example, if someone lacks confidence or is scared to go on the bus on their own in an unfamiliar environment, you may need to escort them to the activity.
- 7. Adopt safe practice** – When you are involved in any outreach work, children and young people and their parents or carers need to know that you are a professional worker from a reputable organisation. Along with any leaflets you have promoting your project or activity, you should have identification with you. You should always take a colleague and a fully charged mobile phone with you.
- 8. Build relationships** – Be reliable and consistent with children and young people. Treat them as equals and don't prejudge them. Be honest and clear about what you are trying to do and what they can expect from you. Vulnerable children and

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young people are easily discouraged when they feel that they have been let down.

9. Work within boundaries – Ensure that the trusting and friendly relationships you build with children and young people are professional and never confused by involvement in your personal life and interests. If you find yourself in a difficult situation that you are unsure how to resolve, contact your line manager immediately.

10. Work at their pace – Taking the time to work at the same pace as children and young people can help you find out what is really important to them, what motivates them and what help they need to participate willingly in achieving real and lasting positive change.

11. Deal with challenging behavior – There are times when individuals may pose a direct threat to, or impair the

experience of others. When you are working with children and young people who may already be excluded from other provision, including those who have been perpetrators of bullying, sexism, racism and so on, it makes no sense to add to that exclusion by indefinitely banning individuals. Temporary restrictions may be required to enable you to conduct a risk assessment and to renegotiate conditions for access with an individual.

12. Child protection and safeguarding – This is too large an issue to explore in full detail here. It is strongly recommended that you undergo child protection training before working with children and young people. A previous How To guide on safeguarding children and young people is available and provides a useful starting point as well as signposting to training.

How do we ensure children and young people sustain their involvement?

Once you've made contact with and engaged children and young people from your target group, how do you keep them there? Providing a range of accessible, challenging and rewarding activities is fundamental, as is making sure you take the time to talk to the children and young people about their involvement. Find out what extra support they might need, for example with childcare or with siblings or parents if they are a young carer. Check that they are receiving travel expenses promptly. Ask what they have enjoyed doing. Ask how they think they have progressed.

How do we measure success?

Working with 'hard to reach' children and young people can be incredibly rewarding, but a number of indicators of success are evidenced through 'soft outcomes'. These can range from a person making eye contact

with a worker, to turning up at a project voluntarily. This information can be hard to capture, meaning that much of the quality work that you do will often not be visible to others. You need to be able to show evidence of your work's value to funders, other youth work providers and the wider community.

Evaluation doesn't need to be complicated. You could devise a simple questionnaire to use at the start of your contact with an individual, at a mid-way point and at an end point, if there is one. This baseline assessment will help demonstrate the changes in the individual's responses and therefore the impact of your work. Questionnaires used in this way also enable children and young people to see for themselves how they have progressed, which encourages them to keep coming back. Be open with children and young people about how you intend to monitor and evaluate your work. Involving them as much as possible in the process will enhance your work and their experience.

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Evaluating the effectiveness of work with 'hard to reach' young people is also essential to ensure that resources are used in the most effective and efficient way. As with measuring the distance travelled by young people, it can be very difficult, but it can also add real value and works particularly well when it forms an on-going assessment process as part of a distinctive and accessible curriculum for this client group. (Prince's Trust 2006)

In conclusion

Developing your work with 'hard to reach' children and young people means recognising and valuing them as individuals. You also need to ensure that your organisation, project or activity is accessible to all children and young people regardless of race, class, gender, ability, impairment, sexuality, dependants and political or religious beliefs. Be flexible in your approach too, whether it's by working in partnership with other organisations or developing innovative techniques. Remember that each child or young person may require a different solution in order to help them participate to their full potential.

Find Out More

This list of publications and websites should help you to find more detailed information and follow up areas of interest. (All web links accessed on 11 December 2008).

Reference

Brackertz, N (2007) ISR Working Paper **Who is hard to reach and why?**

www.sisr.net/publications/0701brackertz.pdf

Brackertz, N (2005) **Community consultation and the 'hard to reach': Concepts and practice in local government**

Emerick, Y (2006) **Muslim youth speak: voices of today's young Muslims**

Smith, M.K (2001, 2007) **'Robert Putnam', the encyclopaedia of information education**

www.infed.org/thinkers/putnam.htm

Wilson, D (2001) **Consulting hard to reach groups.** www.laria.gov.uk

Pink News (March 2007)
www.pinknews.co.uk

Prince's Trust website at
www.princes-trust.org.uk

Useful web links

www.askability.org.uk

A website presented entirely in symbol to enable children with learning disabilities to become informed about ongoing current affairs and also create a central forum for children to express their views and opinions.

www.readingagency.org.uk

The Reading Agency is an organisation dedicated to promoting the importance of reading as a way of developing confidence and self-esteem.

<http://tinyurl.com/6l4tla>

A Home Office report outlining ways of improving police relations with 'hard to reach' groups.

<http://tinyurl.com/67ysop>

A Health and Safety Executive report on the impact for 'hard to reach' groups of health and safety.

www.ruralityouth.com

Rural Youth Network is a national charity that works with partners from the voluntary, community and statutory sectors to make a difference on the issues that affect young people in rural areas.

<http://tinyurl.com/6pcsf5>

A National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) article focusing on the use of ICT by 'hard to reach' groups, including BME.

www.lgbtconsortium.org.uk

The Consortium of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Voluntary and Community Organisations website.

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Case Examples:

Gillingham Youth for Christ
Consortium of LGBT Voluntary and Community Organisations
Muslim Youth Skills
NSPCC Participation Through Sport
Salvation Army, Wood Green Christian Centre,
Young Parents Group
YouthWorks

Participation Works enables organisations to involve children and young people effectively in the development, delivery and evaluation of the services which affect their lives.

The Participation Works How To guides are a series of booklets that provide practical information, useful tips and case studies of good participation practice. Each one provides an introduction to a different element of participation to help organisations enhance their work with children and young people.

Participation Works is an online Gateway to the world of children and young people's participation. Visit www.participationworks.org.uk to access comprehensive information on policy, practice, training and innovative ideas.

Participation Works

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