



THE BEACON SCHEME 2005 APPLICATION FORM

Please email your completed application by midday on Monday 5th September 2005 to: beacon.application@idea.gov.uk

Please ensure you have read the Beacon Scheme Application Brochure 2005 before completing your application. The brochure is available at <http://www.idea.gov.uk/beacons>

PART 1 – AUTHORITY INFORMATION	
Authority Name	City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
Beacon theme for which you are applying	Positive Youth Engagement (in the Community and Democratic Process)
Type of authority	Metropolitan District
Contact Name	Hannah Wyatt
Position/Job Title	Corporate Performance Projects Officer
Telephone	(01924) 305934
E-mail	hwyatt@wakefield.gov.uk
Postal Address	City of Wakefield MDC Town Hall Wood Street Wakefield
Post Code	WF1 2HQ
County	West Yorkshire
Region in which authority is located	Yorkshire & The Humber
Councillor with portfolio responsibility for the theme area (if relevant)	Councillor Wayne Jenkins
List any other themes under which you are applying for Beacon status in 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivery of Quality Services through Procurement• Valuing People
Do you agree to allow your application to be made available on the IDeA website once Beacon awards have been made?	Yes.
What is the geographical size of the authority in square kilometres?	340 sq km
What is the population of the area covered by the authority?	315,172
Authority's gross budget	£360.8m

PART 2 – THEME CRITERIA

1. Please summarise (in 1 or 2 paragraphs) the excellent practice for which you are seeking Beacon status.

In Wakefield, young people are at the heart of the design and delivery of services they receive. They are involved from the outset in determining the way they want to be involved, in planning the service and making innovative partnership arrangements. Senior officers and elected members are fully signed up to the view that by ensuring the participation of young people in service design and delivery, we will be better placed to provide services that meet their needs and the needs of their families. They know things adults do not and are best placed to comment on the services and support they need.

The key features of our engagement work with young people include:

- Use of a wide variety of innovative methods of involvement including conferences, focus groups, questionnaires, multi media through the Mix vehicle and targeted work through the corporate parenting strategy. We believe we must always use different ways of engagement – a single approach is restrictive, and our success is based on diversity of approaches.
- Fully embracing technology through the Young People's Service (YPS) website and the Children's Fund website, both of which have a section dedicated to the views of children and young people.
- A strong focus on groups and individuals who are difficult to access. The initial strategy "Involving Young People in the Democratic Process" has evolved and as it has done so it has engaged with more groups while the ethos of engagement has spread throughout the Council and its partners.
- Action on issues raised by young people has been taken wherever possible, but in every case feedback is made available on outcomes and results.

Engaging young people is now firmly integrated into the work of the Council and other key partners and the momentum continues. As a 15 year old male commented, "*It's good that the views of young people are being taken seriously.*" The success lies in the fact that everyone involved has been totally committed to the process and the results are becoming visible throughout the district.

2. Outline how you meet the six key criteria below (the criteria are explained in more detail in the Application Brochure 2005).

2.1 Outcomes (the tangible differences that have been achieved for your community)

Wakefield's engagement with children and young people is more than token consultation; it is about the process of involvement and engagement leading to active participation in the design and delivery of services. Our strategy for the Participation of Children and Young People, "Engaging with our Futures" has gained total agreement between partner organisations and each strives for the participative approach. Agreement in terminology between young people and policy makers has been a critical factor in the positive outcomes.

A number of tangible differences have been achieved:

- Young people are now making a difference in forming policy and delivery on sex education in schools. This area was first identified at a Young People's Conference sponsored by the Health Authority in 2001.

Young people said: *“Sex education should be given earlier, with better information, resources and unembarrassed teachers.”*

The Health Authority responded: *“We are passing on your comments to the education authority, seeking out better information, buying resources such as ‘virtual babies’ and offering training to teachers to enable them to feel more confident when teaching sex education.”*

- The **Wakies Watchdog Group** was formed in 2004. This was a new initiative, which recruited, selected and trained a group of young people from throughout the district to address issues of concern to them in terms of service delivery. The group also took up the theme of sex education and undertook their own research and presented their findings to school governors and the Wakefield District Partnership (WDP) which is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). They used their evidence to encourage governors to improve sex education provision in all schools across the District.
- Looked after young people have also been involved in developing a Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) policy for themselves and their peers and have produced a young person’s version of the policy. This has led to the appointment of a designated Sexual Health and Relationships worker.
- The 2001 conference also addressed issues concerning sexual health services for young people. The young people attending said, *“Options clinics could be better advertised, friendlier staff, attractive and more youthful in décor.”* The Health Authority responded by involving young people in the design of advertising and promotional materials, in developing staff training and advising on the design and décor. As a consequence the take up by young people in the centres has seen a continual increase and a higher rate of satisfaction.
- Concerns about the impact of Neighbourhood Patrollers and the way they deal with groups of young people was one of the issues raised by the Wakies Watchdog Group when they met with the WDP board members. The evidence presented by young people implied that they were being moved on for no apparent reason. Wakefield Council’s Chief Executive gave the commitment that this should not happen. This has led to a change in the way patrollers are trained and there is an ongoing dialogue between the Watchdog Group and the managers from the Neighbourhood Patrollers’ team to resolve this contentious issue.
- The development of a dedicated interactive Young People’s Service website www.wakiesworld.com allows in depth analysis and explanation of issues affecting young people as well as the chance for “blogging” and other interactive activities. There is also the children’s section of the Children’s Fund website which is aimed at children from five years upwards.
- Young people are a pivotal part of the ‘Fast Forward’ Community Strategy – the 25-year vision for the District. They are a key stakeholder group and were heavily involved in the consultation that led to the publication of the document. Their views were recorded on video and this evidence was influential in determining some of the content of the strategy. Through the Watchdog they have continued to be actively engaged in its implementation.
- **Wakies Check** has been established. This is a group of peer inspectors who have been recruited, selected and trained to carry out research, monitoring and evaluation of young people’s projects. Using the Ofsted criteria, their work has so far concentrated upon the Young People’s Service, looking at youth centres, detached and mobile projects and

other specific pieces of work including the development of a skateboard park. During their visits to projects they discuss provision with young people and the staff. Their results are placed on a statistical evaluation programme, which they follow up with feedback to the projects involved. Eight reports have been completed so far and all the evidence suggests how seriously the youth workers have taken the comments. This has led to major changes of programmes, of décor and equipment, and in some cases of staff attitudes.

- The **Mix It Project**, which focuses on community cohesion, is a hub for young people from city centre estates. A great deal of regeneration is taking place in Wakefield city centre and this project was set up because of a worry that one group in particular could take ownership of the issues at the expense of others. Young people from Lupset, Agbrigg and Eastmoor worked together on a project involving music and media and now work together as a core group. Now, when the future of the city centre is discussed they are a representative group.
- The development of **Wakies Shout**, a group made up of 13 –19 year olds, is the nearest thing Wakefield has to a Youth Council, but without the formality. It came about initially as a means of involving the unsuccessful candidates in the youth UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) elections, but it has assumed a wider role with a workload different from the other “Wakies” groups. It develops its own agenda based upon emerging issues coming from the UKYP MPs or more local issues. It has a major influence upon the UKYP process, organising media events for the elections, acting as a sounding board for ideas and developing publicity materials. It also acts as a standing reference group for consultation by services and agencies and, where appropriate, will plan youth conferences to access the views of a wider cross-section of young people. It has been involved with the development of the Connexions Service locally and the research undertaken by members of this group has led to changes in the opening times of centres, the way they look and the resources they contain.
- The **Get Creative Initiative** (see section 2.6) is a very tangible example of the way in which one agency, Children’s and Adolescents Mental Health Services, responded to the case so clearly made by young people. Young people said, “*Counselling now, not in six month’s time.*” “*Someone to talk to that I can trust and will listen to my problems.*” As a result a young people’s counselling service has been established with a number of qualified counsellors.
- Looked after young people co-wrote the Council’s Corporate Parenting Strategy, which has already seen improved outcomes for young people in care. A specific example is the agreement to offer a number of places on the Council’s apprenticeship scheme to care leavers.
- Young people are having an increasing involvement in the recruitment and selection of staff particularly in the Young People’s Service and Social Services and Health, but a number of schools are also involving pupils in the process.
- Young people are to deliver “Total Respect” training to professionals, which will increase their understanding of young people.

Involvement in these areas is a step change in the way young people are seen by those in authority. For young people it is about developing ways to respond and have influence, realising that sometimes the process is long and slow, but democracy allows them to have their say. There is now wide acceptance in the top levels of local government and the WDP that young people’s views matter. This in itself is a key milestone.

The fact that young people are being listened to has led to a significant increase in the numbers of young people who are involved with Young People's Services. Young People's Service data shows that prior to the involvement initiative in 2000 there were very few young people regularly involved. Some would be attracted to specific events or by certain issues, but these were often one-off and rarely led to sustained involvement. In the year 2004/05 250 young people between 13 and 19 years were actively involved. (Active involvement is defined as giving more than 30 hours during the year to one or more of the activities described above). This does not take account of young people involved in other service areas, through school councils or students' unions, or whose involvement was not as substantial. This figure has increased year on year.

2.2 Leadership, Vision and Strategy (what you are trying to achieve and political leadership and strategic management that drives this agenda)

A key outcome of the 'Fast Forward' Community Strategy vision for Wakefield is that in 25 years' time Wakefield will be a place *"where together with the younger people of the District we will ensure that the work we do now will stand the test of time."*

Further vision statements around young people appear in the Community Strategy and the Council's Engagement Framework, which sets out an incremental approach to engagement. The Framework aims to reduce inequality and ensure more difficult to reach groups and vulnerable groups are included at all stages of policy development and service delivery. Key to this is the work of the Children's Partnership's Involving Young People Strategy called "Engaging Our Futures" plus the draft Children's Plan which has had considerable input from children and young people.

The Young People's Service has a clear statement of purpose and a list of 10 key objectives. Its statement of purpose reads: *"The key activities of Wakefield YPS are concerned with young people's personal development, their education, their access to information and their empowerment. It provides a professional youth work contribution to the range of services available to young people. It maintains a voluntary relationship with young people and prioritises the involvement of those who are hard to reach."* One key objective is *"To promote young people's critical involvement in decision-making within their own clubs and projects, within the Young People's Service and within other local authority, strategic partnership, regional and national bodies whose client base is wholly or partly comprised of young people."*

Young people are instrumental in service planning of the Young People's Service (YPS), and resources in the YPS are deployed to meet the identified priorities. For example, the first service plan – "Involving Young People in the Democratic Process" was generated by young people through peer research and has evolved since then with further research and consultation.

The YPS has support at all levels of the Council, from the Chief Executive, the Leader, and Cabinet members and throughout the organisation, as well as from outside agencies. This has been demonstrated through attendance at events like the 'Partnership Question Time', which allowed the Wakies Watchdog Group to put their research findings directly to the WDP board members. The outcomes were a commitment to act on research findings, financial support where appropriate, and the development of a Local Democracy Week event "speed debating" which aimed to provoke discussion between young people from across the District and a group of local councillors.

Involving young people is not exclusive to education services or the Young People's Service. Social Services and Health provides a model service for young people who are looked after. Care leavers are over-represented amongst those with no formal qualifications, the homeless, the unemployed, those using mental health services and teenage parents. Whilst there is a clear responsibility for councillors and officers to be good corporate parents, exactly how to be "good" is a complex matter and so we consulted the experts – looked after children, young people and care leavers themselves – and asked them to work with us to develop a corporate parenting strategy. In so doing they renamed it The "U'n'Us Strategy", having actually co-written it and identifying the priorities to be addressed.

The engagement process has become so integral to the development of strategy in the district that it has now become second nature to involve young people in the activity. This can be clearly demonstrated through the development of the draft Children and Young People's Plan. The development of the plan has involved extensive engagement and consultation with children and young people which has influenced the intentions and priorities set out in this document.

2.3 Community and Customer Engagement (how you engage your service users and wider community)

Young people are at the heart of shaping everything we do. Across the Authority we have successfully developed a range of innovative engagement strategies, using a wide variety of methods of involvement. These include the conferences, focus groups, questionnaires, multimedia (through the Mix vehicle, a mobile recording studio allowing young people to stop anywhere in the District and record video and audio in film quality on any issue they wish), and embracing technology through the www.wakiesworld.com website. For the UKYP elections we developed internet and text voting, as well as a system of "blogging" where candidates could write daily diaries and give their own campaign information.

The first dedicated YPS action plan "Involving Young People in the Democratic Process" in 2001 was developed by young people and involved Housing and Social Services, Central Services, and the Health Authority at the time. A total of 32 young peer researchers were trained up to interview 261 young interviewees to develop the action plan. The work began with asking young people how they wished to be involved, and was developed by young people themselves.

Another key factor in increasing young people's involvement is the establishment of an independent city centre location, **The Westmorland Centre**. This is a joint initiative between the Local education Authority and Wakefield Cathedral. The property is owned and managed by the Cathedral and was seen as a way of establishing a citizenship centre in Wakefield. The Involving Young People team is based in here and its central location has proved to be effective in drawing young people from across the district. It is well equipped and the fact that it is a non-Council property has given the young people a sense of independence. Amongst other things the building has almost become a constituency office for the local members of the UK Youth Parliament.

The involvement with the **UK Youth Parliament** is a success story in terms of engagement, both from the point of view of involving people in the democratic process and in volunteering, and also in the range of methods of consultation used. Wakefield is allowed two members of the UK Youth Parliament. Formerly these were elected from a group of young people who had taken part in workshops. In the last two years a conscious effort has been made to make this process as inclusive as possible. In 2003, more than 25,000 young people were on the

electoral role and were invited to vote for two of 26 candidates from all parts of the District in an internet election. This was the first e-election ever in the District, possibly in the country. Following feedback from that election, the 2004 vote allowed people to take part by internet, text and ballot box. More than 8,000 young people voted in the most inclusive and innovative election ever held in the District. The two UKYP members and their deputies are key players in the Wakies Shout group and also take part in the Watchdog events.

Also key to consultation and engagement are the **Young People's Conferences**. These are effectively consultation days and the ownership of these events has been with young people from the start. For example, they pick the date and subject matter, and then invite all relevant parties. So far consultation events have featured issues of the environment, health, relationship with the police, provision of leisure facilities and housing. They have also been used as a means of consulting on important initiatives such as the District Culture Strategy, City Centre Development and Information, Retrieval and Tracking.

One of the things that set Wakefield apart is avoiding restrictive formality. We feel formality encourages a narrow band of young people, probably those who are already engaged. We are different because we have developed a range of ways to encourage participation in the knowledge that that the involvement span of young people can be limited by factors like time, age and personality and particular circumstances.

We continually recruit and train volunteers to replace those moving on. In terms of training, a unique selling point is that we develop bespoke packages to meet the different needs of young people depending on what they are going to be doing. There is no "one size fits all" package, leading to a very flexible system. Training for those who are part of the Watchdog group is different to those who are members or deputies of the UK Youth Parliament, which is different again to training given to the peer inspectors. All young people involved in research and volunteering receive relevant training which can be used towards national accreditations, volunteering certificates and awards. We have within the YPS Informal Learning Team – a dedicated team which provides accreditation programmes and support to the work of young people. To complement national accreditation programmes we have local awards based on the number of hours engaged and the achievement gained from their activity. We also take part in the National Open College Network accredited youth training units, Millennium Volunteer accreditation and the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Information is made freely available to all young people with the commitment that it will be in user friendly language and is culturally appropriate. This also applies to the work with looked after children with the "U'n'Us Strategy that was developed with young people and care leavers at its heart. It has been their messages, hopes and aspirations that have given the strategy shape and direction. The aspiration for this three year strategy is that it enables looked after children and young people to dare to wish for more. A total of 59 young people provided direct messages through a variety of means. A further 30 took part in more indirect ways by attending creative workshops to give their voice through drama, music and art. Officers advocated on behalf of a small group of children and young people with complex and profound disabilities. Following on from the main engagement and consultation events, six young people worked more closely on developing the key messages. Some of these young people are also actively involved in the Wakies Shout activities and Wakies Watchdog.

Social Services and Health produced a video, written, performed and sung by looked after young people called "Does Anybody Care?" In the video, they explain what it is like to be

looked after and explain why we need more foster carers. This video is used in our foster carer training.

2.4 Actions (what initiatives or steps you have taken to deliver your vision)

The single most important document released by Wakefield District Partnership is the 'Fast Forward' Community Strategy, the 25-year vision for the District. At the Fast Forward conference when the strategy was being developed, young people led and facilitated the group work to give the whole document a young perspective. A number of principles developed by young people underpin all actions:

- Organisations need to be prepared to change their practices in order to meet the involvement and participatory needs of young people
- Organisations seeking the participation of young people must expect to be challenged
- Organisations wishing to consult around particular issues must seek out groups of young people who find those issues relevant to their lives
- Organisations need to be sensitive to children and young people's lives when planning participatory activities
- Organisations need to demonstrate to young people that their participation is valued
- Organisations must give timely feedback to the children and young people they have worked with

Young people are at the centre of planning structures for volunteering, for allocation of resources, for communication and for accreditation and celebration. This is not just an area where we pay lip service. Within the Young People's Service we have two full time staff members for the Young People's Volunteering Project and three within the Involving Young People team. This is a generous allocation for the size of the authority and is a direct result of the research done by young people in shaping the service plan. It also reflects the views of service managers of the value of volunteering and involvement has upon the personal and social development of young people. The central resource is supplemented by fieldwork support in the YPS and the contribution by groups and individuals from a wide range of council services has ensured the ongoing momentum of this work.

Young people decide research projects and work programmes. We have a large involvement in the UKYP process, and while the Millennium Volunteers Project looks after volunteering for 16 years and over, we have **our own volunteering project** for 13 to 16-year-olds.

Young people are involved in planning their own events to celebrate their achievements. In August 2005 up to 50 young volunteers planned and held their own celebration event which included an optional abseil off the city centre hotel where the event took place and a chance to meet members of the Wakefield Wildcats Rugby League team.

Wherever possible, control of budgets is devolved to young people directly. Examples of this include users influencing the design and décor of the new Connexions Centre in Wakefield and of the Options Clinic in South Elmsall. Young people administer the Children's Fund grants programme, providing small grants to other groups and individuals across the district.

The Involving Young People's Group was instrumental in influencing and developing the overarching Young People's Charter for Connexions West Yorkshire, a sub-regional initiative. We are committed to regularly reviewing and updating systems. An example of this was a dedicated group who looked into issues of confidentiality. The work of the Young People's

Service is inspected using Ofsted criteria and monitored through our reporting procedures and in-house structure. One off events, such as conferences, are evaluated at the end and the information used by the group planning the next event. A part of every piece of work and research is dedicated to evaluation and reporting back.

2.5 Partnerships (who you work with to deliver excellent services and what makes these partnerships work)

We can demonstrate close links with and support from Wakefield District Partnership, and all the bodies that comprises. Briefly these include Wakefield College, Yorkshire Forward, Groundwork Wakefield, VOX, West Yorkshire Police, the Primary Care Trusts, First (the development agency for the District), the Government Office, Wakefield Asian Community Forum, Mid Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce and the West Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council, Wakefield Children's Fund, and Barnardos Young People's Advocacy Service.

We also have very close links – effectively a seamless transition – with Connexions, the UK Youth Parliament both regionally and nationally, and a very close tie with the Social Services and Health group “U'n'Us”. We have also developed strong international twinning links with the Kinder und Jugendparlament in Herne, Germany. This led to a piece of international research into attitudes of young people in England and Germany towards alcohol.

Schools and colleges also make a significant contribution to the engagement strategy. The YPS is contracted by Wakefield College to support the Student's Union and this ensures a strong working relationship between the FE sector and other partners. The Teacher/Adviser for Citizenship plays a key role in promoting the work of school councils and in linking these into the wider strategy through his involvement on the young people's engagement group.

The Wakefield District Compact is in place and acts as the over-arching written agreement between the major public agencies and the voluntary and community sector for partnership work. Its development was led by Voluntary Action Wakefield District and was formally adopted in 2004. This, together with the individual protocols between service areas, provides the policy and procedures for partnership working. It formalised the well-developed inter-agency partnerships that have existed in the district for a number of years.

2.6 Equalities and Diversity (how you routinely consider equality of access to services, the various needs of different communities and develop strategies to address diverse views)

One of the Young People's Service objectives is *“To promote equality of opportunity while challenging oppression and prejudice.”* This fits into the Council equality policy. It is a principle that underpins all activities and can be specifically demonstrated in the engagement process in the following ways:

Black and Minority Ethnic Groups

Our most recent project was involving BME groups and a report and action plan has just been published. The report was concerned with the needs of BME young people. We recruited young people who were trained to undertake the research and complete the report and evaluation. An action plan has been devised which will lead to improved activities for BME young people.

Also young people in Wakefield Mosque were involved in consultation on the Children's Plan, carried out by Wakefield Children's Fund.

Young People with Disabilities

Another innovative piece of work that crossed service areas and traditional boundaries was the Get Creative project. This used arts as a method of engagement with a wide range of young people – a significant number of the 70 taking part had mental health issues, and this was the first project of its kind in the region.

The pre-cursor to Get Creative was an earlier young people's conference called "The Risk Business" which took as its premise the fact that everybody needs help at some point in their lives. The Wakefield Prevention Initiative which was the subject of the conference is based on the belief that when a young person has problems, then quick help is available – and certainly before a problem gets out of hand with potential to damage lives. The conference provided young people with an opportunity to identify the things which might go wrong through childhood into adulthood, and to identify the help and support which they think is needed. More than 60 young people took part in the day, along with officers from the Young People's Service, Social Services and Health, and Connexions.

Get Creative was a development from this beginning, spanning several weekend residentials and involving more than 70 young people. It was funded by the Council and the local primary care trusts. Initially the people taking part were encouraged to express themselves through different media – including music, drama and poetry. The process was spread over three residential weekends in which groups worked closely with arts co-ordinators and began to write scripts for a presentation demonstrating their feelings about the support they needed. Finally a 15 minute performance was presented to an invited audience of elected members and managers from the district.

This piece of work and the evaluation directly resulted in a new young people's counselling service in the District. These counsellors are now on hand for anyone who needs them and link into the wider counselling network.

Other vulnerable young people

The work done by Social Services and Health on looked after children is an excellent example of engagement with vulnerable groups, with its starting point being what young people would like to see and how they feel they should be involved. For example part of the strategy states: "The Council and other agencies believes that young people with experience of the looked after system can be a valuable resource for other looked after children and young people." The U'n'Us initiative described earlier is indicative of the way in which the views of this vulnerable group are heard and addressed.

From the YPS data base it is evident that in 2004/05 of the 250 young people who were actively involved for at least 30 hours in the engagement opportunities within the Council:

- 10% were from BME communities;
- 7% were in care/leaving care;
- 5% had special needs (physical or learning difficulties)
- There was an equal balance of males and females.
- All electoral wards in the district were represented.

Every effort is taken to ensure that there is involvement from those areas where young people are hard to contact. The excellent partnership arrangements within the district gives access to other groups such as those involved in criminal or anti-social activity, LGBT and those not involved in Education, Employment or Training.

Outline, with reference to a specific case (a geographical area, a particular section of the community, an individual or a particular issue) how you have taken action to address an issue and the impact that this action has had.

This case study will be used to assess how your leadership, vision and strategy and partnership working draws upon the messages received through community and customer engagement and feeds through to actions and ultimately to improved outcomes (including outcomes that seek to promote equality and diversity).

In early 2002 George arrived in Wakefield aged 17 as a refugee/asylum seeker from Kenya where he had spent a troubled and traumatic childhood and adolescence. Keen to put his past behind him, George wanted to take up as many of the opportunities his new situation offered and was introduced by his Social Worker to the Wakefield Youth Service's Young Volunteer Project, which incorporated Millennium Volunteers.

In a very short time George found himself engaged in a variety of volunteering activities that led to him receiving his MV Certificate for 100 hours service and then his MV Award for 200 hours. His voluntary work included:

- Environmental work with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, which included tree planting in a former coalfield site;
- Working in a residential home for elderly people offering support and company to the residents as well as undertaking other tasks for the staff;
- With other MV colleagues, devising a programme of entertainment which they took round to different old people's homes in the district;
- Fund raising for World Vision, Cancer Research and the NSPCC through street collections, sponsored events and packing bags at the local supermarket.

George speaks warmly of his time with the Young Volunteer Project. *"It gave me something positive to do and made me feel useful,"* he says. He highlights an event in London in 2003 when the Wakefield Project was one of the finalists in the National Volunteer of the Year event. Although the Wakefield Project came second, the sense of achievement George gained from this was something he had not experienced before. *"I got my photo in Young People Now!"* he added with a smile.

In March 2003 he became involved in the Wakefield Involving Young People's Group after being introduced to some of the members at a celebration event when receiving his MV Award. Just as with the volunteering project, George took every opportunity to participate in the full range of activities on the agenda. The project's main focus at that time was work on the community strategy, Fast Forward. This provided George with the opportunity to learn about the Council Services and those of the Health and Police Services. He played a lead role in the Conference of September 2003 when the members of the District Partnership met with a wide cross-section of young people to hear directly the views and concerns of the younger generation.

His next major involvement was in supporting the work of the UKYP members. Although too old to offer himself as a candidate, he engaged in the whole process; participating in road shows in schools to publicise the work of UKYP and encourage candidates to come forward; supporting candidates to develop their manifestos and advising on this, the first all-electronic election. As one of the returning officers he announced the winners at an event in the Town Hall in March 2004.

Also in September 2003 he became aware of the work of the emerging Connexions Service

and volunteered to be part of a West Yorkshire group of young people that supported the development of Connexions in the sub-region. This brought other opportunities, too numerous to detail, but sufficient to say that through the work of the group the needs of young people clearly influenced the way the service was developed.

In the Spring of 2004 the Partnership Board of Connexions West Yorkshire was seeking to elect two young people directors. George was nominated by his peers and duly elected. He continues to represent the interests of young people well in that forum. This has led to other opportunities, not least a visit to the House of Commons in 2005 to meet with MPs to lobby on behalf of the Connexions Service.

He has now completed his first year on the BA in Community and Youth Studies at Leeds Metropolitan University. He is convinced that the portfolio of all the work he had undertaken through his involvement in the Volunteer and Involving Young People project were instrumental in enabling him to gain a place. The amount and variety of experiences, many of them formally accredited, is impressive by any standards, but considering where he started from have to be seen as exceptional.

George is the first to recognise the benefits he has gained from all his experiences in Wakefield. *“The opportunities have helped me to focus on the present and future, rather than dwell on the past; I have met a lot of people who have made a difference to my life; my confidence has grown and my communication skills developed; I have learnt how companies and organisations are run”.*

We have chosen to use the experiences of this individual because his story highlights the effectiveness of the strategy in Wakefield for engaging young people in the democratic process and demonstrates how the principles described in this document have been achieved:

- That young people do come from a wide range of backgrounds and are effectively included within the programmes on offer;
- That the variety of opportunities enables participants to benefit from the wide range of opportunities on offer;
- Young people recognise how people with influence are willing to consider their views and actively encourage their participation through listening and responding as appropriate;
- Young people value the experiences through both the accredited outcomes and the life-enhancing opportunities that are offered.

Unique though this case is, it is not uncommon. The positive benefits gained by many participants are indicative of the success of the policies and practices introduced into the work of Wakefield Council and its partners over the past four years. The numbers of young people involved has increased year on year, as has the range of opportunities now available. As the skill and experience of staff has developed, so the quality of programmes and activities has improved. The benefit to young people has been in the competencies they have developed – the benefit to the Council has been an increasing number of young people willing and able to engage with elected members and officers to ensure that the future for the district is positive.

PART 4: DISSEMINATION OF GOOD PRACTICE AND LESSONS

Authorities will be asked to provide more detailed information on their dissemination proposals if short-listed.

4.1 On the basis of the practice you have described in Parts 2 and 3, what are the key messages you have to share and whom do you see as the audiences for these?

a) Factors that underpin your success –

Key messages:

- We involved young people in the process from the outset. We regarded them as equal partners in the process and afforded them the respect that this deserved. Action is taken on issues raised by young people wherever possible, but in every case feedback is made available on outcomes and results;
- Through this involvement we agreed a set of principles and values within which each participating service and agency worked. We continue to challenge each other to ensure that these principles and values are addressed;
- We ensured that members and senior officers were committed to young people's engagement;
- We developed and used a range of methods to engage with young people as we recognised that if we genuinely wanted to engage with a wide cross section of ages, interests and abilities there was no single approach that effectively suited them all;
- We thought big but started small. Although our ambitions were high we recognised that we needed to build up incrementally and take everyone with us. Much of work was innovative and to some extent untested and success was not guaranteed. Fortunately the strategy has worked and as success has bred success, so larger numbers of young people and services have become involved;
- Additional resources have been made available. The establishment of a central dedicated team was essential in ensuring the work developed;
- We actively targeted young people from traditionally under represented groups.

Audiences:

- Members and officers of councils and partner organisations working locally with children and young people;
- Children and young people from other districts can come and experience Wakefield's approaches themselves.

b) Successful initiatives –

- A series of Young People's conferences covering a range of different topics and involving a wide cross-section of young people;
- Wakies Shout, the group formed to voice the views of young people in the district and to support the work of the UKYP MPs;
- Wakies Watchdog, the group of older teenagers recruited, selected and trained to research young people's views on service delivery. Has been successful in engaging with the Wakefield District Partnership;
- Wakies World, the website developed by young people for young people in the Wakefield district;
- Wakies Check, the group recruited, selected and trained to undertake inspections of services for young people. Activities confined to Young People's Service up to now, but has wider application;

- The Involving Young People Team, 3 full-time youth workers dedicated to supporting involvement and engagement work within the district;
- The Mix, a specially designed mobile unit equipped with video and audio recording facilities that enables young people to express their views and opinions.
- U'n'Us, the group of young people in care/leaving care who reflect the needs of children and young people in care to the corporate parents.

4.2 Beyond the national Learning Exchange conference and Open Day, how might you work with other Beacons within your theme to maximise the impact of your dissemination activity?

Wakefield has a successful track record of sharing practice with other authorities. The list below gives outline ideas around what we could do but some of this would be determined by the needs and desires of other authorities who would be seeking to share our learning:

- A joint Youth Engagement Conference. This would enable all those presenting and attending to learn from each other;
- Establishment of an electronic network learning community. This could include the development of a good practice website where Beacons and other authorities can post and share ideas. Weblogs and a discussion forum could be included. These would be open to all involved in engaging young people including the young people themselves, to encourage them to share both their observations and learning points;
- Jointly host Study Tours, involving children and young people, for visiting authorities to directly experience innovative approaches to engaging with children and young people;
- Set up a 'secondment club' with other Beacons to provide a pool of different opportunities for officers from other authorities to spend time learning what it is to successfully engage with children and young people;
- Jointly develop a range of innovative publicity materials, for example a CD-Rom with film footage of the Beacon Council's activities, highlighting the successful initiatives developed by each authority.
- Jointly facilitate one or more (depending on take-up) learning sets, each for 12 to 15 authorities. The learning sets will include at least four half-day group meetings over the period of a year, and the establishment of an informal support network.

4.3 What experience does your authority have in sharing lessons with others? Give examples of where your dissemination activity has supported other authorities to improve.

- Wakefield Council has a successful track record of capturing and sharing learning. For example, we have engaged with a number of excellent authorities in priority service areas to drive improvement through our learning and challenge programme. This has been a reciprocal relationship with excellent authorities learning from Wakefield in areas such as risk management and competency frameworks.
- Over the past twelve months, Wakefield Council has worked through the Yorkshire and Humber Local Government Improvement and Innovation Partnership to provide performance support packages to seven local authorities within the region, demonstrating and sharing proven practical performance management tools and techniques and developing new networks to identify and share good practice.
- At a corporate level, officers and members of the Council regularly speak or host workshops at regional and national conferences.
- The Young People's Service publishes all its Service documents and information (including

contacts lists, guidance documents, strategies, etc.) on the Councils website – www.wakefield.gov.uk and will continue to develop and update the site. The site averages about 30,000 unique visitors and 320,000 page views a month.

- The Regional Youth Work Unit based in Leeds offers opportunities to disseminate good practice amongst statutory and voluntary youth services in Yorkshire and the Humber. At a national level, the National Youth Agency, based in Leicester offers the opportunity to share experiences, particularly through its weekly publication, “Young People Now”. In October 2004 we hosted a visit by Youth Service staff from Walsall LEA, who were particularly interested in the engagement strategy. In the same month young people from the Wakies Shout group spoke to visitors from a number of local authorities about the work they were undertaking. Neighbouring North Yorkshire Youth service visited in April 2005 to look at the mobile provision.