

Case Study

Beacon Theme Positive Youth Engagement
City of Wakefield

Authority name

Overview of Authority

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, the council 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. The council believe it 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.

What has been achieved?

There have been a large number of achievements over the past five years. The following examples give an indication of the range and impact:

- high level of engagement in the UKYP process with 11,354 casting their votes in the last election (26.6% of the electorate) including electronic voting systems
- Wakies Shout, the support group for the UKYP MPs raising issues affecting local young people that are taken up at a district, regional and national level
- Wakies Watch, a group of young volunteers who present young people's issues to the District Partnership which has already led to changes in sex education in schools
- Wakies World, a dedicated website designed by young people for young people, which is proving to be an effective way for young people to express their views
- peer research, the most recent example looked at services for Black and Minority Ethnic young people in the district and has led to the Mix It Project to develop multi-cultural youth provision
- Wakies Check, a peer inspection programme which recruits and trains young volunteers to undertake inspections of youth provision leading to changes in programmes and facilities
- Get Creative project, using the arts as a means of identifying the needs of young people in terms of emotional and mental health. This has led to the establishment of a young people's counselling service

- Democracy Wall, a method for obtaining the views of young people during local democracy week. A number of the priorities identified are currently being explored
- Young People's Service Management Board, a recent initiative to place young people as key players in the governance of services for them
- Young People's Conferences, a rolling programme of conference events on topics chosen by young people and planned by them or where agencies have commissioned conferences for young people in order that they could impact on strategic planning
- My Life Project, developing ways of engaging with children under 13 years
- U "n" Us, a group of Looked After Children who make a direct contribution to the corporate parenting plan for the district

The Children's and Young People's Plan. Some 6,000 young people were consulted on the plan and priorities were changed to reflect the views.

Service Delivery tips

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."*

Learning from the actions taken at Wakefield, other councils can develop their work with young people. The following areas outline key steps to take:

Partnerships are at the heart of Wakefield's success. Demonstrate close links with and support from partnerships. At Wakefield these include Wakefield College, Yorkshire Forward, Groundwork Wakefield, and VOX.

The council also have very close links 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". The council have also developed strong international twinning links with the Kinder und Jugendparlament in Herne, Germany.

The council initially asked young people themselves how they preferred to be involved.

This was an extensive peer research project started in the summer of 2000 and published in July 2001 that looked into young people's preferred modes of engagement. From this the council learned the key ways to engage and involve young people:

1. **Variety** – the council developed a whole range of methods to engage the widest range of young people including:
 - young people's conferences
 - focus groups
 - questionnaires
 - multi-media
 - targeted work
 - opportunities for one-off commitment
 - opportunities for ongoing work
 - international links and exchanges
 - schools councils/student unions
2. **Informality** – the council adopted young people-centred approaches from the Outset, the council encourage young people to opt in or out as their availability permits and the council have avoided replicating formal adult models.
3. **Technology** – the council have actively encouraged the use of existing websites as well as developing a dedicated site. The council have used electronic voting and texting and have a purpose-built mobile unit equipped with a recording studio to capture young people's views.

4. **Full range of views** – the council have made every effort to ensure that groups and individuals not normally involved are part of the process and that a full range of community interests and particular needs are addressed.
5. **Action** – the last thing young people wanted was “talking shops” so the council have ensured tangible outcomes wherever possible, if not, feedback is given in every case to say why not. The council also recognised involvement through accreditation when appropriate.

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