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Curious Minds

Youth Voice Recommendations

Updated February 2024

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Introduction

Curious Minds worked with seven early career professionals under the Kickstart scheme as Creative Youth Voice Champions.

The Creative Youth Voice Champions were deployed across four local cultural education partnerships (LCEPs) in the North West and were tasked with taking a creative approach to engaging children and young people's voices in cultural education. To do this they delivered workshops in schools, planned, delivered, and analysed youth voice surveys, and held consultation conversations with children and young people.

The following recommendations are for place-based partnerships when working *with* and *for* children and young people. They draw on everything the Creative Youth Voice Champions learnt from working with their LCEPs, the activities they delivered directly with children and young people, and their own experiences of where they live and work. Their suggestions are important for working with any target group, as much as for working with children and young people.

Summary of Recommendations

- Introduce the role of 'Community Champion' to your place-based partnership.
- Integrate youth voice meaningfully into your LCEP meetings and strategic plans.
- Find ways to involve key workers and teachers in place-based partnerships.
- Work towards making travel more accessible for young people and provide alternatives in cases where it is not possible.
- Ensure meetings are accessible and inclusive is essential to making sure young people feel they are listened to.
- Inductions and micro meetings are necessary, so the young people know what the aims and objectives are from the start.
- Use cross-collaborative events and projects to help build professional networks for young people.
- Advocating for the arts and creative careers for young people is crucial.

Things to Consider

Introduce the role of 'Community Champion' to your place-based partnership.

This is an individual, or team of people, who work consistently with children and young people to create and maintain a cycle of regular communication. To do this, they work with youth projects on a weekly basis to gather young people's thoughts and options, and 'translate' feedback from LCEPs for the young people. Their role is to process data and serve as a mouthpiece for the young people with the aim of youth voice being taken more seriously.

Things to consider...

- Creating a combination of people and roles including more experienced workers to process data and feedback, and younger workers to build rapport with young people.
- Ensuring Champions have a consistent presence in key partner organisations. The aim is one Champion per organisation.
- We strongly suggest that Champions are paid for their time, skills, and expertise.

Integrate youth voice meaningfully into your LCEP meetings and strategic plans.

This should be a realistic and achievable plan that challenges your partnership to do more on a regular basis. Youth voice is not a one-off consultation workshop every three-years. It could include a combination of online surveys and in-person conversations across community spaces, youth projects, cultural organisations. It should have the aim and ambition to include all groups of young people, e.g., those with disabilities, LGBTQ, cultural groups, etc.

Things to consider...

- Create a specific action plan for youth voice across your local area, this could be led by the Community Champions.
- Setting up a monthly newsletter to share how youth voice is being used and to ensure young people know their voices are being heard, 'you said, we did'.
- We would suggest age range between 14-18 as younger children may not comprehend or appreciate what is being asked.

Find ways to involve key workers and teachers in place-based partnerships.

We need to work harder to connect individuals and wider children's services to the work of the place-based partnership. This will enable the voices of foster children, those leaving care or with additional needs and others to be heard and ensure offers are relevant, accessible, and inclusive to them in particular. Also, by ensuring that connections are made, we can create two-way communication where key workers know what's happening and can also share information with the partnership.

Things to consider...

- How social media can be used more effectively to create connections, to share information about meetings and opportunities. For example, tag relevant individuals and services where possible.
- If key workers and teachers can't attend regular steering group meetings, we suggest inviting them to 'opt in' meetings on specific topics so they can still meaningfully contribute and connect according to their capacity.
- We suggest you connect and collaborate with social workers, leaving care workers, the council services – those who support children and young people every day and understand their needs.

Work towards making travel more accessible for young people and provide alternatives in cases where it is not possible.

Travel and the associated costs are the two biggest barriers that young people face to take part in arts and culture. We also recognise that travel may particularly challenging or not even possible for young people with additional needs. Youth voice efforts should be focussed in areas where travel links are limited, to explore how the partnership can work together to bring relevant offers 'to' that area.

Things to consider...

- How you can work together to provide ways of supporting travel. For example, providing a minibus, contributing to a bus pass, integrating existing travel offers like 'Our Pass' into your plans or establishing a joint fund between organisations to fund travel for young people.
- Remove the need for transport by going to places whose young people are most secluded because of transport – meet them in their location first!
- Use online tools to collect youth voice from targeted areas and potentially run consultation workshops.

Ensuring meetings are accessible and inclusive is essential to making sure young people feel they are listened to.

If young people are invited to attend LCEP meetings, then these must be interactive with space for young people to actively take part and stay engaged. If they feel like there is lots of talking about things they don't understand, then young people will get bored and frustrated. The diversity of the young people must be reflected in the steering group members. A diverse steering group will attract a diverse group of young people who will feel more understood and valued.

Things to consider...

- All meetings should have clear outcomes that are shared in advance, so everyone knows what they are working to achieve each time they meet.
- Information, such as meeting agendas, notes, and timetables, should be available in different formats and clearly explained at all times (e.g., acronyms should be kept to an absolute minimum)
- Before working with new children and young people, ask them about any additional needs they have, what they need to be included in conversations, and talk about what they can expect at meetings, etc.

Inductions and micro meetings are necessary, so the young people know what the aims and objectives are from the start.

If the partnership wants to include young people in meetings, then we feel that inductions and smaller micro meetings are necessary to make the young person feel comfortable and also make them feel that their opinions are valued.

Things to consider...

- Prepare icebreaker questions to use at the start of meetings. This will not only help young people but could also help more established professionals feel at ease if they are also new to the group.
- Work closely with key workers to make sure young people are supported to prepare for meetings and make effective contributions.
- Setting up a page on the partnership's website with short biographies of steering group members which young people could look up in their own time.

Use cross-collaborative events and projects to help build professional networks for young people.

Place-based partnerships can work together to create joined-up pathways and connections across a local area. One way we think this could happen is via events which utilise the specialisms of two or more organisations with a focus on young people leading from the front. This could include them as performers, programmers, doing the marketing and social media, etc. This provides opportunities for young people to network with other creatives outside their field and raises the aspirations of others around them.

Things to consider...

- There should be space outside of meetings for the organisations to make plans, share ideas up and coming events and knowledge of how people can get involved.
- We recommend charging a small entry fee for events in lieu of funding, the 'pay what you think/feel' model has become increasingly common.
- We recommend advertising these opportunities on social media, via the Community Champions in LCEP meetings and in schools.

Advocating for the arts and creative careers for young people is crucial.

Place-based partnerships can respond to the lack of funding in schools for the arts by creating an advocacy group and promoting key messages to challenge this in their local area. We think that the messages they share must be supported by evidence provided by LCEPs of successful local artists and alumni. Alongside this they can provide a space for the next generation of the creative workforce to connect with more established creative professionals to receive feedback, careers advice and have networking opportunities.

Things to consider...

- Collect and actively use case studies of local people with successful creative careers.
- Arts subjects should be viewed as having equal value as PE, for mental health and wellbeing benefits it provides. This message needs to be shared with school boards and those in positions of influence.
- Host marketplace events with a range of arts organisations and freelancers to offer support, advice and guidance and feedback to young people wanting to start a creative career.