CWDC
Children's Workforce
Development Council

'One big wheel':
young people's participation
in service, design, development
and delivery

Sharing our experience

This report is part of CWDC's Practitioner-Led Research (PLR) programme. Now in its third year, the programme gives practitioners the opportunity to explore, describe and evaluate ways in which services are currently being delivered within the children's workforce.

Working alongside mentors from Making Research Count (MRC), practitioners design and conduct their own small-scale research and then produce a report which is centred around the delivery of Integrated Working.

The reports are used to improve ways of working, recognise success and provide examples of good practice.

This year, 41 teams of practitioners completed projects in a number of areas including:

- Adoption
- Bullying
- CAF
- Child trafficking
- Disability
- Early Years
- Education Support
- Parenting
- Participation
- Social care
- Social work
- Travellers
- Youth

The reports have provided valuable insights into the children and young people's workforce, and the issues and challenges practitioners and service users face when working in an integrated environment. This will help to further inform workforce development throughout England.

This practitioner-led research project builds on the views and experiences of the individual projects and should not be considered the opinions and policies of CWDC.

'*One big wheel*': young people's participation in service, design, development and delivery

Natasha James

Abstract

How do professionals and agencies seek the views of young people moving from participation to the implementation of service design and delivery? The research involved six white British young people from the Camborne, Pool and Redruth (CPR) area of Cornwall who, with the support of a senior social worker within the Schools Multi-Agency Resource Team (SMART) and other members of the team, became researchers themselves.

The young people were involved in the process of designing questions and conducting semi-structured interviews with agencies such as Children's Social Care, the police and the fire service to ask how young people are involved in service design and delivery. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, creative and solution focused methods were employed to identify a young person's perception of services.

The research process highlighted some surprising examples of service delivery for young people from agencies other than those set up to deliver 'youth services'. Why has this developed and what recommendations can be made for further service design and delivery on front-line and strategic levels to achieve a true model of integrated practice, ensuring young people have a voice and are heard?

Natasha James

Introduction

I am a senior social worker within the Schools Multi-Agency Resource Team (SMART), with representatives from education, health and social care working within the primary and secondary sectors of the Camborne, Pool and Redruth (CPR) Cluster schools. The deprivation index rank for this area is 87 of 354 UK districts – lower rank number indicates higher level of multiple deprivations. The aim of SMART is to prevent fixed term and permanent exclusions, ensure positive experiences of education, improve social inclusion and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, thus benefiting the communities of CPR and embracing the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda.

SMART delivers an innovative early intervention targeted service working with local and national initiatives and in partnership with families, schools, agencies and communities to achieve optimal outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. The SMART 'child-centred' and ecological approach, viewing the child or young person in the wider context of the family and community, is a model for integrated multi-agency working, promoting social inclusion and emotional wellbeing to influence long-term systemic change. The ecological approach has meant working positively with the wider community and partner agencies to promote sustainability and community cohesion.

Since 2005 SMART have developed different approaches and interventions to positively engage children and young people from five to 16 years who experience a variety of difficulties both at home and school. These include individual work with children, young people and families, group work, parent support, behaviour support, training, community work, learning mentor support and primary mental health support in addition to working with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the SMART Service Request procedure, to provide a co-ordinated and integrated response. SMART have encouraged and supported the involvement of children and young people, for example through school holiday programmes, as part of the extended services agenda. Following the summer activities a group of young people have created their own tailor-made group, in a child-led initiative, with the aim of continuing support. This has enabled the young people to apply for their own funding and one young person has represented his school and community by presenting at the International Forum for Child Welfare (2008). It was through working with these young people over the last three and a half years, that the idea of integrated working from a young person's perspective within the context of the wider community, felt like an appropriate proposal for the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and Practitioner-Led Research (PLR).

Aims of the project

The original proposal set out to focus on a specific geographical community involving a young person and his family. However, this developed through the young people's participation as 'researchers' into a focus on how young people are involved in service delivery through the process of participation

The aim of the PLR project was to achieve a greater understanding of how professionals and agencies involve young people in their service development and delivery. The agencies included Children's Social Care (CSC), the Education Welfare Service (EWS), the police and community based organizations. I intended to explore young people's participation, listening to young people's views, while providing opportunities for the young person's voice to be heard in the context of service planning and delivery.

To achieve this understanding I facilitated an opportunity for young people to write their own questions and conduct their own interviews with professionals, asking how they work with young people. The young people were those currently working with SMART and who attend the three secondary schools within CPR. The group initially consisted of six members, three male and three female, all aged between 13 and 15 years. All of the young people were recruited through a discussion with both the young people and their parents. In total three young people undertook the 'face to face' interviews and all of the young people involved define themselves as white British.

It was essential for all the young people involved in the PLR to fully participate using the guidance of young people's participation. I was guided by Participation Works and Hear by Right Building Standards resources. 'Children and young people have a right to have a say on all issues that affect them and for these views to be taken seriously' (UNCRC Article 12). It was hoped that this piece of PLR would provide an insight into integrated working *which focuses on enabling and encouraging professionals to work together effectively to deliver frontline services* (ECM 2004).

The PLR also involved other members of SMART: Family Support Workers, Parent Support Advisers and a Trainee Educational Psychologist; therefore providing opportunities for the team, while focusing on young people's participation and completing *the circle*, by turning research into practice with the involvement of young people. It is essential to ensure that involvement and consultation is a continuous dialogue, through undertaking consultation and feeding back the findings to local strategic partners and those responsible for service delivery. By involving young people I felt there may be recommendations for service development and integrated working practice both locally and nationally.

Context

My PLR is set within the context of my practice as a social worker and as a professional within a multi-agency team. I work within the frameworks of law, legislation and policy which include:

> ➢ *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (1999 and recently updated).
> ➢ The Education Act 2002 and the Children Act 1989. The Children Act 2004 provides guidance on the 'duty to cooperate' and the legal framework from which the transformation of children's services, as set out in ECM with the five positive outcomes, the Change for Children programme, with integration at every level. The ECM agenda with the five positive outcomes (Revised April 2008).
> ➢ The ECM integrated working framework including the Information Sharing and Assessment (ISA) Common Assessment Framework for the early identification of children and young people with additional needs, developed from the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families* (2000).
> ➢ The Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Human Rights Act 1998. The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 2001, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. The Children and Young People's Plan. The Children's Plan: building brighter futures, Guidance on the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), the Integrated Children's System (ICS) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), *A 21st Century for Schools.*

With reference to participation, I have also been guided by:

Theory of Participation (Treseder 1997); Artstein's 'Ladder of Participation' (1969);Hear by Right, Self assessment tool with the seven standards framework, Participation Works, Barnardo's; Children and Young People Now – participation works charter; Save the Children – Practice Standards in Children's Participation; Ruth Sinclair, Involving Children and Young People in Developing Social Care, National Children's Bureau, Sinclair (2004), (Carr 2004) and *Consulting Pupils* (Flutter and Rudduck 2004).

Methodology

For the purpose of PLR I used a range of methods from interviews, which were the primary method, to Solution Focused Brief Therapy approaches with the process of 'scaling' to Rich Pictures. The PLR could be viewed as 'action research', with an ethnographic interview approach which is a commonly used

interviewing process employed by research clinicians (Kuehl and Newfield 1991; Kuehl, Newfield and Joanning 1990). A total of six young people were involved with the PLR with three conducting the 'face to face' interviews. However, all of the young people assisted in writing the interview questions for the Police/PSCO, Education Welfare Service, Community Neighbourhood Manager, Fire Officer and CSC Social Worker. The interviews were undertaken with the young people and were semi-structured with narrative questions. The process involved initial meetings, formation of a young persons' focus group, designing questions, visits to meet with professionals to undertake the interviews, analysis of the interview responses and feedback sessions with the young people.

In an initial meeting with the young people they listed agencies and/or professionals who work with young people, these included: social workers, education welfare officers (EWO), learning mentors and the police. From this list the young people were asked to select those who they felt it would be appropriate to interview. Questions for CSC would ask 'Why did you want to become a social worker?' and 'Where do young people sit in meetings to facilitate their involvement?' The questions for all agencies were general and not case specific and I worked alongside the young people at all times, accompanying them to and sitting in on the interviews. However, the young people didn't wish to conduct face to face interviews with children's social workers. The young people felt that social workers seem to work very hard but were unclear about what they did and had heard negative comments from their peers. The young people were happy for their questions to be emailed to the social workers, and I facilitated this on their behalf, although the social workers were actually quite excited to be involved in the PLR and had hoped to be interviewed.

Informed by the Hear by Right framework and the three approaches to developing a Hear by Right Map and Plan, Approach C – *children and young people take the lead with support from staff.* The idea of the PLR was to involve the young people as researchers. I wanted to establish the full involvement of young people in conducting aspects of the research while taking responsibility for the process. There were preparation sessions; for example, how to conduct interviews, non-verbal communication and practice sessions in asking the questions. There were regular meetings and support sessions with the young people to create an opportunity to feed back to the group and discuss any findings. I also provided briefing and debriefing sessions, before and after undertaking the interviews, to ensure the young people were given the opportunity to reflect on the interviews and for me to check they were emotionally safe. The young people also agreed an end 'product', a visual representation of their research experiences, using photos taken both individually with their own disposable camera and with a group camera to create a scrapbook.

As a method of audio narrative data collection I completed the content analysis of the interviews by transcribing all of the recordings and pulling out the salient themes. The first step of this process is data collection audio tapes and then moving on to thematic analysis to combine and catalogue related

patterns into sub-themes. Themes are identified by 'bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which are often meaningless when viewed alone' (Leininger 1985: 60). I felt the range of approaches were inclusive for the young people, using pictures, scales, questions and a Dictaphone to record the data.

Due to the involvement of young people I was alert to ethical considerations, including informed consent, parental consent, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, both for the young people and for the professionals involved. The young people who agreed to be part of this research project met with me to discuss the issue of consent and this was also checked before each interview. I sought permission to record and transcribe (selective transcription) the interviews from professionals by providing written information and guidance to clarify confidentiality and anonymity. In respect of any potentially harmful situations (exclusion information) it was made clear that the PLR was not about 'investigating' practice; however, if harm or inappropriate behaviour was uncovered in the research it was agreed that I would check the material and findings and seek the appropriate advice and support through my line management structure and those in place through the county systems. This did not occur during the PLR. The ethical and research governance issues were addressed by obtaining permission from Cornwall County Council. My own ethical practice was also informed by my social work training and practice.

Findings

From the initial meetings with young people the solution focused approach was used to identify how they rated professionals using the method of scaling. The solution focused approach is commonly attributed to the body of work of different therapists and authors, mainly: Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg, Bill O'Hanlon, and Michelle Weiner-Davis (De Jong and Berg 2002). Solution focused therapy work supports clients to identify and build on strengths. Within the context of this research, the scaling approach was used to enable the young people to grade the professionals, to celebrate what they did right, and break down small, concrete specific steps to help professionals do it better next time. The young people were asked to score professionals from 1 to 10 to illustrate their perceptions of professionals/agencies in how they work with young people and examples can be seen below.

Agency	Young persons' perception/comments	Score 1–10
Social worker	'They work very hard' 'They need to be more fun' We hear 'they take children away from their families and don't help	10 7 3

	at all'	
EWO	'They should be at school more, they have education in their name but why don't we see them?' '"Help more children, talk to us and help with behaviour problems, listen more'	2 5
Police	'Listen more'	7
Learning mentor (non-teaching support staff based within schools)	'"They teach you' '"They help when you're in trouble and explain things'	10 6
The Community Manager	'We would like more talks about crime' 'They take us on trips; they help and they sort out behaviour problems where I live'	5 and 8
Fire Service	'"They are good at saving people's lives'	6 -10
SMART	'Cause they do all sorts of cool things'; 'they help me and my family'; 'they are nice people, they help me and support me and the summer activities are great'	10
School nurse	'Be in school more'	5
Youth worker	'Loads of fun' 'listen and work well together'	10

Interestingly, when I asked the young people if they had ever met a youth worker the response was 'no', although they believed everyone in SMART were youth workers and professionals in agencies such as the Youth Offending Team and the community managers were also youth workers. The young people cited 'getting on with each other' and 'listening to young people' as key qualities for adults who work with young people. As Egan (1975: 107) states 'All communication skills are essential tools for developing relationships.' The Common core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce Development describes six areas: effective communication and engagement with children, young people and families; knowledge and understanding of child and young person development; safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child; supporting transitions; multi-agency

working, and sharing information; all of which require professionals to work across thresholds and boundaries and, most importantly, engage with young people.

In transcribing the interviews and receiving responses by email, where the face to face interviews were not possible, I was able to draw out the main presenting themes. The content analysis of the interviews clearly indentifies:

> ➢ 'Other agencies' were far and reaching, including health, social care, adult services, housing and the wider aspects of town councils and strategic partners.
> ➢ SMART is an agency to support young people, parents, and offer direct work and group opportunities for young people.
> ➢ Working within schools is crucial, school visits, speaking in assemblies, taking PSHE lessons, talks, road safety projects, community events.
> ➢ SMART were seen as the link between schools and families.
> ➢ Building relationships with young people was important.
> ➢ Making sure young people understand why the professional is involved and giving them the opportunity to ask questions.
> ➢ Partnership working is crucial in helping professionals to fulfil their role and to identify support outside of schools.

All professionals interviewed clearly had excellent communication skills in relating to young people and were positively received by the young people. Throughout the interview process I observed that the young people maintained eye contact, one young person ordered the questions to work for her and all of the young people appeared professional and controlled throughout, even when they didn't agree with something, they didn't let it show.

Interventions and approaches used by the agencies interviewed to facilitate young people's participation:

> ➢ Questionnaires
> ➢ Activities provided in the community and trips
> ➢ Bluetooth messages, posters, flyers, bag drops with schools.
> ➢ Youth residents' association and meetings
> ➢ Newsletters with a youth section
> ➢ Views of the young person in writing
> ➢ Advocates
> ➢ Discussion and feedback throughout the process of consultation to planning and delivery were seen as key aspects of the work with young people
> ➢ Invitations to multi-agency meetings to meet their needs
> ➢ Meetings with young people on their own and outside of school
> ➢ 'Litter picking' in the community is a way of earning trips and also for establishing 'respect' for the environment

- ➢ Discos
- ➢ Fund-raising
- ➢ Fun days
- ➢ Young people listened to and their views acted upon in their best interests within safeguarding
- ➢ Consider age and understanding of a young person
- ➢ Home visits
- ➢ Communication is imperative to the development of work with young people: 'We listen to young people and they often cite the fact that nobody listens to them, as a reason for not engaging.'

Key themes identified for future work

- ➢ Agencies would like young people to be directly involved in influencing the service, having a say in how we work and what can help or hinder.
- ➢ We would like to update our leaflets, making them young person friendly.
- ➢ CSC would like to involve young people in more direct work and group work which would involve them in having a voice.
  While young people identified social workers as deserving a '10' because they work very hard, the social workers themselves cited working hard, pressures of the job, staffing, time-scales, targets and deadlines, limit, and often prevent, them from spending time with young people; yet they stated that the opportunity to work with young people was one of the motivating factors to joining the profession.
- ➢ The Fire Service would like to strengthen partnership working and work with communities on a larger scale.
- ➢ The community teams would like to see more residents youth association work and activities within the community.
- ➢ The young people all stated they would like to see professionals in school more often, including the school nurse, who they felt provided a good service and made them feel safe, to the police and the EWO.

Surprises

Young people identified that the Fire Service and police are delivering a range of activities for young people. The Fire Service run a programme called Supporting Community Values which enables them to work with young people, families, and communities. The police deliver activities such as tag rugby, football, sports activity projects, police cadets and generally enjoy spending lots of time with young people doing 'nice things' and not necessarily because they have come to police attention for doing 'bad things'.

Both services have established close links with schools and agencies and feel they have a positive community profile. The police felt the single point of contact in CPR is SMART 'to look at how we can engage with young people before they become involved in criminality, stopping young people from getting into trouble', with the process of restorative justice seen as an important preventative tool.

Using the method of 'Rich Pictures' which is set within the context of Soft Systems Methodology (SSM), as a means of representing the situation of concern, including elements which influence the problem, but which would not perhaps be picked up using more formal methods. The pictures are seen as artistic and individualistic expressions and therefore not 'right' or 'wrong' (Darzentuas, Darzentas and Spyrou 1994). What this did was highlight the wider community factors and how, when the community was less positive, the young person felt unsafe, worried and their dad felt 'stressed'. The community manager was seen as a key person in helping to turn this around and was illustrated in the picture, together with the police, as being key agencies who supported this transformation. The young people involved in the PLR all associated a strong alliance with 'place' and this had significance to young people in terms of where they live, where they go to school and where they spend their time. Communities Minister Sadiq Khan said the government had to get better at listening to young people: 'They play a crucial part in addressing issues facing their communities – from faith and race divisions to poverty and substance misuse' (Children and Young People Now, 27 January 2009).

Building relationships with young people and providing opportunities for young people to be consulted and involved in activity design were key for some agencies. Professionals relayed a commitment to their work and in working to achieve the best outcomes for young people. However, I also recognize there are exceptions and this experience may not be the same in other areas both locally and nationally. The interviews also identified that some professionals recognized the job itself can constrain how much time can be spent with young people. However, all professionals were clear in their commitment to young people and the ECM agenda which makes achieving best outcomes everyone's business, as demonstrated in the words of one professional:

> 'Support includes working with other agencies, young people, families and working together as one big wheel.'

Implications for practice

Interestingly the majority of agencies interviewed provide activities for young people which may have traditionally been provided by the youth service. However, in the eyes of the young people the majority of these professionals, other than those in uniform, are viewed as 'youth workers'. Therefore, has the ECM agenda made working with young people in this way everyone's priority,

rather than the expectation of one service, such as those set up specifically to work with young people?

The PLR has enabled me to achieve a greater understanding into what is happening both locally and nationally in respect of participation and integrated working. There has been an overwhelmingly positive response from professionals in participating in the research and I have strengthened partnership links with agencies who are already involved in young people's participation. This PLR has provided an opportunity for young people to participate in research which involved taking a lead and while there are opportunities for young people to be involved in participation activities such as youth forums, student councils and youth parliaments these young people are representative of the communities in which they live. It is essential to be inclusive so as to involve those vulnerable and socially excluded young people, who may not have access to participation nor be prioritized through specialist projects and will have the least opportunities to influence decision-making (Hear by Right).

SMART have developed a model which continues to build on integrated working practice. As a social worker within the team I feel very privileged to be able to work with vast numbers of young people, provide opportunities for consultation, participation and for young people to have a voice in our service development and delivery; for example, student voice sessions and the summer activities programmes, often working in partnership with the CPR Learning Space who also place young people at the heart of their work. The PLR has helped me to focus on further development ideas such as integrating our practice with the 5–16 age range, the 0–5 and the post-16 services, with the idea of an early intervention, integrated service being seamless through the key transitions in child/young people's lives. The CWDC identify that a multi-agency team provides scope to engage in work with universal services and a range of levels – not just with individual children and young people, but also small group, family and whole school work.

For the young people the PLR provided an opportunity to develop communication skills, strengthen relationships, and raise self-esteem, self-efficiency and build resilience, while also helping to raise aspirations and even their ambition.

> 'I've built my confidence ten times more'
> 'I have learnt how to make new friends'
> 'To keep up my courage and how to get on with people I don't know'

These young people may be viewed by some as 'hard to reach' and traditionally excluded from decision-making…to open up decision-making to children in a fair and equitable manner includes a commitment to welcome all children and young people however they look, dress or talk (Participation works *dealing with dilemmas and difficulties*).

Members of SMART reported that their confidence in addressing young people's participation had increased. In addition to supporting young people's

participation, the PLR has certainly enhanced my professional development and enabled me to achieve a greater insight into young people's participation in service design and delivery. I am also now very aware of the strategic priorities listed by the Council with Strategic Priority 1, *listening to and acting on the voices of children and young people,* and will make recommendations to my own agency to undertake the Hear by Right Self Assessment Tool to benefit young people, integrated working practice and the wider community. All of the agencies and workers involved had a different exposure to young people and an opportunity to be reflective. The research also helped to understand young people's perceptions of adults within professional roles.

Further to the PLR I would like to see more involvement of young people to represent their geographical and school communities to support community cohesion. I would also envisage the creation of a practitioner forum, to share good practice, overcome challenges and develop national, even international, links to highlight examples of good practice. The PLR will be presented at an event within CPR by inviting local strategic leads and professionals, and providing an opportunity for the young people to celebrate their achievements.

Conclusion

This piece of research is by no means a detailed data collection, rather a collection of salient themes identified by the young people and from the professional interviews. The process was just as important as the findings or outcomes, providing new opportunities for the young people. I feel this is a stepping stone for future work such as Student Voice which will continue to explore locality and integrated working from a young person's perspective. To conclude, the PLR has grown and developed and this organic process has enabled me to consider the wider implications of the findings and how this will be disseminated and ultimately celebrated. It has also inspired me to continue to develop my skills, build on the findings from the PLR and make recommendations to Cornwall for integrated working practice and young people's involvement, making participation part of everyday practice. As the 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy outlines, everyone working with children and young people should be ambitious, excellent, committed and respected. Let us hope that the systems and structures in which these professionals work enable young people to be fully involved in the strategy. I aim to take the participation of young people further and my vision is to see more, if not all, agencies within the county being involved in Hear by Right and using the Self Assessment Tool to map and plan, as:

> 'Participation is the process by which children and young people influence decision making which brings about change in them, others, their service and their communities.' (Hear by Right)

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The Children's Workforce Development Council leads change so that the thousands of people and volunteers working with children and young people across England are able to do the best job they possibly can.

We want England's children and young people's workforce to be respected by peers and valued for the positive difference it makes to children, young people and their families.

We advise and work in partnership with lots of different organisations and people who want the lives of all children and young people to be healthy, happy and fulfilling.