

# How To

## Use Creative Methods for Participation

This How To guide aims to provide some ideas and information for organisations working with children and young people to help them get started using creative methods.

Creative participation methods offer a unique way to develop fun and inclusive engagement with children and young people and support their involvement in decision-making. Using creative methods can enable children and young people to share, explore and develop their ideas and to express them in memorable ways. It is **not** about using creative arts therapies. It is about activities and approaches that can be used in a variety of settings to enable children and young people to participate

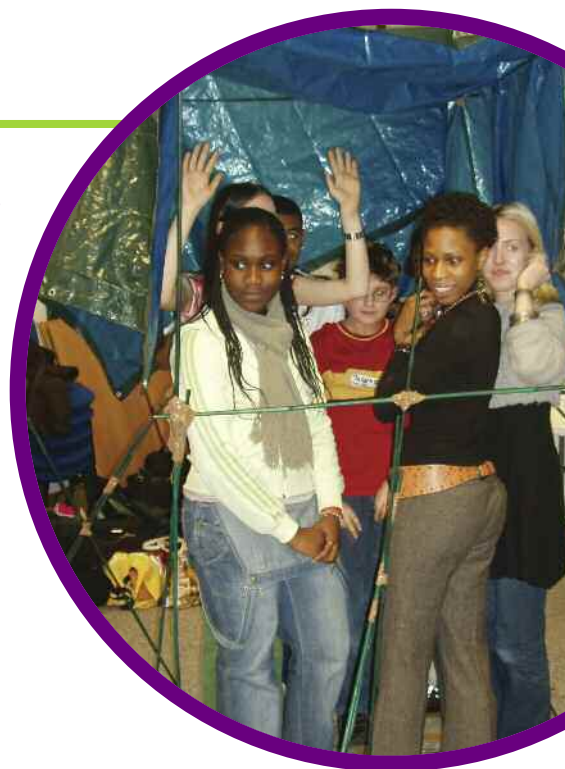
### Creative methods

Many organisations working with children and young people use creative methods; it might be projects, workshops or sessions that use video, drama, dance, music, arts and crafts, photography and so on. Your organisation may use these methods already to help children and young people participate in decision-making. Creative methods are popular because they are:

**Fun** – choose the right activity with a group of children and young people and they will be keen to get involved. Fun and enjoyment sparks enthusiasm and energy – a powerful mix.

**Inclusive** – everyone can take part because it does not have to rely on those who are confident speakers or readers. Creative methods often focus on the visual or experiential so there is less reliance on verbal skills.

**Engaging for all ages and abilities** – children and young people of all ages and abilities can get involved in creative



activities. They might need some adapting and some might be more appropriate than others but there is plenty of scope for something for everyone.

Creative activities are a familiar and enjoyable part of many organisations' work with children and young people so it can be an easy step to use creative methods to develop creative participation work with children and young people too.

### What creative participation can do

**Find out different kinds of information.** It can express not just the 'what' but also the thoughts and feelings children and young people have about a subject. For example songs, poems and raps, or drawings and paintings can express feelings and emotions that are hard to talk about.

**Help plan and evaluate services.** Many consultations and evaluations use creative ways to gather and analyse information about services and use the findings from this to plan better services for children and young people. Children and young people receiving a service are the best people to help decide if it is useful and how it could be better.

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## **Explore difficult or sensitive issues.**

Creative methods can help discussion by 'distancing' an issue so that discussion is not about personal experience. Developing a drama about bullying or making posters about racism or sexism can provide a safe space for children and young people to put forward their ideas and experiences, explore how issues like peer pressure affect behaviour and say how they think these issues should be dealt with.

**Include a range of views.** Children and young people will have different experiences and views about issues. Creative methods can allow the expression, exploration and presentation of differing views even within the same creative space. For example, children and young people of all ages and abilities can contribute to a photographic collage or a community map.

**Challenge stereotypes about children and young people.** It is not uncommon for young people to be portrayed in the media and within local communities in negative ways. Creative methods can help children and young people to challenge stereotypes among themselves and encourage more understanding of diversity and difference.

**Engage the hard to reach.** Creative activities have proved to be a successful way to engage children and young people who are not part of or have rejected mainstream services. For example, youth offending teams, pupil referral units and secure children's homes have found that creative activities can inspire and interest young people, get them involved and often help them re-engage with learning, education and their community.

**Present information and views in different ways.** The creative work produced by children and young people can often be a refreshing change from a written report and be much more memorable too. It can reach out to and be understood by many more people – old and young, professional, family and community.

**Provide opportunities for social and emotional development.** Creative activities also offer unique opportunities for

children and young people to learn about communication and getting on with others as well as provide different ways to express feelings and emotions. Children and young people often experience pleasure, delight and satisfaction whilst engaging in creative activity and such positive experiences can only enhance well-being.

## How children and young people can benefit from creative participation

**By learning new skills.** Creative activities provide opportunities for the development of new skills.

**By expressing themselves.** It helps to give children and young people the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings. This is a crucial part of participation work as often children and young people do not believe their views are important, will be understood or acted upon.

**By learning how to communicate and negotiate.** Involvement in creative activities often includes communicating and sometimes practising how to deal with situations. For example, a drama about personal relationships might explore how to deal with peer pressure.

**By increasing their confidence and self-esteem.** Children and young people learn that their views and opinions are important, worthy of respect and that it is possible for them to put their views forward, be listened to and have those views acted upon.

**By acquiring a sense of achievement.** Many children and young people are proud of their creative achievements and so are their parents and carers. Working towards goals provides opportunities for children and young people to gain recognition for their work and can contribute to learning profiles, CV's and future employment prospects.

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**By being included and involved.** Much creative work takes place in groups and requires groups to work together, this can be a great opportunity to learn how to get on with others and helps to build relationships and create feelings of belonging.

## How organisations can benefit from creative participation

**By learning** what children and young people's views are on a range of issues including the children's services they use.

**By keeping** children and young people's views at the heart of the service.

**By demonstrating** in a practical way how the organisation is putting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into practice.

**By showing** how children and young people in the organisation are achieving the Every Child Matters outcomes especially the '*enjoying and achieving*' and '*making a positive contribution*' outcomes.

**By collecting** evidence about children and young people's views and their participation that can inform evaluation, monitoring and inspection requirements.

## Steps to get started

Below are some actions that you can take to help you prepare for and get started using creative arts to enhance your participation work.

### Step 1. Review the creative artwork and participation work already done within your organisation.

- Is there any scope for bringing this work together more?
- Could you use creative methods to help evaluate the work of the organisation or to put forward children and young people's views on issues important to them?
- If the organisation is new to creative methods then start with something small scale, have a look at the Find Out More section on page 11 and 12 to get some ideas and talk to people in other organisations who have experience of working in this way.

### Step 2. Get the people you need on board.

- Talk to managers, staff and volunteers to gain their support and then talk to the children and young people about what they might like to do in terms of participation and choice of creative activity.
- Think about doing 'taster' type activities to help give everyone an idea of what it is like. It can be hard to say 'I'd like to

make a video about...' if you have never even taken a photograph. Sometimes children and young people say they cannot do something or 'I'm not any good at...' but often they have never had a chance to try it and may need encouragement to have a go.

- Check out local sources of help such as youth arts workers or children and young people's arts agencies and involve them early.
- Think about who the work is going to influence and where and how it will be presented.

### Step 3. Start planning the activity or taster sessions.

- Get children and young people involved in the planning if possible.
- Be clear what the children and young people are going to focus on and why and what the outcomes of their work will be. Make sure the children and young people are clear about this too.
- Be practical. Creative activities need the right resources available plus space and time – do not under estimate this, it

usually takes longer than expected.

- Give some thought to how you could record progress – maybe a graffiti wall, take photographs and build in some time to review and evaluate with the group at the end. Be clear with the children and young people about how this will be used.
- Always consider health and safety – most activities can be done safely with planning and careful management.

#### **Step 4. Review the activity with the children and young people.**

- What was good about it?
- What would they do differently next time?
- Did they agree on any important messages?
- Who are the messages for?
- How can they can make sure they are heard?
- What happens next?

#### **Step 5. Consider how to build on the work**

- Is there a way this can be shared with others, with the children and young people's permission and involvement?
- If the children and young people thought it was successful, would they like to do more and what would they like to focus on?
- Find out about local arts projects through your local arts development officer. Sometimes by working together you can access funding to do more ambitious work.
- Encourage the children and young people to get involved in the future planning. Successful creative partnerships ensure that children and young people have ownership of the project: if it is theirs from the beginning they will learn to take responsibility, build skills, negotiate and work together to achieve their objective.

## The experience is as important as what is created

What happens during a creative activity is just as important as what is produced. For example, a group who work together on developing a drama or a series of songs might spend a lot of time discussing and agreeing the plot or the lyrics. This development of ideas, negotiation and sharing of views can be a powerful experience for those involved. Case Study Two (see page 8) describes how music is being used by young people to describe their feelings and views often in difficult circumstances.

The final product might not demonstrate all that children and young people have given

and gained and/or the children and young people's production skills may be developing. This can lead to disappointment that somehow the final product is not as good as they thought it would be. Children and young people should be supported so that they do not feel let down and can see that they are developing ideas as well as creative skills. Reflection on experiences, successes, disappointments and learning is important. Case Study One (see page 6) describes an activity where reflection about the final product and how to improve it is a key part of the activity. Groups need to review their progress as they go along so that there is constant feedback about achievement and development. This also ensures children and young people can reflect on what they have learnt and produced, and consider how to refine it next time.

## Examples of creative participation

Below are some examples of how creative arts have been used to involve children and young people. They also show how participation has been able to effect change in areas of their lives they feel are important and how it has increased other people's awareness of certain aspects of their lives.

### **Presenting young people's experiences**

A group of young fathers made a CD about their experiences of being a dad. They wrote the lyrics, sang, played the instruments, did the mixing and sound production, and designed the CD cover.

### **Contributing to training professionals**

Young people created, performed and filmed a drama about running away and leaving home. They were all young care leavers or had run away from home in the past. They made the video to show other young people that running away can bring even more problems than the ones they thought they were leaving behind. Once made they thought it could also explain to social workers and foster carers how young people feel and what happens when young people are on the streets alone. It is now a training resource.

### **Presenting positive images of children and young people**

A group of looked after young people worked with an arts agency to organise and manage a conference for adults. They worked with graphic artists, designers and event managers deciding the management of the day. Adult delegates commented on their high level of professionalism and care.

### **Exploring sensitive issues**

Young people in an inner city area made a video about their experiences of being victims of crimes perpetrated by other young people and their concerns about their safety, especially on the streets. They also tackled the lack of serious concern about this by adults and professionals such as teachers, police and local services.

### **Including children and young people in consultations and developments about their community**

Children and young people worked with architects and planners to influence the design of a new housing development.

### **Keeping track of progress**

Young carers kept scrapbooks or journals about a carers support group they are part of. They could record whatever they wished in any way they liked and it could be private or shared. The poems, descriptions, cartoons, doodles and mementos helped them to review what they had enjoyed or found difficult and what had supported them.

### **Challenging other young people's views**

A series of posters and postcards about homophobia were designed by gay and lesbian young people and distributed to youth clubs to promote discussion and raise awareness.

### **Providing information about a children or young people's service**

Secondary school students who are part of a primary to secondary school transition project designed a leaflet and made a video about the project for primary school children and their parents and invited them to get involved in the project.

## Providing information for young people

Young people researched sexual health services in their area and talked to other young people to find out the kind of information young people want to know. They designed a young people's sexual health booklet and website and made sure it was distributed in places young people will see it.

## Case Study One

# The Big Idea:

## Involving children and young people in the built environment

The Big Idea project worked with young people to help them develop skills to be involved in making decisions about the built environment they live, work and play in. A toolkit has been produced from the experiences of young people and workers involved in three pilot projects. It is a practical guide to support workers aiming to involve young people in other built environment projects.

A 'Design Challenge' activity involved the young people in designing and building a temporary shelter using plastic sheeting, bamboo canes, string and parcel tape. Each group was asked to ensure that their shelter:

- Allowed all the group to sit under it – at the same time!
- Was waterproof – and they had to test it to prove this with a bucket of water...
- Used only the materials provided.
- Was freestanding – no help from walls, doors or nearby furniture.

Young people found the activity fun and engaging. The group had to discuss, negotiate and agree how to build their shelter so they learnt how to work together and come to decisions as a group.

Once the shelters were complete and the groups had compared their finished products, they talked about how they could have improved on their shelter design. They also talked through their experience of working together as a team and how they had participated in making the decisions need to build their shelter.

The activity requires minimal resources but maximum participation and is often used as a warm up activity for new projects/groups or to support team building with young people getting to know each other.

Find out more about The Big Idea and similar activities at [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

# How to use creative arts

## Professional artists

The quality of children and young people's creative work and the experience of creating it can be enhanced and extended by working with professional artists.

Professional artists can offer access to a wider range of arts and media and provide learning and mentoring for children and young people to develop skills and produce high quality artwork. Local arts agencies may be able to provide access to professional studios and equipment and the support to use them. Children and young people benefit from this by extending the range of their experience, and by increased opportunities to develop skills and produce a high quality arts product. For some children and young people developing a network of positive role models will be a great gain.

## Working with artists and creative arts organisations

Artists and creative arts organisations bring invaluable expertise and skill about the arts. Workers involved with the children and young people bring essential knowledge and skills about working with young people – this is why co-facilitated projects often work well. As with any project it is the planning and preparation that help to make it successful. Artists need to understand why the creative participation project is being undertaken and what it is aiming to do, including how it might be intended to effect change or influence decision-making.

### Here are some top tips drawn from successful creative arts partnership projects:

- 1.** Find artists who are trained and experienced in working with children and young people as well as skilled in their art form. They should always have a Criminal Records Bureau check completed and be aware of your policies and procedures such as child protection.
- 2.** Consider and agree how workers from the organisation will work with the artists. Working together as co-facilitators is a common practical approach but make sure you are clear about who is responsible for what – such as managing children's behaviour, getting to and from venues, permissions to attend, numbers of children attending, who is responsible if children do not turn up etc.
- 3.** Be clear about the aims of the work and provide the artists with as much information as possible about the project including how the final work will be used e.g. presented to local councillors or to be used at a conference. Always provide a clear brief about what the artist or arts agency is expected to do.
- 4.** Be clear with the children and young people about what the project will involve and their roles and responsibilities within it. Encourage and support them to be involved in planning.
- 5.** Make sure the space and time available are appropriate and the right equipment is to hand. Arts projects can be very engaging and children and young people can feel frustrated if they do not have enough time to complete them.
- 6.** Think about evaluation at the beginning. How will the organisation, the children and young people know if this project has been successful and made a difference? Artists will need to consider how to evaluate the quality of the art work and arts practice.

Look at *Providing the Best* in the Find Out More section on page 10 for more information.

## Case Study Two

### Reaching the Parts: Mobile digital music project

Oxfordshire Youth Arts Partnership has been running a mobile digital music production project for young people at risk for the past six years. They provide high-end DJ-ing and studio quality Apple Macs and software with a tutor experienced in working with the most vulnerable young people. Settings have included Young Offenders Institutions, fields, youth clubs, pupil referral units, village halls and children's homes. Young people have consistently rated the project highly because it meets them where they are, and they are instantly able to make the kind of music they are into, from two-step garage to grime!

This project has enabled young people to have their say on a variety of issues. In Huntercombe Young Offenders Institute young men were able to surprise their workers with expressions of their feelings. The music young people have made has informed Children's Services through films and performances. Making music has also been used as part of a creative package in consultation exercises where young people have been enabled to make decisions about services they access and projects they wish to participate in.

Find out more about Reaching the Parts at: [www.oyap.org.uk](http://www.oyap.org.uk)

## Safety and ethics

Creative activities provide opportunities for feelings and experiences to be shared and explored and can provide a safe environment for this to happen. For example, sensitive issues can be distanced by creating a story that explores what might happen in an imaginary situation rather than the real situation of someone in the group. If personal experiences are shared then boundaries must be set about how that information is used within and outside of the group. Care must always be taken to make sure that safe boundaries exist. Artists and children and young people's workers need to make sure children and young people do not feel exposed and that views and opinions can be challenged and explored as ideas and behaviour without becoming personal. It is not always possible to assess how a creative activity may spark a memory of a difficult experience for a child or young person, but there should always be an adult who can talk with the child or young person and find them more support if needed.

## Permissions to use artworks

It is important to discuss and agree with the children and young people involved how any art works created will be used. Some art works have a specific purpose. For example, Case Study Three on page 9 describes groups from two regions in England coming together to give their views on a government green paper. From the outset they knew that their work would be made anonymous and shared in a final report and had given their permission for this to happen.

Other art works are made by children and young people for themselves. Care must be taken with sensitive work that describes, for example, a child's feelings or a young person's experience. They may not wish others to see it. If it could be useful to share with a wider audience the children and young people who created it must give permission.

Using photographic or video work of children and young people needs careful

consideration (see the How To Safeguard Children and Young People guide at [www.participationworks.org.uk](http://www.participationworks.org.uk)) and permission should always be obtained for use in any reports, websites or documents. In the case of children and young people under 16, this should be from the parent or guardian – and of course the child or young person too.

Gaining permission to use artworks is important for children and young people's developing understanding of participation. Their views and work will be presented to other people and may influence decisions. They should be given feedback about how their work and views have been received and what has changed as a result.

## Funding the work

Creative participation work does not have to be expensive and can often be done within existing budgets. However, it is possible to access funding, particularly funding for the development of art-based work, which can also support participation work. Local creative arts agencies may be able to act as partners to put together funding bids so it is worth considering working with them as it may enable more ambitious projects to be undertaken. They may also be aware of potential sources of funding for arts projects.

### Case Study Three

## Myrtle Theatre Company: Care Matters drama workshop

On behalf of the Healthy Care Programme the Myrtle Theatre Company consulted with looked after children and young people from two government regions – the South West and the East Midlands – about the Government Green Paper for looked after children: Care Matters.

The children and young people, aged 8 to 19, took part in day-long drama based workshops which were divided into two groups: for 8 to 11s and 12 to 19s. The children and young people were accompanied by workers and carers whom they knew. A specially written play introduced the themes of the Green Paper and interactive drama based activities continued throughout the day. The activities enabled the groups to put forward their views and thoughts – they could do this physically by acting them out as well as describing them. This then became the final act of the earlier play.

The result was a report collating the opinions and comments of the 38 children and young people who took part. The report was sent to the two Government Offices Regions to inform their regional response and looked after children's regional strategy. It was also sent as part of the Healthy Care Programme's response to the consultation on the Care Matters proposals. A children and young people's version of this report was also prepared and shared with the children and young people who took part. Some of the comments from the consultation reports were included in the Care Matters: Time for Change White Paper and demonstrated how children and young people's views were heard, listened to and will be acted upon.

Find out more about Myrtle at: [www.myrtletheatrecompany.co.uk](http://www.myrtletheatrecompany.co.uk)

Find out more about the Healthy Care Programme at: [www.ncb.org.uk/healthycare](http://www.ncb.org.uk/healthycare)

# How to use creative arts

## Find Out More

This list of publications and websites should help you to find more detailed information and follow up areas of interest.

### Useful resources

#### **Are you listening! A toolkit for evaluating Children's Fund Services with children and young people.**

Cambridgeshire Children's Fund and Save the Children (2005). Tried and tested activities, many with a creative focus and descriptions of how they were used. Available to download from:

<http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/social/children/fund/>

(accessed 9 October 2007)

#### **Building creative partnerships a handbook for schools - Could your school be even more creative?**

Creative Partnerships (2007). Although written for schools, it can help any organisation that is seeking to develop creative partnerships. Available to download from:

<http://www.creative-partnerships.com/handbook>

(accessed 9 October 2007)

#### **ENYAN Creative Youth Consultation & Participation Toolkit.**

ENYAN (2007). This guide forms part of ENYAN's current campaign to raise awareness of the arts as a tool for effective youth consultation and includes 12 case studies. Available from: [enyand2@artsworld.org.uk](mailto:enyand2@artsworld.org.uk).

#### **The Evaluator's Cookbook: Participatory Evaluation Exercises.**

National Evaluation of the Children's Fund (2005). Many of the activities in this collection are arts and craft based and require only minimal resources and equipment. Available to download from: <http://www.ne-cf.org/news.asp?section=000100040004&monthInView=2006/5/1&id=1074>

(accessed 9 October 2007)

#### **Keeping Arts Safe: Protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults involved in arts activities.**

Arts Council, England and NSPCC (2005). Available to download from:

[http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/documents/publications/keepingsafepdf\\_phpS4UNyh.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/documents/publications/keepingsafepdf_phpS4UNyh.pdf) (accessed 9 October 2007)

**Listen Up!** Mencap (2003). A toolkit of multimedia resources to help children and young people 5 to 19 years with a learning disability complain about the services they use.

Available to download from:

[http://www.mencap.org.uk/html/listen\\_up/listen\\_up.asp](http://www.mencap.org.uk/html/listen_up/listen_up.asp)

(accessed 9 October 2007)

#### **Participation: Spice it up! Practical tools for engaging children and young people in planning and consultations.**

Save the Children and Dynamix (2003). Participation activities with a creative twist but you do not need to be a professional artist to use them. Available from [www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

#### **Positive pointers for artists. Using the arts to engage young people at risk.**

Arts Council England (2006). A useful reference for artists and arts organisations working with young people at risk. Available to download from:

[http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/documents/information/positivepointers\\_phpYUOyvtv.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/documents/information/positivepointers_phpYUOyvtv.pdf)

(accessed 9 October 2007)

**Providing the Best.** Arts Council England (2006). Guidance for artists and arts organisations on assessing the quality of activities provided for children and young people.

Available to download from:

[http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/documents/publications/providingthebestpdf\\_phpJq0DJ9.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/documents/publications/providingthebestpdf_phpJq0DJ9.pdf)

(accessed 9 October 2007)

#### **Youth Arts in Practice – A guide to evaluation.**

YALP, NIACE and The National Youth Agency (2006). Includes case studies of youth arts projects involving young people in their evaluation. Available from: The Young Adults Learning Partnership. Tel: 0116 2047071.

# How to use creative arts

## Useful websites

[www.accessart.org.uk](http://www.accessart.org.uk)

Free downloadable art resources and workshops to use with children and young people on a range of subjects.

[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

Information about the Arts Council including its strategy for children and young people, regional support, downloadable publications, funding sources, regional arts action plans and links to local community arts projects.

[www.artsline.org.uk](http://www.artsline.org.uk)

Disability access information service to the arts, leisure and entertainment.

[www.artspider.org.uk](http://www.artspider.org.uk)

A website for learning disability arts.

[www.bbc.co.uk/blast](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blast)

BBC Blast inspires 13 to 19s to get involved in creative activities. Ideas, tips, newsletters, message boards and opportunities to showcase creative work online.

[www.e-mailout.org](http://www.e-mailout.org)

An online source of information about participatory and community arts plus a magazine.

[www.enyan.co.uk](http://www.enyan.co.uk)

English National Youth Arts Network. A membership organisation which aims to raise the profile and support for youth arts in England.

[www.11million.org.uk](http://www.11million.org.uk)

Website for the Children's Commissioner for England with information about campaigns, issues and ideas for participation work.

[www.ncb.org.uk/healthycare](http://www.ncb.org.uk/healthycare)

Website for the Healthy Care Programme includes a section of case studies of creative activities involving looked after children and young people.

[www.show.me.uk](http://www.show.me.uk)

A museums and galleries guide for children and young people with information about what is on where, virtual guides and lots of fun games and activities to do online and an interactive area for children to show their art work.



# How to use creative arts

**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](http://www.participationworks.org.uk) to access comprehensive information on policy, practice, training and innovative ideas.

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Case studies: The Big Idea, National Children's Bureau

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## Participation Works

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Enquiry line: 0845 603 6725

