

How To

Celebrate children and young people's success

Children, young people and adult workers often work incredibly hard together to make projects and activities happen. However, they don't always take time out to celebrate their achievements, nor do they consider how they might celebrate success from the beginning of a project. This guide will look at what we mean by celebrating success, why it's so important, and how it should be an integral part of all work with children and young people. Through case studies, the guide will also show how organisations with varying resources and capacity make sure they involve children and young people in celebrating their achievements.

What we mean by celebrating success

Celebrating – *mark the occasion or day by ceremony or festival; praise something publicly; showing something good or special has happened.*

Success – *the achievement of something that is planned or attempted and turns out well.* (Cambridge Dictionaries Online)

Whether it is in the day-to-day setting of drop-in children and young people's provision, or a specific project planned with children and young people with explicit outcomes built in, there is always an opportunity to acknowledge success. This need not be at the end of a project or piece of work, but can be done at anytime during a project.



It can take place on a one-to-one basis – adult to child or young person – or in a peer support setting with children and young people supporting each other.

It can also take place in a range of settings – on mountainsides and lakes as well as in centres, or in cafes and public places as well as in youth clubs. Even a walk in the country can be managed to make it a celebratory event and a way of acknowledging the success of the children and young people's involvement.

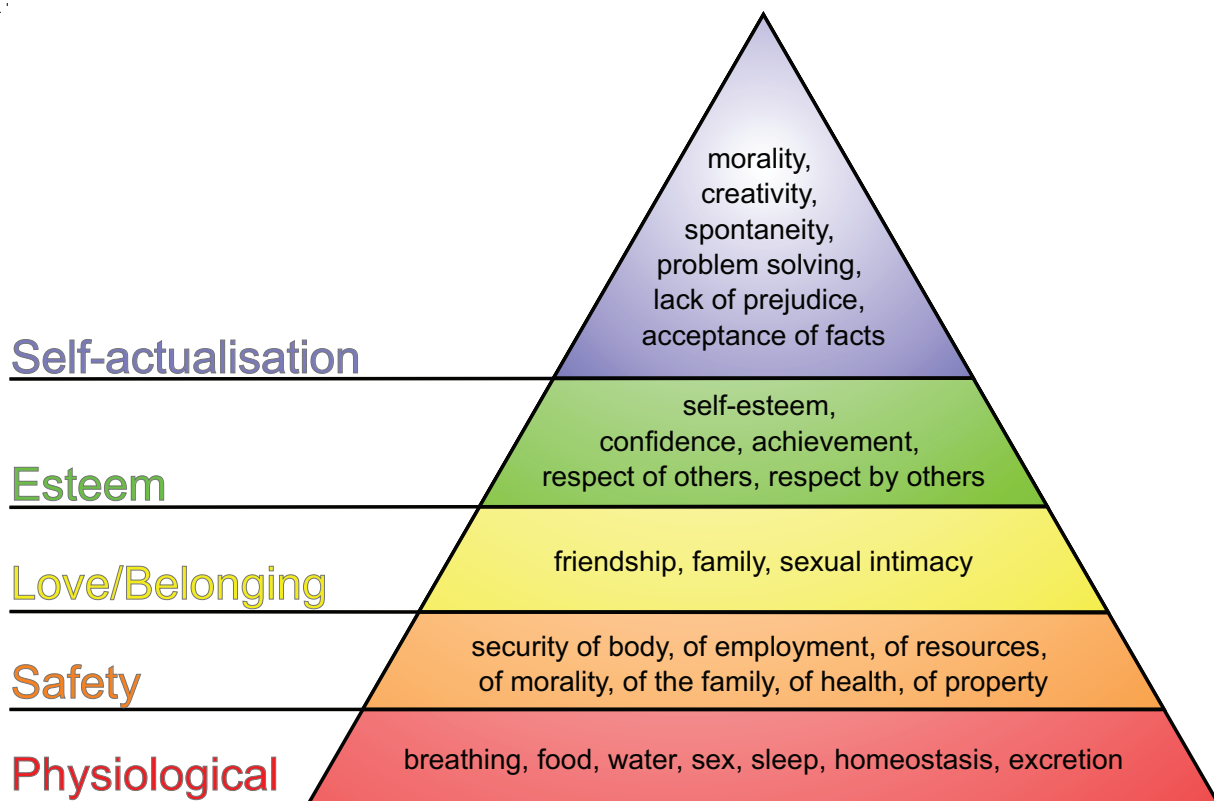
Celebrating success can also provide the opportunity to produce something and to have it valued by others. This can be of central importance for children and young people as they work towards establishing a sound identity.

How to celebrate success

Esteem needs

All humans need to be respected, to have self-esteem, to have self-respect and to respect others. By engaging in activities – be it in a profession or a hobby – people can feel involved and accepted, that they have contributed, and have improved self worth. Without these feelings people can suffer from low self-esteem. People with low self-esteem need respect from others, but they must also accept themselves – and this does not come from receiving fame, respect and glory but is internal to each person. Recognising achievement and celebrating success can play a key role in personal development and raising self-esteem.

Abraham Maslow proposed a hierarchy of needs theory that is shown here. It illustrates the important role that self-esteem plays in relation to the development of children and young people. Celebrating their achievements can go a long way towards raising self-esteem. This can help them to feel valued and confident, particularly when the levels of physiological, safety, love/belonging have also been addressed.



Maslow, A (1954) *Motivation and Personality*

How to celebrate success

Why celebrating is important – identifying learning, having fun, evaluation

Celebrating demonstrates a commitment from organisations to a participatory style of working and an expectation that organisational learning will be a priority. Through celebrating, lessons can be learned and practice developed.

Opportunities for further training can also be identified, and organisations can undertake to respond to these identified ongoing needs.

Successful celebratory or closing activities encourage children and young people to celebrate their achievements. They can also generate feedback, which can inform the planning process for future programmes and provide insight and ideas from them. It is important to make the evaluation process meaningful, and above all to have some fun as well.

Below are some ideas to get you started:

- You might choose to hold a big celebratory event at the end of the year or the end of a particular project. Or you might feel that a small event held more regularly provides a better opportunity to celebrate.
- Gestures such as thank you letters and certificates also go a long way towards making children and young people feel that they and their contributions are highly valued.
- Press releases to local radio, television and newspapers keep your organisation in the public eye. They also highlight to a wider audience the successes of children and young people and ensure that they are recognised as part of the community.
- Asking children and young people what they want is also essential if the organisation is to avoid tokenism.

What not to do

Avoid tokenism at all costs. Children and young people need to have control over their opinions and expressed views. Very often they are engaged with projects and organisations that are controlled by adults who also make the key decisions. But children and young people need to be consulted and informed. They will probably choose to participate at different levels - some preferring a lesser degree and others wanting a higher level of involvement. A wide range of opportunities to participate needs to be available, informed by the varied needs, interests and abilities of the children and young people.

Tokenistic and decorative modes of participation do little to enhance children and young people's well-being and skills; bring their opinions to bear on decision making; or re-draw systems and structures of decision-making. Indeed they can have negative consequences with children and young people deterred from further involvement.

Celebrating on a budget – it doesn't have to cost a fortune

A celebration activity can take place on a very small scale and still be very effective in terms of the impact it will have on the individual or group. For example, a word of congratulation can have more impact on the individual than the same individual being part of a large, more formal celebration team.

Cost has no link to impact in terms of value for money. The smallest, or even no budget, should not be a barrier to celebrating. It is possible to arrange events in-house with children and young people thoroughly engaged as participation partners in the planning and delivery of the celebration.

How to celebrate success

Case Study One

Oxfordshire Children's Fund

Celebrating at the centre of all work

The Community Chest funds play and leisure activities for five to 13-year-olds living in Oxfordshire. Community Chest ensures the right to play for children who don't have the money in their family to pay for activity costs or equipment.

The Community Chest has funds of £50,000 per year and is run by panels of children aged between five and 13. They are fully trained to run their own fortnightly meetings, assess applications and decide on who to award the money to. Each panel exists for six months and has between eight and 12 members.

Acknowledging the commitment and success of the panels is key to the whole project. A 'Thank You' and internal accreditation package runs throughout the panel members' tenure to ensure they are thanked and rewarded for their hard work and commitment. Comments from award winners are collected and given back to the panel meetings so they hear first hand what a difference their decision makes. This helps to create a sense of the validity of their work.

'Our meetings help people and if you can make someone feel happy it helps you feel happy too'.

On completing the training, panel members receive a goody bag with a branded T-shirt, pen and gym kit ruck sack.

The highlight of the Thank You package is a special trip chosen through consensus by each group. A theme park is a common choice and the day is purely about feeling treated and having a lot of fun. The trip takes place a few weeks before the end of a group's six-month tenure and often helps to strengthen the spirit of the group.

There is also a formal 'Thank You' tea party for each panel and their invited family and teachers. At the party the panel members' achievements are recognised with a certificate; a mini Community Chest voucher for £25 for them to spend on a play or leisure activity; and a surprise 'Thank You's' booklet which records their achievement in words and photos.



How to celebrate success



10-year-old Kier was a member of a panel. He said:

'When I got graduated I found it happy and a good experience'.

Panel member Zak's mum said:

'Zak really liked the tea party, he's been saying to people "me and Mum are going out to tea". I had to go to my boss's boss to get let off early, so that really made it for him. He was over the moon. It gives him a sense of responsibility and having a sense of responsibility and of being important is good for him. It's not something he gets to do so it is extra good for him'.

Children and young people also designed a Thank You policy – called the Thank-You Plan – that serves as an overall policy for Oxfordshire Children's Fund Participation Projects.

How to celebrate success

'Hidden' outcomes for children and young people in celebrating an event

Celebrating offers many opportunities for children and young people to build their confidence, improve their self-esteem, and develop new skills including:

- Event planning
- Speaking in public
- Negotiating
- Project management
- Managing a budget
- Listening and communicating
- Team work
- Being part of a community with collective identity.

10-step guide to putting on a celebratory event

Here are some ideas to help you get started with your planning

1. Start planning well in advance of the celebration.
2. Make the planning group small and focussed.
3. Let all possible participants know about it well in advance and ensure that all information goes out to everyone who needs it. Do so with plenty of time for them to respond and prepare themselves. Also make sure that there is a reply slip for them to book places, and to give you information about any dietary and access needs.
4. Check with the children and young people what would be a good time to hold the event. Sometimes an evening or weekend event will be the best way to accommodate everybody.
5. Check the accessibility of any venue you might use – both site accessibility and getting there. Choose a central location to minimise travel expenses, and a venue that will accommodate all your needs with plenty of room for your planned activities. Ask the venue to present everything in writing so all costs are detailed and make sure a full contract is issued.
6. Make sure any keynote speakers or main guests are invited and booked very early in the process.
7. Plan a varied and interactive programme so you are not expecting people to sit and listen for too long.
8. Be sure everybody knows what their role is on the day and that they have time to rehearse using microphones and other equipment.
9. Check out all the equipment you will need is in good working order and plan for a backup.
10. Have a plan B – as part of your risk assessment process – in case things don't turn out as you expect (e.g. a main guest who can't come at the last minute).

In the end have a dynamic, engaging and fun-filled time!

Case Study Two

Worth Unlimited/ St Basils

A celebration helps to build young people's aspirations

Worth Unlimited and St Basils celebrated young people's participation in a life skills programme by holding a graduation ceremony. It took place at the National Indoor Arena in Birmingham. Young people who had completed their life skills programmes wore a cloak and gown and were awarded their certificates by the Mayor. Young people were involved in running the ceremony and also performed a play. The play focussed on what it was like to be a young person without a home to live in.

For some of the young people involved, the experience was such a positive one that they are now thinking they would like to take part in a 'real' graduation ceremony and aspire to go to university.

Worth Unlimited is a Christian Youthwork agency offering personal support and experiential learning opportunities. Visit www.worthunlimited.org.uk for more information. St Basils works with young people to prevent youth homelessness by providing accommodation and support services. Find out more at www.stbasils.org.uk

What can celebrating success be useful for?

Funders

If the event or celebration is for a project that has received funding you will find that funders always appreciate seeing their name in lights. In most cases they will insist that they are showcased in some shape or form. Remember too that funders will also expect to see their logo on any promotional materials and it is always a good idea to thank them publicly for their support at any events they sponsor.

You might want to seek other funding or sponsorship for the celebration if you have not already received funding. Smaller frontline organisations can ask bodies like the Lions Club or your local Chamber of Commerce. Local businesses are often keen to promote children and young people's activities that have a positive spin to them.

A celebration of success is also a way to attract future funding to a project or organisation. By inviting funders to celebratory events you provide a direct link to the children and young people who have been engaged in the project. It is a great opportunity to showcase what they have done and influence potential funders directly.

The organisation – internally and externally to learn/promote

By measuring impact against curriculum or personal development, a picture can be built of the success or otherwise of the work that is taking place over a given length of time. It is a vital way of improving performance and productivity. There may be a range of factors that mean that a particular piece of work – or element of it – is not going well. It might be that targets are not achieved or progress made. But, by using this process, success can be measured to aid the learning of an

How to celebrate success

organisation and the children and young people it works with.

Lessons can be learned, programmes can be redesigned, and decisions made about what celebration could take place and the audience it should reach.

It might even be possible to share the practice, or generate income from the work that has taken place.

Children and young people – to step back and celebrate their achievements

Although children and young people will have been a part of the planning and delivery of both the project and the celebration, very often the end still comes as a bit of a surprise. When they are totally immersed in a project's delivery, the journey that has taken place for individuals and organisations can get lost.

Celebrating re-engages everybody with an overview of what has been achieved. And planning the celebration can bring out a whole new set of skills development. This can often lead to a more complete evaluation of the work that has taken place. In addition, ways of celebrating that journey that can be taken into future projects.

The individual participation worker – to gauge progress

It's not always easy to see the impact of the work or the development of the children and young people involved in a project from the inside. Funders increasingly look for workers to make some assessment of the individual progress that has been made by each participant.

John Huskins' *Quality Work with Young People* is an example of the stages of personal development which you might find useful to assess individuals' progress. It identifies seven steps in personal development:

Stage 1

Initial contact. Young person is testing the workers out (what have these adults to offer me? can they be trusted?).

Stage 2

Familiarisation (getting to know each other, further testing out, the workers 'selling' what youth participation has to offer).

Stage 3

Socialisation (informal group contact or activity). Youth participation workers encourage greater commitment to and involvement in programme.

Stage 4

Involvement in activities, seeing it through to completion. Workers encourage progression to stage 5.

Stage 5

Young people begin to take part in planning and organising activity themselves.

Stage 6

Young people run activities themselves with support from workers.

Stage 7

Leadership or peer education level – young people take responsibility for others as well as themselves.

Huskins, J (1996) *Quality Work With Young People*

For gathering evidence – for writing impact and annual reports

Whatever the level of celebration – from a one-to-one catch up through to a full-blown celebration event – evidence accrues that can be given to funders or written into impact reports and organisational annual reports.

In the case of one-to-one catch up, it is appropriate to use the seven steps guide outlined here. Measuring baseline positions on the guide from one to seven at the beginning of relationships with children and young people, and measuring again at a

Case Study Three

The RSPB Phoenix Forum

A residential helps the group celebrate their good work

The RSPB Phoenix Forum is a body of 10 democratically elected members from the teenage membership of the RSPB who meet four times a year at different RSPB nature reserves across Britain to advise RSPB staff on the style and pace of the teenage membership package. Each meeting has a full agenda, decided upon by the Forum and the meetings are chaired and minuted by the teenagers themselves.

Any teenage member of the RSPB can stand for the Forum by writing a manifesto of approximately 100 words, describing what they could bring to the Forum. These manifestos are then published in the teenage membership magazine, *Wingbeat*, and our members are asked to vote for the ones that they like the sound of the best.

The Forum chooses or writes most of the content of *Wingbeat* and become our primary ambassadors in all sorts of ad hoc external opportunities. In 2002, for example, two Forum members were invited to attend the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa to represent UK Youth. They rubbed shoulders with world leaders and challenged them on issues such as climate change long before it became fashionable.

Closer to home, the Forum chooses the location and content for the annual RSPB Phoenix Conference, which in recent years has involved practical conservation work, wildlife watching, and political lobbying at Westminster.

The RSPB firmly believes that giving teenagers an input to their own membership package is very important. Many parents have contacted us to say that their children had developed confidence and self-belief as a result of being part of the Forum. Some great friendships have been formed and are still strong today, long after the teenagers have left the Forum.

"The RSPB Phoenix Forum is a lot of fun, and looks good on members' CVs. But we have other more tangible reward mechanisms. Every year, we run a residential weekend for the Forum, usually based in a Youth Hostel. This comprises a short meeting, and then visits to local nature reserves or other attractions of the members' choosing. We even went bowling one weekend when the weather was too rough to be outside. As members retire from the Forum, they get a certificate, signed by our Chief Executive, in recognition of their service. As RSPB Volunteers, the teenagers also get a volunteer card, entitling them to discounts off RSPB goods, and those who serve for five years or more are eligible for long-service awards, such as an exclusive swift lapel badge."

You can find more details at www.rspb.org.uk/phoenix

How to celebrate success

given specific time in the future can gauge progress. It will give you a true indication of the impact of the work or specific project you are engaged with, as well as the personal development of the children and young people involved.

An annual report has to have some particular information included, usually of a financial nature plus an overview of the organisation and its work. In addition, it is an opportunity to showcase projects and achievements; to give a public endorsement to individuals and groups; and publicly celebrate their success.

Potential for research

Within the voluntary and community youth sector there are practitioners who have honed their participatory skills and have set up ways that participants can feel rewarded and engage in the process of celebration. Alongside the children and young people you work with, you could do some research into what these organisations have done to get some more ideas to work with. Some of them are listed on page 11.

Case Study Four

Young Devon

Celebrating and making plans over dinner

Young Devon is a charity that supports young people in Devon. Its vision is 'changing the odds in favour of young people'. The organisation is piloting a nationally accredited scheme – Participation In Action (PIA) – that invests in young people, giving them the skills and qualifications to be professionals in their own right. One of the voluntary groups being supported by the pilot scheme is called ALLSORTS where around 12 young people volunteer every week.

ALLSORTS has been involved in a great deal of positive participation work including:

- Taking part in interviews for the head of Devon's Children's Trust, Education Welfare Officers, school nurses, and the senior matron at the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital
- Giving advice on improving young people services

Recently they have been working with the Red Cross to develop HIV/AIDS awareness. As part of this a local service supporting people living with HIV/AIDS delivered a course to the group.

The young people felt they had learnt so much they wanted to educate other young people and share their new knowledge with them. As a group they decided they wanted to do a performance using drama as the tool to educate other young people. The performance was a real success and about 30 young people from around Devon turned up to see it.

The young people were so proud of their achievement and the success of their work that they decided to celebrate what they had done. It was also a good way of helping to keep the group engaged in their work. Along with the workers, the group sat down and decided to go for a meal to celebrate. They also saw it as a chance to discuss their success – not just the performance, but also all their brilliant work along the way.

This was a really great way to celebrate as it gave them the opportunity to evaluate their success as a group. The group have now decided to keep up their hard work and continue on their positive participation journey.

More information about Young Devon can be found at www.dya.org.uk

How to celebrate success

Find Out More

This list of organisations and websites will help you to find more detailed information and follow up areas of interest:

www.byc.org.uk

British Youth Council is led by young people for young people and runs training workshops, creates volunteering opportunities and builds inspiring campaigns which give everyone aged 26 and under a chance to make a positive contribution to society both in the UK and other countries.

www.youthactionnetwork.org.uk

The Makin' it Real Awards were set up in 2006 to reward and recognise groups of young volunteers and the workers who support them for making a positive difference to their local community. Each year, first, second and third place prizes are awarded to groups of young people and to workers in celebration of the amazing things that can be achieved through Youth Action.

www.clubsforyoungpeople.org.uk

If children and young people have done something they are proud of, however big or small, there is space to share their achievements in the *done somethin'?* memoirs.

www.ukyouth.org

The Youth Challenges and the Youth Achievement Awards offer an activity-based approach to peer education. The Awards are designed to help develop more effective participative practice by encouraging children and young people to progressively take more responsibility in selecting, planning and leading activities that are based on their interests.

www.sja.org.uk/sja/

St John Ambulance recognises children and young people for acting safely, promptly and effectively in a real emergency and for putting good first aid into practice. Young First Aider of the Year Awards are presented at special ceremonies at St John's Gate in London.

www.princestrust.org.uk

The Celebrate Success Awards ensure every person who has changed their life for the better or helped change someone's life around with The Prince's Trust has their efforts recognised. Since they began almost 2,500 people have been nominated: young people, volunteers, xl club advisers, team leaders, partner organisations and staff.

www.theaward.org

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award provides an enjoyable, challenging and rewarding programme of personal development.

www.fairbridge.org.uk

Recently young people from Fairbridge have been able to see their own films on a silver IMAX screen and meet the likes of HRH Princess Alexandra, Kevin Spacey and Secretary of State for Children and Families, Ed Balls.

Kevin Spacey said, *'It was a fantastic and eye-opening evening. It's clear that Fairbridge plants those first seeds a young person needs to find their own self-esteem and the confidence to do great things'.*

Fairbridge supports young people who are not in education, employment or training – giving them the motivation, confidence and skills they need to change their lives.

Case Study Five

NCVYS Young Partners Award

Awarding success

The Young Partners Award (YPA) is a celebration of children and young people's involvement in decision-making within voluntary and community youth organisations and projects. It provides an opportunity for such organisations and projects to demonstrate what they have achieved, share ideas and inspire other organisations.

The Young Partners Award is unique because young people are in control. Using their own experiences, young people:

- Developed the criteria for the Award
- Are responsible for shortlisting the nominations
- Visit the shortlisted organisations
- Make the final decision on who the winners are
- Plan the award ceremony ensuring that everyone has a good time!

Here's what a young person has to say about being involved with the Young Partners Award:

'Being part of the planning group was great and the people I was working with really helped to make the mood more enjoyable. I like travelling to different places so going to visit projects and finding out more about what they do and seeing how they work with other children and young people was really exciting. Helping them celebrate their work at the awards ceremony was brilliant and everyone enjoyed themselves. I can't wait to do it all again' Linda Epstein, YPA planning group member

Find out more about the awards at www.ncvys.org.uk

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.

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