

Beacon Theme	Positive Youth Engagement
Authority name	City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
Case Study title	Use of ICT to enable positive youth engagement.
Theme (if applicable)	ICT
Also linked to these themes - Partnerships, citizenship, structures for youth engagement, social inclusion.	
Summary	
<p>Wakefield Council has developed a number of ICT- based mechanisms to help engage with young people across the district. This case study focuses on three of the major mechanisms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Voice - a text message panel for 11-19 year olds from across the district • WakiesWorld - a website holding contributions from young people • Online and text message voting - for UK Youth Parliament elections 	
Background	
<p>Wakefield District is in the heart of Yorkshire and the Humber, covers some 339 square kilometres and is home to 319,800 people in a diverse range of city, urban and rural communities. Approximately 61,000 (19%) are aged between 5 and 19 years.</p> <p>Wakefield has undergone major social and economic changes over the last 25 years. The loss of traditional industries has had a severe impact on local communities and the industrial heritage has also left a legacy of poor health, preventing many from re-entering work. The Council has continued to make real progress in the last three years in tackling some of these areas, becoming a thriving manufacturing, retail and distribution centre, taking full advantage of its place at the heart of the region's transport network and significant progress has been made on key flagship regeneration schemes. However, the district continues to face a number of challenges from its economic legacy.</p> <p>Wakefield is a historic seat of regional government in Yorkshire and for two centuries provided the county headquarters of the former West Riding of Yorkshire. Today the City retains its strong tradition of public services employment with the headquarters of the City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Assembly and West Yorkshire Police all located within the City Centre.</p> <p>The make up of the Council is predominantly Labour, holding 41 of the 63 seats, Liberal Democrats with 3, Conservatives 14 and Independents 5 seats.</p> <p>This case study explores how ICT has been used to encourage greater levels of engagement with Young People.</p>	

Key issues/problems

Young people are traditionally a hard to reach group, particularly those not proactively involved in groups such as school councils.

Use of the internet and mobile phones is extremely high amongst young people, and therefore offers an important channel for engaging with them.

Youth Voice was set up to take advantage of this and provide a way of engaging with young people from across the district via their mobile phones.

A lot of young people are very computer savvy and access the Internet daily. **WakiesWorld** is an attempt to make use of that interest and give young people a convenient and easy way to contribute to the democratic process. Its initial success however is being eclipsed with the rise of the MySpace and YouTube type sites.

Online and text message voting for UK Youth Parliament elections was introduced on a similar wave of optimism, only to be dwarfed in take up by the more traditional ballot box.

What you did

Youth Voice was set up in March 2006 to provide a mechanism for quickly and effectively consulting young people on a variety of different issues. It works through votes being sent out via bulk text message, with panel members able to respond with their views by sending in a text message.

Youth Voice was originally recruited through the district's network of schools, with sign-up forms being distributed by teaching staff. Young people can now also sign up by filling in sign-up forms, which are available in schools and colleges, libraries and youth clubs, or by completing the online sign-up form. Membership is open to anyone who lives within the district, is aged 11-19 and has access to a mobile phone.

As one of the first votes, members were given the opportunity to decide the name of the panel, with Youth Voice being chosen.

WakiesWorld was set up in 2002 to provide an easy way for young people to get their views and ideas on to the web. Individuals can sign up to contribute in their own time, writing text content and designing layout.

Online and text message voting was developed for the 2004 UKYP election and provides the foundation on which the election is built. Ballot box votes are manually inserted into the online voting database by Wakefield Council staff to ensure that the voting system is not abused. Secondary schools and colleges are provided with ballot boxes. Young people not in education are able to vote on-line at home or other centres such as libraries and youth clubs provided they have registered on the electoral register and received their voting password. Text voting from mobile phones is similarly available.

Key outcomes

As a result of **Youth Voice** young people from across the district have been given the opportunity to have their say on a variety of different issues. These include the sort of information they would find useful on a website aimed at young people, what improvements they would like to see for school meals and what improvements they would like to see in their local area.

WakiesWorld has enabled some young people to experiment with web authoring and active groups to publish information they want to share.

Online and text message voting for UK Youth Parliament elections has given the opportunity to young people not in education to vote.

In the 2006 election the turnout was Ballot box = 10,775; Text = 53; Internet = 526

Impact

Youth Voice now has over 200 members from across the district, with numbers growing each week.

As a result of the votes carried out with Youth Voice the Wakefield Children's Information Service is developing their new website in line with Youth Voice's recommendations. The Council's school meals provider is introducing a number of suggested improvements provided by Youth Voice members around offering a wider variety of affordable healthy eating options and improving the presentation of meals.

WakiesWorld has encouraged the candidates in the UKYP election to write daily campaign blogs. It has also been useful to disseminate information about the Youth Opportunities Fund and enabled the YOF application forms to be downloaded.

Online and text message voting for UK Youth Parliament elections has given the process a media profile that was previously lacking. It has also enabled otherwise excluded groups of young people the opportunity to participate.

Resources

The major resource in setting up **Youth Voice** was producing and distributing promotional material and the sign-up forms. The ICT system used to send out bulk text messages and receive responses was already in place as a result of the text voting for the UK Youth Parliament. The cost of sending out bulk text messages is relatively low, particularly when compared to other methods such as postal surveys.

WakiesWorld was initially set up using a one off grant from Wakefield Council. Since then hosting costs have been met from Young People's Service budget. The site is maintained by various young people and monitored by youth workers in the Involving Young People Team.

Online and text message voting for UK Youth Parliament elections is resourced by Wakefield Council.

Who was involved?

Alongside the Council's Communications and Marketing Team, who coordinated the set up and manages the use of **Youth Voice**, a number of different teams and organisations have been and continue to be involved.

When Youth Voice was set up the Young People's Service and local schools were involved in promoting and recruiting the Panel. These have now been joined by colleges, libraries and youth clubs.

The district's UK Youth Parliament representatives were also consulted during the set up of Youth Voice.

Since it was set up a number of teams within the Council and partner organisations have used or are planning to take advantage of Youth Voice to engage with young people.

WakiesWorld is run and resourced exclusively by young people and Wakefield Young People's Service.

Online and text message voting for UK Youth Parliament election involves a partnership of council departments responsible for delivering the election. ICT, school support and advisory services, elections, consultation and partnerships, and young people's service make up the partnership, which meets regularly throughout the year to plan and deliver the UKYP election successfully.

Barriers and how were they overcome

The first barrier for **Youth Voice** was how to recruit members to the Panel. This has been overcome by working closely with local schools and colleges, the Young People's Service and libraries to distribute sign-up forms and raise awareness.

The other major barrier is the fact that it costs members their standard text messaging rate to respond to votes. This could put off many young people from sharing their views and to overcome this each vote is followed by a prize draw for all those who took part. This approach has helped ensure a strong level of participation from members of Youth Voice.

WakiesWorld initially had very few barriers as this was something new. However with the increase in commercial community sites aimed at young people the allure of WakiesWorld has decreased. We are attempting to overcome this by concentrating on local content and useful information, rather than fun video clips and other gizmos. WakiesWorld will provide a base for the Publicising Positive Activities programme.

Online and text message voting for UK Youth Parliament elections initially faced many technical barriers. The fact that the election team was a partnership of committed workers with the backing of senior management enabled people to overcome the problems and make the elections successful year after year.

Critical success factors

The critical success factors were:

Youth Voice:

- Buy-in from schools and libraries in promoting Youth Voice and distributing sign-up forms

- Support and use of Youth Voice from different teams in the Council and partner organisations
- Use of the findings from votes to drive outcomes/improvements
- Feedback to Youth Voice members to ensure there is a link between what they tell us and what is done as a result

WakiesWorld:

- Easy for young people to contribute to
- Easy to monitor

Online and text message voting for UK Youth Parliament elections:

- Supported by senior management
- Provided a media profile.

How would you do it better?

ICT provides a means to an end, not an end in itself. Young people are not taken in by flashy democratic mechanisms. They are interested in publishing their views in formats that suit their own creative natures. Hence street walls covered in graffiti, and school books emblazoned with slogans. We need to recognise that ICT will never provide the universal answer to involving young people but that, for some, it is the medium of choice.

WakiesWorld would have more appeal if it was revised every year to reflect advances in commercial websites.

Engagement via text message would be more widely used if our text messaging system enabled young people to text in for free.

How did this improve one person's life?

Although it is difficult to identify specific instances where our use of ICT has changed a young person's life there are a number of more general examples.

Youth Voice has provided members with the opportunity to share their views on local issues and affect real changes. One example of this is the way in which the feedback provided by members is being used to ensure the local school meals service more effectively meets the needs of young people.

A number of young people have been drawn into our various groups via **WakiesWorld** and the **UKYP** elections. One young person in particular was out of mainstream education for four years before coming to our WakiesWatchDog group through interest in the WakiesWorld website. He is now at 6th Form College catching up with his GCSEs and standing in the UKYP election.

Contact details

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