IN Volving Young People
In Service Design
Action for Children’s Young Ambassadors’ top tips for participation
Action for Children recruits and trains Young Ambassadors who have experience of their services. We volunteer some of our time to support the organisation, often working alongside the Fundraising and Events Teams. We regularly speak at conferences and events, telling our stories and connecting supporters of the organisation with real first-hand experience of Action for Children’s work, and the huge impact it has. We’re also regularly involved in governance at Action for Children, recruiting staff and trustees, providing film and media content.

Jordan (Young Ambassador)
Welcome to the Young Ambassadors’ Top Tips guide! The idea for this guide came about when a group of us recently met for an Ambassador workshop event. We were asked about how we’d been involved at our services and how we’d been able to influence the way things are done.

There were lots of great suggestions, so we decided to collect the main examples together in this Ambassadors’ guide. We know from personal experience that these ‘top tips’ work! We hope that you’ll be inspired by these examples – try them out, and make sure young people have a voice!

Shamaila, March 2016

**Top tips for participation**

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Young Ambassador Beth recommends that children and young people are regularly involved in staff recruitment and selection, ‘it’s worthwhile and every service should do it for the self-confidence of young people involved but also for the confidence they’ll have in the staff and the service in the future.’

‘We met up a few times, first with the Volunteer coordinator to find out about the job and what we’d be doing, and about the process of being involved in staff recruitment. We used the job description to make up questions that suited this job, and we wrote out score sheets and included words and phrases next to the questions to show what we were looking for in the people’s answers. Part of our preparation also included things like how we’d act in the interview, and how we’d interact with the people, how we might want to set-up the interview room, things like that.’

Ray Woolford was the successful candidate and is now Employability North Programme Manager, ‘the young people introduced themselves to me and briefly explained the process. They then asked their questions in turn. Overall they acted in a very professional manner throughout. The questions were excellent and quite ‘probing’, certainly as thought provoking as the questions from the ‘adult panel’. In interviews you can often anticipate and prepare for many of the questions, but with the young people this wasn’t possible. I was very impressed with the way they carried out the interview and fed this back at the time’.

Beth concludes, ‘It is very worthwhile; it’s a good experience for your own job interviews and how to behave around people in that situation. It’s increased my confidence, I’m more confident than I would have been before doing it, definitely.’

Action for Children’s ‘Right Choice’ guide to involving children and young people in recruitment is available as a free download, click here for your copy: www.actionforchildren.org.uk/resources-and-publications/information-guides/the-right-choice/
“IT’S INCREASED MY CONFIDENCE, I’M MORE CONFIDENT THAN I WOULD HAVE BEEN BEFORE DOING IT, DEFINITELY.”
TOP TIP: Personalise risk assessments to fit around the young person

Young Ambassador Alex explains how the participation group at his service identified risk assessments as an area that could really benefit from more involvement of young people.

‘The Youth Task Group decided to look at the forms and documents used at our service to make sure they were young person friendly. They decided that the risk assessment forms were the most important and also the most difficult to understand, and not very young person friendly’.

We planned a group night to look at risk assessments, to decide what were the most important bits, and how we could re-write/re-design in a young person friendly way. Everyone agreed how important the forms were but we thought they were too formal, with too much writing, and hard to make sense of.

There were five of us involved, all with experience of the service and a range of different risk issues ourselves. We discussed what we thought were the main things and what was important to be in there from our point of view, as well as what the service and staff needed.

To help us feel like the risk assessments belonged to us we needed to see more colour, less formal writing, and more images to make it clearer and easy to understand, e.g. a smiley-face scale, and also traffic lights (red, amber, green) to show degree of risk and danger.

It felt good to see that it was definitely different after our group had worked on it, and that what we’d said and suggested was included.

I felt important and valued as my voice was being listened to and felt good that not only would this benefit me and the others in our group, it would make a huge difference to young people using the service in future and really help them to feel safe.

Amazing to see how it came out and how easy it was to understand once we’d been consulted – I think we did a really great job, and it makes you feel better about the staff and the service knowing that what we think matters.’

Alex Burke
“IT FELT GOOD TO SEE THAT IT WAS DEFINITELY DIFFERENT AFTER OUR GROUP HAD WORKED ON IT, AND THAT WHAT WE’D SAID AND SUGGESTED WAS INCLUDED.”
TOP TIP: Takeover Day

Action for Children Young Ambassadors recommend Takeover Day as a good way to boost service user participation – it’s a great way to find out what young people think from first-hand experience of taking charge!

Kacey and Ben were recently involved in a highly successful event which saw 14 young people from 2 local schools spend the day learning about the service, meeting members of staff - including a visit from Action for Children’s Chief Executive Sir Tony Hawkhead, and Chair of Trustees John O’Brien – and helping to make decisions regarding how to shape the future of Action for Children Worcester City Early Help service.

‘As Young Ambassadors we helped to organise and plan what would happen, and on the day we helped make sure everything went smoothly. I spent the day as the social media champion and provided a live feed of the day’s events on the Worcester City Early Help Facebook and twitter pages. Kacey spent the day meeting and greeting everyone, helped set up activities, accompanied the young people to one of the local children centers and provided general assistance to the Early Help practitioners Kate and Brian.

Andy Stone (Volunteer and Work Placement Co-ordinator) explains, ‘Takeover Day gives children and young people a real insight into how services are run. It also enables them to provide feedback from an informed point of view, which really helps us to tailor what we do, and improve our service. In addition, involving Young Ambassadors to help plan and organise the day ensured the activities suited the young people involved, and also added an extra layer of participation!

Both Kacey and Ben thoroughly enjoyed this experience. Since Takeover Day their Young Ambassador role has developed to include taking part in Trustee interviews at the Action for Children London office, and attending the Worcester City Early Help youth forum.’

The Children’s Commissioner’s Takeover Challenge puts children and young people in decision-making positions and encourages organisations to hear their views. Children gain an insight into the adult world and organisations benefit from a fresh perspective about their work.

http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/learn-more/takeover-challenge
“It also enables them to provide feedback from an informed point of view, which really helps us to tailor what we do and improve our service.”
Do a survey of service users to find out their views – what’s going well, what could change, and what new ideas they have.

Action for Children Ambassador Catrin is also a young carer in North Wales. Along with two other young carers, she recently visited London to talk to Action for Children Trustees about a young carers’ survey she helped develop. The survey began as conversations between young carers about the importance of adults and service providers listening to their views and enabling them to influence the types of service they receive.

‘We were having a conversation about our opinions being important, and that collecting views of young carers could help to improve the service by doing some things better or differently. We decided as a group that a survey could help do this and a few of us got together with Laura, our worker, to agree on appropriate questions for the survey.

The survey was handed out to young carers, appeared on-line, and was also used at groups and outings to collect as many views as possible. Staff also collected case studies too – to show people first-hand what life is like as a young carer.

I think the questionnaire was really successful. It helped us understand more about what it’s like to be a young carer, and we now have some different group activities, things that are really fun and interesting for the young carers – last week we did Chinese calligraphy for the first time, and it was great!

Surveys are a good way for children and young people to be heard and get their point across. They can help to change things and also let people know what’s good already and what they enjoy.’

Laura Williams (Children’s Services Practitioner) who helped the young people with their survey, said, ‘The survey worked really well and has definitely made a difference to what we do with the young carers. The case studies were also an important part of this work; even though we talk to the young people all the time, the case studies have given us a deeper understanding of their experiences, and a more detailed insight into their everyday caring roles and how they feel about their responsibilities.’
“THE SURVEY WORKED REALLY WELL AND HAS DEFINITELY MADE A DIFFERENCE TO WHAT WE DO WITH THE YOUNG CARERS.”
Young people’s participation has always been really important at New Horizons, but by far the best idea was the introduction of ‘Have your say’ meetings.

In addition to regular conversations between young people and staff, sitting down together for ‘Have your say’ meetings means there’s also a formal way to listen to young people and create opportunities for them to discuss and shape the kind of service they receive at New Horizons.

‘It’s good, we get a chance to talk about things and change things if we want. Sometimes after talking about it we decide we don’t want to change anything. I would tell other young people it’s good to be involved as what you have to say is as important as anyone else, and you can change things’ Sean Larner (Young Ambassador)

A great example of the impact of young people’s participation through the ‘Have your say’ meetings is New Horizons’ ‘Traffic Light System’. The young people reviewed the existing system of rules and sanctions, and created a new approach based on their own ideas for matching mistakes or misdemeanours with, what they termed, ‘natural consequences’. Introducing this new system has had a positive impact on life at New Horizons, and has supported residents to sustain their placements.

Jackie Macaulay (Service Co-ordinator): ‘Have your say’ meetings are a key part of our successful approach to participation. The Traffic Light System has given young people a greater sense of ownership of their service, it’s helped to manage behaviour, and supported young people to get the most out of their placement.

My ‘Top Tip’ would be to feedback quickly once a decision has been made. This means young people know they have been listened to and that you are willing to act on their ideas, whether or not you are able to change what you do as a result.’
“I WOULD TELL OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE IT’S GOOD TO BE INVOLVED AS WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY IS AS IMPORTANT AS ANYONE ELSE, AND YOU CAN CHANGE THINGS.”
TOP TIP: 06

Make a film about your service

Action for Children Young Ambassadors Harry and Ryan helped create a film showcasing their service and the facilities on offer. Harry explains, ‘As Ambassadors our role was to host the entire film.’ Ryan continues, ‘yes, we gave the Action for Children film crew a tour of the whole building complex, inside and out, so that people could see what we do here, and how it helps people at a certain age with disabilities.’

Harry and Ryan are attached to Monksfield Residential Short Breaks Service.

Roseanne Montague (Service Manager) says that making a film created another valuable opportunity to develop their participation practice, ‘we directly involved the young people in what we did and how we did it, and the end product benefitted hugely from their input at each stage. I would recommend this process to every service – it has helped to clearly show the great work we do, and it’s also given our young Ambassadors an experience they can be really proud of!’

The film has been welcomed by families, Commissioners, and partner agencies, as a fantastic way to introduce children and their parents to what’s on offer at Monksfield.

Arriving somewhere new can often be difficult and anxiety provoking. We’re hopeful that seeing Monksfield through the eyes of Harry and Ryan will ensure a smooth transition for those new to Monksfield, helping to remove some of their fears about what to expect.

Henry White (Digital Communications Team): ‘Making films with young people is a great way to involve them in what we do. Film is a medium that children, young people and parents can all relate to, and today’s smart phones mean it’s now cheap and easy to do. What are you waiting for?’

Watch ‘Harry and Ryan’s guide to Monksfield’ here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsKCfsGZIwK
“I would recommend this process to every service – it has helped to clearly show the great work we do.” 
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