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:research

Enabling **young people's participation** in residential care decision-making

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The Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care is a partnership between the Australian Childhood Foundation and Southern Cross University. The Centre integrates up to date research evidence with cultural knowledge, practice wisdom and the voices of young people in care to produce reports, practice resources and training to support the provision of high quality, evidence informed therapeutic care.

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Introduction

The literature on how young people participate in decision-making in residential care identifies three main aspects of participation: being able to access information to take part in decisions that matter; having opportunities and capabilities to express their views freely; and having an impact on the outcome of the decision-making process (Bessell, 2011, 2015; Lansdown, 2018; Sinclair, Vieira, & Zufelt, 2019). These key aspects of meaningful and authentic participation also include having the space and time to reflect, form a view, change one's mind, and consult with an advocate that may shift the inherent power imbalance in residential care decision-making (Davis, 2019; Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010). Because young people in residential care have experienced an extreme intervention in their freedoms and rights, participation should necessarily involve more than having a say in individual matters and include expressing views and being taken seriously in matters relating to policies and systemic decisions that affect their lives (Davis, 2019; Lansdown, 2011).

Yet in the most recent survey of 321 children and young people in residential care in NSW, 60% of whom were aged 15-17 years old, only 49% said they usually get a chance to have a say and usually feel listened to; 21% said they don't usually get to have a say and don't usually feel listened to, and these rates were worse amongst females (Robertson, Laing, Butler, & Soliman, 2017). When this survey was repeated in 2018 with 143 young people, the percentage who reported that they usually get a chance to have a say and usually feel listened to reduced to 48%; and the proportion who don't usually get to have a say and don't usually feel listened to increased to 25% (NSW Department of Communities and Justice, 2019).

THIS BRIEF ADDRESSES THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION:

- **Understanding participation**
- **Participation for groups of young people in residential care**
- **Why is participation important?**
- **Benefits of participation**
- **Models of participation**
- **Enabling practice: implications for practitioners and organisations**
- **Young people's participation in service, program and policy design.**

Understanding participation

Youth participation is broadly defined as 'a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives' (Checkoway, 2011). The daily lives of young people living in residential care, or going to school, young people living in rural and remote communities, young people with disability, or young people of different ages and cultures may be different, yet their rights to participate in the decisions that affect their lives persist (Lansdown 2011). In a qualitative study with 11 young people recently transitioned from residential care in Queensland, two core themes included 'having a say and own space' and 'being involved in decisions' (Queensland Child and Famliy Commission, 2018). Quotations from the participants demonstrate the level of exclusion many young people feel in residential care, and very different experiences:

> ***'There is a reason they [young people] are running away. They have tried to have their voices, opinion heard and weren't so they remove themselves from the situation.'***
>
> ***'When I say leave me alone, I mean leave me alone [listen to me].'***
>
> ***'I could leave whenever I liked. They would wait for me to return...placement was always available.'***
>
> ***'At the house there was no privacy, they were monitoring that I was in my room at night. They would come into my room.'***
>
> ***'We could choose – our own linen… buy our own meals... paint our own room… choose what you want for dinner... cook if we wanted to but I didn't'***
>
> (Queensland Child and Famliy Commission, 2018, pp. 14–15)

These quotations concur with wider research in highlighting core themes for young people: prior experiences of not being listened to; the need for privacy, space and time; the importance of knowing what they are entitled to; the role of advocates; developing the skills and confidence to participate; and that young people want to participate in 'important decisions' like administrative, procedural or judicial matters as well as everyday matters; only some young people want to participate in formal meetings and care planning (Bessell, 2011; Commission for Children and Young People, 2019; Davis, 2019; McDowall, 2018; Queensland Child and Famliy Commission, 2018). Research identifies young peoples common experiences of exclusion from decision-making in residential care, in particular: at entry to care, in the court system, in case planning and review, decisions about school location, family and sibling contact, cultural planning, and leaving care (Balsells, Fuentes-Peláez, & Pastor, 2017; Bessell, 2015; Davis, 2019; Diaz, Pert, & Thomas, 2018; Franklin & Goff, 2019; McCarthy, 2016; McDowall, 2016, 2018; Moore, McArthur, Death, Tilbury, & Roche, 2017, 2018; Thomas, 2011). This section highlights key concepts in the literature relating to participation of young people in residential care decision-making.

Access to information, understanding and awareness

Participation involves more than 'having a say' or 'having a voice'; it involves knowing one's rights and entitlements, understanding the possible consequences of decisions, and having access to information about themselves, their family, and about the residential care system.

***NSW CHILD SAFE STANDARDS FOR PERMANENT CARE* REFLECT YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHTS TO:**

- **access information about care decisions in a manner which they can understand, and**
- **to be provided with information about how to raise and use complaints systems, information about proposed carers or residence, that support participation in decision-making processes**

(Office of the Children's Guardian, 2015).

The right to access information includes planning documentation and processes, and information about how to make contact with family members (Glynn & Mayock, 2019; Lansdown, 2011). It also includes more sensitive information, such as information about therapeutic treatment plans, why contact with certain people might be restricted, being informed about safety risks they might be exposed to in residential care and what institutions do to protect their safety (Glynn & Mayock, 2019; Lansdown, 2011; Larkins et al., 2015; Moore, 2017). On a practical level, it involves tailored information about life skills for living independently beyond the residential care system, and the right to attend review meetings to access information that is discussed verbally but rarely written down (Roesch-Marsh, Gillies, & Green, 2017). As the quotation below illustrates, superficial information that is not tailored to young people's needs and interests, can result in their withdrawal from participation altogether:

> ***All of the young people leaving residential care described some level of life skills training that involved, for example, cooking lessons, money management and/or safety information but, almost universally, these lessons were considered to be superficial and insufficient to meet the demands of living independently... Disappointments of this nature sometimes led to young people opting out of training courses of this kind.*** **(Glynn & Mayock, 2019, p. 86)**

Having a voice, having a say and expressing views

The right to participate is often referred to as the 'voice of the child'; 2/3 of 86 articles reviewed for this research-to-practice brief involved research conducted directly with young people about their views about participation in residential care decision-making using qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research. A study with 151 young people aged 16-22 in care in the USA measured perceptions of the amount of voice they were able to exercise in decision-making in their case, compared to their preferred level of voice, and the amount of voice exercised by others (Beal et al., 2019). 64% said that their voice made up less than half of the decisions made. They felt most decisions were made by caseworkers, legal representatives, caregivers and parents. When asked what they preferred, all young people sought more voice in decision-making about their case, with a preferred increase from 43 to 57% of influence over decisions. These results indicate that while young people in this research want more of a say, they want to collaborate with others in important decisions about their lives. They do, however, want a say about who is involved (Beal et al., 2019).

In Australia, young people's voice is consistently found wanting in a series of reviews, evaluations and research in residential care decision-making (Commission for Children and Young People, 2019; McDowall, 2018; Queensland Child and Famliy Commission, 2018; Robertson et al., 2017) (QFCC 2018, CCYP 2019, McDowall 2018, Robertson 2017). CREATE Foundation's survey of more than 1200 children and young people across Australia in 2018 found that young people in residential care were less likely than in other placement types to have a say about education matters, family contact and placement changes (McDowall, 2018). When asked what 'having a say' meant, some respondents in CREATE's 2018 survey said:

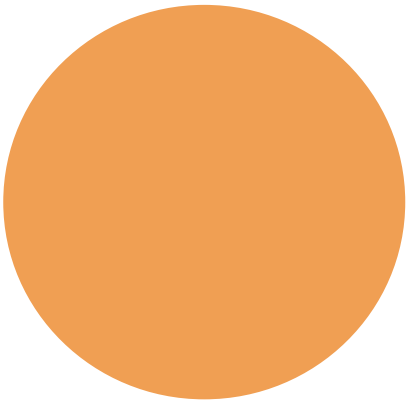
I don't want to go to residential care but they say there's nothing else. Because it's all they have got, I have to go. No one tells me what to expect. No one cares that I don't want to go. I like the carers I'm with now, but they are old and I have to leave at the end of March. **(Male, 14 years)**

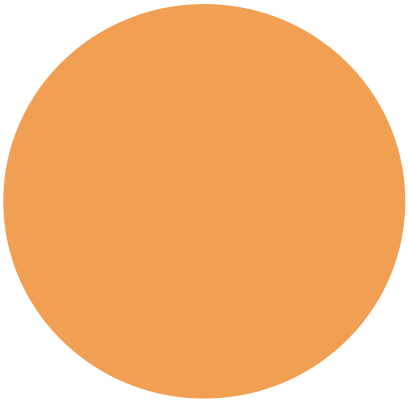
When my carer and caseworker have come to my brother and I, "Do you want any family visit or contact?" and I will be able to have a say about our family contact and if we want to see them or not. **(Female, 14 years)**

That I can get involved in my Indigenous heritage and get a proper education. **(Male, 12 years).**

(McDowall, 2018, p. 58)

Young people want to have a say about their care, about family contact, the school they attend, what activities they participate in, cultural and religious practices. Beyond everyday matters, young people should also have opportunities to participate in formal meetings where key stakeholders meet. While these meetings can be intimidating, they are an opportunity to influence the rules, policies and cultures of institutions and systems that influence young people's lives (Lansdown & O'Kane, 2014; McDowall, 2018; Sinclair et al., 2019). They also want to have a say about important social issues that affect their lives, like school subjects, community services and urban planning (Bessell, 2011). Having a say includes being able to express views in different forums, giving feedback to people involved in decision-making about their lives, and being able to make complaints (McDowall, 2018; McDowall, 2013; Moore, 2017). CREATE Foundation's 2018 survey found that 30% of 1000 respondents had experienced treatment in care that they wanted to raise a complaint about, but did not follow through. 36% of these young people felt fear or anxiety about the impacts of a complaint on themselves, carers or their family, and 11% thought no one would listen, or they would not be believed (McDowall, 2018). Evidence of children and young people's inclusion in decision-making at key stages is unclear, and not uniform across countries and organisations (Beal et al., 2019).





Practitioners should explore a range of tools to support young people's voice, from creative, play-based and story-based techniques that may be more effective with younger children, to more conversation-style interactions with older young people (Grace, Miller, Blacklock, Bonser, & Hayden, 2018), as well as digital opportunities for speaking out and networking online (Lansdown, 2018). Creating safe spaces and allowing time for young people to form and express views in decision-making hinge on trusted and inclusive relationships, accessible and inclusive communication including the use of interpreters and communication devices (Bessell 2015, Franklin 2019, Grace 2019, Lansdown 2018). Having a say can be empowering for young people, where 'voice' is an equal voice, where views are listened to, and where young people feel they can have a say about who is involved in decision-making about their lives(Lansdown, 2018; Lundy, 2007; Mannay et al., 2019; Sinclair et al., 2019).

Youth Consult for Change, a consultative group of young people with lived experience in out-of-home care contributed to the development of the NSW Care Leavers' Charter of Rights, which guides practitioners working with young people in care. An excerpt is included in Box 3 below (NSW Department of Communities and Justice (Families and Community Services) 2019).

BOX 3: EXCERPT FROM NSW CARE LEAVERS' CHARTER OF RIGHTS

Participation is more than being physically present in meetings or shown a finished plan, it's making room for us to use our voice and take control of our lives.

Remember that leaving care is our journey, not a task or a meeting.

Involve us from the beginning to the end, don't leave planning conversations till the last minute.

Find creative ways to help us understand and be involved in the process.

Listen to what we want and need, ask questions, help us understand ourselves and our options so we can make good decisions.

Young people's preferences vary about their desired level of autonomy in decision-making, yet across the board they want to be more informed, have more voice or input into decisions, and to be listened to. Young people want child protection workers and legal professionals to contribute less to decision-making, but not to eliminate their contributions altogether; indeed, for young people with complex experiences of abuse, they may desire more involvement of legal professionals (Beal et al., 2019).

> ***"when adults have supportive, warm, and nurturing relationships with adolescents and are less controlling, adolescents provide more voice in decision-making"***
> **(Beal et al., 2019, p. 67)**

Trusting and inclusive relationships between care workers, case planners, reviewers, legal professionals and young people are critical to their involvement in decision-making, both in preparing or capacity building, in participating, and in debriefing (Bessell, 2015; Commission for Children and Young People, 2019; Roesch-Marsh et al., 2017). Having a say about the location and timing of meetings is critical for young people, and most young people do not want to have case planning meetings at their school (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2017). Importantly though, there may be individual differences for different young people. Some young people will not want to participate, and should not be forced to do so; however they may change their minds over time. Most young people want to know that their views are views represented even if they do not attend, and want to be kept informed about what is being said about them in their absence, decisions taken and any documentation (Sinclair et al., 2019).

Some organisations focus on 'voice' at the expense of listening to young people and giving weight to their views in decision-making. McDowall's (2016) review of participatory practices notes that a focus on consulting with young people on their views can allow organisations to use consultation as a proxy for meaningful participation, with decisions made without young people and no feedback provided. Similarly, using young people's words, images or creative expression does not guarantee young people's views are heard or given serious consideration (Mannay et al., 2019). UNICEF notes in its guidelines for implementing the child's right to be heard, "it is not possible to represent the best interests of children without taking account of their experiences, concerns and preferences. Mechanisms must be introduced to ensure that children in all forms of alternate care, including institutions, are able to express their views and have them given due weight in matters affecting their daily lives" (Lansdown, 2011, p. 86).

Listening to, and giving weight to young people's views

Listening to children and young people and working hard to understand their views, in whatever format they are able to express them, should be at the heart of all social work practice and is the first step in any participation process **(Roesch-Marsh et al., 2017, p. 904).**

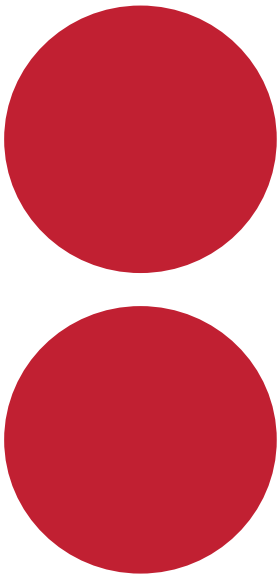
Listening to young people and giving weight to their views in decision-making shifts the focus of participation to the obligations of practitioners, organisations and policymakers – the audience for young people's expression of views, and the response of those who are listening (Lansdown, 2018; Schoenfeld, Bennett, Manganella, & Kemp, 2019). It involves taking their views seriously, in all aspects of decisions that affect their lives. Young people in residential care have experienced a range of practices, systems, spaces and places where they have had limited involvement in decision-making, and their frustrated attempts to get involved in decisions relating to the most significant issues: their safety, family relationships, where they live and who is involved in their lives (McCarthy, 2016; McDowall, 2013, 2018). In recognition of these significant failings, and the vulnerability of children and young people who live in alternate care, justice and health systems, UNICEF suggests children should be guaranteed their views will be listened to and given due weight, based on each young person's evolving capacities and full access to all relevant information, including establishing communication with each child by whatever means necessary (Lansdown, 2011).

The only reason I'm absconding is because I don't feel safe there. They don't listen to me, I don't feel valued **(Imogen, residential care, 16).**

Some workers don't listen. I have really bad anger issues and when I'm already mad and I ask them to go away they keep biting and then they snap at me and they blame me **(Kerry, residential care, 15).**

(Commission for Children and Young People, 2019, pp. 173, 238)

Young people are more likely to participate if they feel they will be listened to, if their contributions will make a difference and if the people they speak to have the power to influence change (McDowall, 2013, 2016). Demonstrating that young people's views have an influence on the process and outcomes of decision-making is critical to fulfilling their rights, and can be achieved through requesting feedback from young people about their experiences of participation, and providing feedback when consulting with young people about their views (Lansdown & O'Kane, 2014; Moore, 2017). In a study investigating independent reviews of young people's care arrangements in Scotland, half of the young people said that participating in review meetings made them feel cared for, and a few said these were meetings where they felt they would be listened to and could get things done or decisions changed (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2017).



In a qualitative research project conducted with 121 Australian children and young people about their experiences of safety in institutions during the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, children and young people emphasised the importance of being listened to and taken seriously (Moore, 2017). Their advice included organisations being transparent about how decisions are made, involving them using a range of strategies such as surveys, peer workshops and regular group discussions, giving feedback about the influence of their contributions, and having 'adult champions' to support complaints (Moore 2017). This study also highlighted the significance of power in children and young people's decision-making mechanisms like youth advisory groups. Such groups should be given authority so that schools or residential care providers are required to listen and take their views into account (Moore 2017). Without this important element of power and influence, young people may disengage and become cynical about participation.

In a study examining the influence of children and young people's preferences in 147 cases of residential care decision-making in Sweden, inspectors reported difficulty in giving due weight to the views children and young people expressed in interviews (Pålsson, 2017). They cited a range of reasons, saying the issues children and young people raised were unconnected to the regulations, inspector's authority didn't align to children's expectations, and inspectors felt the views needed to be substantiated through evidence - processes which they found overly complicated. Some inspectors were hamstrung by being unable to influence the outcome of the concerns, with others "persuading the managers outside the formal inspection process to heed the children's opinions" (Pålsson, 2017, p. 37).

Influencing outcomes and making a difference

Young people are entitled to influence decision-making at all stages of child protection and OOHC decision-making, including judicial, administrative, planning and policymaking. Making a difference to decision-making is most critical for young people at removal and entry to care, planning and school, with regard to family contact and reunification, placement decisions, location and type of placement, future planning and leaving care (Beal 2019, Bessell 2015, Lansdown 2011, McDowall 2013). In the Family is Culture review of Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC in NSW, Davis (2019) states that the magnitude of the impact of removal of a child from their family of origin is 'difficult to overstate', requiring that procedural justice be afforded to the family and child, ensuring "that their views are not only listened to, but heard, and that they have the opportunity to engage with the representatives of the state to craft a safe and secure life for their children" (Davis, 2019, p. 314).

At organisational and systemic levels, trust is supported through transparent processes of accountability for decision-making so that young people can see the outcomes of their participation, through feedback, coordination, open communication and documentation of influence (Keenan, 2014). Young people who are empowered to participate on an individual level are more likely to participate in policy-level processes, and in these processes they feel respected when decision-makers show up to hear them, or indeed, to engage in policymaking collaboratively over time (Sinclair et al., 2019).

Social workers' group decision-making processes can also be used to subtly influence young people's cooperation with workers' decisions, rather than allowing young people time to freely consider their views and preferences or engage with trusted supporters, advocates or family members (Hitzler & Messmer, 2010). These forms of influence include decisions by default, an agreement to revert to a previous decision if no new arrangement can be reached; decisions made based on workers' depiction of facts that influence assessments, rather than the facts themselves or young people's interpretations; implicit decision-making, in which certain details about decisions are unstated to prevent lengthy discussions, yet the details are unknown to young people and have consequences for their lives (Hitzler & Messmer, 2010). In each of these cases, young people can be left out of group discussions or influenced to agree with decisions already made. Child and family advocates, human rights officers and independent reviewers can be critical influencers in young people's participation holding organisations and governments to account, and in building young people's capabilities to exercise their agency, such as chairing care planning and review meetings (Clive, Pert, & Thomas, 2019; Glynn & Mayock, 2019; SNAICC, 2018).

Participation for groups of young people

Participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

The participation rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait young people in care are bound up with three important concepts of *kin, culture, and County:* their rights to be in contact with family and extended family members of their choice, to cultural connection, and to know and be connected with Country (Davis, 2019; SNAICC, 2018). Recent reviews of the New South Wales (Davis, 2019) and Victorian out-of-home care systems (Commission for Children and Young People, 2019) have found Aboriginal young people are often missing out on all three of these aspects of participation despite the existence of cultural plans. Building an understanding of culture and cultural connections through contact with kin and Country enables young people to develop a strong sense of pride in culture and historical continuity with different places and nations (Davis, 2019).

PRACTITIONERS SHOULD DEMONSTRATE ACTIVE EFFORTS IN SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONNECTION TO KIN, CULTURE AND COUNTRY, INCLUDING:

- **early identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, recognising the impacts of intergenerational trauma, colonisation, historical and present-day disparities on young people's sense of cultural identity, which may be complex;**
- **strengths-based assessments, early intervention and holistic supports to families promoting interconnected emotional cognitive, cultural and spiritual elements of wellbeing;**
- **development of cultural support plans in collaboration with young people, their families and communities;**
- **active support to access services, including financial support and transport;**
- **collaboration with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs);**
- **engagement with Aboriginal Family-Led Decision-making, including trained Aboriginal convenors and shifting power to the leadership and cultural authority of young people, their families and communities to make decisions;**
- **ensuring young people's needs are the focus of decision-making as much as adults' needs, including allowing young people to identify those who they identify as safe;**
- **ensuring young people and families have time to consider their views and options without professionals present;**
- **case management that meets the principles outlined in the Aboriginal Case Management Policy, including being culturally embedded, supporting self-determination, holistic, preventive, and accountable;**
- **supporting young people and families through reunification planning and supports**

(AbSec, 2018; Lindstedt, Moeller-Saxone, Black, Herrman, & Szwarc, 2017; SNAICC, 2018).

Self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is another key concept linked to participation, but with a different meaning. Self-determination has varied meanings, and may include a system of independent self-governance as a collective, or people "making meaningful decisions about their lives" as individuals (Davis 2019). It is recognised in the *United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the 2019 *Independent Review of Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC in NSW,* and was distinguished from participation because participation assumes that services or offerings to young people and families are, to some extent, already determined. Whereas self-determination assumes Indigenous *autonomous* decision-making, "the devolution of power from the state to Indigenous peoples" (Davis, 2019, p. 85).

Particularly in the case of Aboriginal young people in residential care, the danger of tokenistic participation, or missed opportunities for young people to express their views and to have their views given due weight in decision-making can be devastating to their health and wellbeing (Davis, 2019; Lindstedt et al., 2017). Practitioners should embed practices of critical reflection into their work with Aboriginal young people in residential care, to enhance their application of participation principles, and avoid compliance 'ritualism' where processes of compliance with expected practices, forms or checklists become part of daily practice at the expense of relational ethical practice that supports real participation and recognise the meaning of self-determination (Davis, 2019). Building strong relationships with local ACCOs and AbSec, NSW peak for Aboriginal OOHC, creates a network of support for staff and young people in residential care.

Participation of young people with disability

The Victorian systemic inquiry into the experiences of children and young people in out-of-home care in 2019 found that placement instability is more likely to be experienced by children and young people with intellectual disability and those who have experienced complex trauma, and that young people in these circumstances are less likely to have regular contact with their parents (Commission for Children and Young People, 2019). Placement is noted as a foundation stone in pathways to adulthood for the health, mental health and employment of young people leaving care (Stein, 2015). The Committee on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2019) has also highlighted the need for greater action in Australia to prevent abuse and violence against children with disability in institutions and alternate care, including forced sterilisation of young women with disability without their full and informed consent. UK evidence demonstrates that in residential care, young people with disability, and in particular young people with communication-related impairments, experience multiple barriers to accessing information, are denied access to decision-making, and the supports they need to communicate their views (Franklin & Goff, 2019).

> ***Communication is not just a technical matter, it is embedded in the emotional, personal context and scripts which inform the life of the young person, the messages they have inherited about their own value, what they understand, the extent to which they have been supported to develop their communicative capacity, and their own sense of their rights and place within a home or setting.***
> **(Franklin & Goff, 2019, p. 100)**

It is the role of practitioners to identify and build the capabilities for communication with young people, and to ensure their rights to communicate, express their views and have their views given due weight are upheld (Franklin & Goff, 2019). In their research with young people with complex communication needs, Franklin and Goff (2019) found that young people want workers to learn their unique way of communicating, to demonstrate interest in who they are as people with their own interests, and to respect that they want to be informed and involved, even when decisions involve 'bad news'. Franklin and Goff also found that workers need to use both low- and high-tech methods of assistive communication devices, like hand-drawn symbols for communicating as well as laptops with dedicated communication apps. Workers also need to be able to champion a culture of respect for young people's communication preferences and abilities to participate in organisations, to prevent tokenistic processes and exclusion. Having opportunities to express dissatisfaction and being heard at all levels of the organisation was critical to young people, rather than being interpreted as 'challenging behaviour', resulting in restraint or exclusion.

In NSW, CREATE Foundation delivers The Ability Project, which includes supported decision-making training workshops for young people with disability who are leaving care, designed to enhance young people's transition to independence. An evaluation in 2017 found that the workshops and follow-up from CREATE staff served to support young people with disability to improve their community inclusion and social connection, improved their wellbeing, and improved their control of decisions and awareness of rights and advocacy during this important transition phase (Notara et al., 2017).

We have a right to make decisions, that's what I picked up and we can make mistakes as well…We learnt about supporters too because sometimes when you have a big decision you need someone to help. [Participant]
(Notara et al., 2017, p. 14).

Participation of young people leaving care

Influencing decision-making takes on greater significance during adolescence as a critical capability for all young people. For young people ageing out of care, participation is an opportunity to prepare for an critical transition that can also establish and sustain their social and emotional wellbeing (Arnau-Sabatés, Marzo, Jariot, & Sala-Roca, 2014; Glynn & Mayock, 2019; Lansdown, 2018). Yet research consistently demonstrates that young people's experiences of participation in transition planning, when it does occur, is likely to be a rapid, one-off planning experience, even if they do experience ongoing contact with support workers (Glynn & Mayock, 2019; Mendes, Johnson, & Moslehuddin, 2011). This gap in planning and sustained involvement in decision-making occurs right at the time when young people leaving care are adjusting to the end of care, finding housing or experiencing homelessness, making decisions about ongoing training and education, searching for employment and experiencing significant financial stress (Mendes et al., 2011). Young people leaving care may be hopeful about freedom from the constraints of residential care and may have deeply held goals for their independence and adult lives that leaving care planning can facilitate (Narendorf, Fedoravicius, McMillen, McNelly, & Robinson, 2012). Without involvement in evolving leaving care planning and ongoing support, including transitional and aftercare programs, young people's goals can easily be derailed. Leaving care planning should commence early, provide detailed capacity building and skills training for young people, as well as ongoing holistic support and adaptable case planning with significant financial support and accommodation arrangements (Mendes et al., 2011).

Practitioners can support young people leaving care into employment through developing participation 'competencies' (Arnau-Sabatés et al., 2014). Competencies can be developed over time and supported through participation in individual and group processes, and include self-organisation, decision-making and problem solving, teamwork, communication, perseverance, professional project development, flexibility and responsibility (Arnau-Sabatés et al., 2014). Analysing transition-from-care programs, Cassarino-Perez (2018) found that the relationship between participants and mentors or practitioners was central to young people's experiences of support, building networks and that, in addition to tailoring the content of programs to individuals, they needed to promote participation to achieve outcomes.

Participation amongst sexuality and gender diverse (LGBTIQ+) young people

There were few references to the experiences of LGBTIQ+ young people in residential care in the literature. CREATE Foundation identifies a lack of resources for supporting sexuality and gender diverse young people and carers in residential care decision-making (McDowall, 2018).

> ***Lack of resources and education for carers and residential workers looking after LGBTIQ+ young people and children. More check-ins from caseworkers to the young people who have just entered a new home. (Trans man, 15 years).*** **(p. 25)**

It is recommended that practitioners seek training, support and collaboration with headspace, Twenty10 or ACON when supporting young people who may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning their sexuality and gender diversity.

Why is participation important?

SNAICC's (2018) guide for implementing the Aboriginal Placement Principle states that the participation of children and young people and their chosen family members ensures the inclusion of their expert knowledge, views and preferences in decision-making, and that decisions reached with their involvement are more likely to be supported and implemented by families and young people. Participation is also a fundamental right of children and young people, a pillar of their future development as citizens, and brings benefits for them as individuals and for the organisations and communities that involve them. Beyond this, participation of children and young people is prescribed in the ethical codes for practitioners in social work, community work, psychology and other fields, presenting an opportunity for practitioners to reflect on the gap between rhetoric and reality for young people in residential care.

Children and young people's rights

The right to participation is recognition of human equality: every person should have a chance to influence decisions that affect their lives. Where this involves children and young people who have not yet reached legal autonomy, the experience of holding those in power to account is also an expression of human dignity (Lansdown, 2018). Children and young people's right to participate in decisions that affect their lives is enshrined in several articles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1989), which has been signed and ratified by Australia. The UNCRC marked a shift from seeing children and young people as objects of care and protection to full citizens with rights and capacities to be involved in decisions (Lansdown, 2001). The Committee notes in its General Comment 12 that this shift involves a movement to one of information sharing, dialogue, mutual respect and accountability to young people for the outcomes of their participation (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). State signatories like Australia are bound by its obligations, including government and non-government agencies and private sector organisations that provide services to young people (Lansdown & O'Kane, 2014). In Australia, the UNCRC is enshrined in state and territory child protection legislation and in NSW, the Department of Communities and Justice has developed a Charter of Rights for 13-17 year olds and one for young people leaving care.

The right to participation is also identified in Standard 6 of the NSW Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care. The standard states "[w]here children and young people are able to form their own views regarding their safety, welfare and wellbeing they must be given an opportunities to express their views freely and their views should be given due weight" (Office of the Children's Guardian, 2015, p. 11). Inscribing children and young people's participation in the standards for permanent care is an important step to ensure their participation rights, and needs to be supported by cultural, policy, and budgetary practices (Lansdown 2018). In their analysis of the rights of children and young people internationally, and with complex communication disabilities, Lansdown (2018) and Franklin (2019) might contend with this standard. They confirm that all children and young people are capable of forming their own views, and they have a right to express their views on all matters that affect them, not only on matters such as their safety, welfare and wellbeing. Indeed, sociologists question the use of age alone as an indicator of capability, and instead point to children and young people's rights to participate and exercise agency about what matters to them (Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2016).

The right to participate is framed by the interlocking of several articles in the UNCRC, but primarily Article 12 which recognises young people's right to express their views in all matters affecting them, and the obligation to give due weight to their views according to their age and maturity (Lansdown & O'Kane, 2014). Other articles highlight the role of guardians in recognising their evolving capacities, and young people's rights to freedom of expression, religion, conscience, association, assembly, privacy and information (Lansdown, 2018). The United Nations (UN) *Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children* (UN General Assembly, 2010) note the importance of children and young people's participation at all stages of decision-making regarding care matters, including the decision to be taken into care, placement arrangements, family contact, provision of services, involvement of guardians, carers and parents in decision-making, care planning and leaving care, health and education matters, and the critical role of cultural and religious practices.

In its 2019 review of Australia's performance under the UNCRC, the UN called for investment in measures "to ensure that children, their families and communities participate in decision-making in order to guarantee an individualized and community-sensitive approach" (2019, para. 34). It also called for measures to reduce the numbers of children in care, to prevent removal to care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through implementing community-led initiatives, to

ensure the same rights and protection from abuse of children with disability and those with mental health issues in care, and to improve training of the out-of-home care workforce, particularly to prevent the drift of young people in care into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2019).

Participation rights are not limited for young people with complex communication needs and other disabilities; rather, professionals and organisations have a "responsibility to recognise, develop and encourage children's communication, especially within residential settings" (Franklin & Goff, 2019, p. 100). Similarly, Vis & Fossum's (2015) research also notes that 'difficult' young people, and those experiencing the impacts of trauma or other mental health issues, still retain their rights to participate, placing the onus of enabling participation on the organisations and professionals who work alongside young people in residential care.

Internationally, one key challenge for researchers has been to measure children and young people's participation in residential care decision-making (O'Hare, Santin, Winter, & McGuinness, 2016; ten Brummelaar et al., 2014, 2018). UNICEF's work to implement adolescent participation broadly across its wide constituency of organisations is highly accessible and caters for varying locations, cultures, geographical and political contexts in which young people live (Lansdown, 2018; UNICEF, 2017). Box 1 below is a summary of a useful conceptual guide developed by UNICEF in its application of the UNCRC to an outcomes framework for measuring young people's participation (Lansdown, 2018).

BOX 1: KEY CONCEPTS IN PARTICIPATION RIGHTS (LANSDOWN 2018)	
All young people	Opportunities should be created for young people who experience marginalisation to participate: girls, young people with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD young people, refugee and asylum seekers, and LGBTI young people.
A means and an end	Participation helps young people realise other rights. For example, it is not possible for young people to access to justice if they are denied a hearing.
As individuals and as a group	Young people have a right to participate in decisions affecting them personally, as well as matters affecting them collectively, such as new programs, or the development of policies or budgets.
All matters affecting them	Young people have rights to participate not only to issues of immediate relevance to their lives, such as OOHC, education or health but also wider issues relating to the environment, transport, economics or immigration.
Not removed by protection	In protecting the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people, adults must not create barriers to their participation.
Different from adults	Young people don't have the same legal standing as adults. Adults supporting their participation should adapt to different young people's capacities, change as they develop over time, and promote their best interests.
Builds empowerment and citizenship	Participating is empowering, with young people developing new knowledge, skills, confidence and practice, and adults sharing power with young people. Participating and sharing power develops citizenship individually and as a society.
A right, not an obligation	Young people can choose whether to participate and should never be compelled.

Enabling the realisation of these rights and addressing the barriers to participation are critical challenges faced by residential care workers in everyday practice (Larkins et al., 2015; McDowall, 2018). Research into the perspectives of 121 children, young people and 19 parents in the UK found that the participation of children and young people in decision-making was critical for social workers attempting to balance the rights of children to parental contact with rights to stable placements and healthy lives (Larkins et al., 2015). In this research, young people themselves held unexpectedly balanced and wise views about the right level of contact for them. Engaging children, young people and birth parents in decision-making about contact over time led to more stable placements and satisfaction of all parties with social work practice.

Benefits of participation for young people

I have come to realise that my voice is just as valuable as my peers. It has made me realise that I create change now rather than waiting for someone else to do it. **(Young Person, Dixon, Ward, & Blower, 2019, p. 18)**

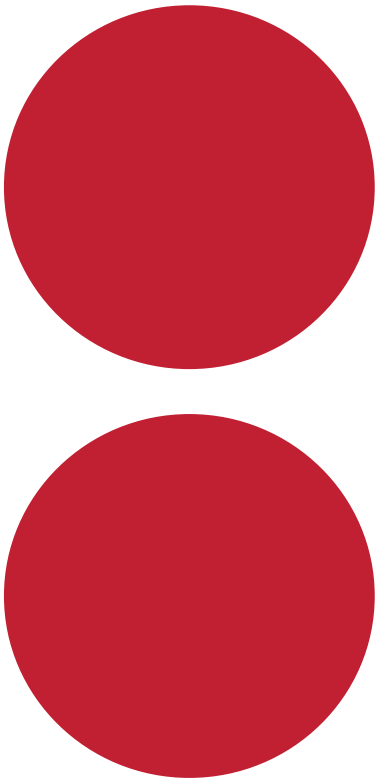
Beyond their rights to participate, young people's contributions can also offer significant benefits, individually, to organisations, and the development of more effective programs and policy. When participation is meaningful, transparent, and accountable to young people in residential care, and when they are given opportunities to build their capacities to participate with support, the benefits can be empowering and long-lasting. Benefits identified in the research literature for young people participating in residential care decision-making can be grouped thematically, and extend from building personal identity and agency to developing social networks, skills and capacities for employment and future participation, including:

- building **social and emotional wellbeing,** including identity, belonging, healthy emotional security and emotional regulation (Commission for Children and Young People, 2019; Diaz et al., 2018; Graham & Johnson, 2019; McCarthy, 2016; O'Hare et al., 2016).
- developing **agency, communication skills, resilience, mastery** and sense of power over their lives (Burford & Gallagher, 2015; Davis, 2019; Franklin & Goff, 2019; Glynn & Mayock, 2019; Graham & Johnson, 2019; McDowall, 2018; Schoenfeld et al., 2019; SNAICC, 2018).
- **enhancing young people's safety,** including building capacities to report abuse and violence in care, assess risk, challenge injustice and discrimination; in this way participation leads to better protection (Borgne, 2014; Lansdown, 2018; Moore et al., 2018).
- opportunities to **connect to culture, kin and country**, including cultural rights and safety and use of language, meaningful contact with chosen family members and cultural community (Commission for Children and Young People, 2019; Davis, 2019; SNAICC, 2018).
- forming and sustaining **relationships and social networks,** including professional and personal relationships related to work, education, and social activities (Commission for Children and Young People, 2019; Narendorf et al., 2012).
- **educational benefits,** including improved grades, school completion rates and transition to employment for 'at-risk' communities of young people involved in partnership-based therapeutic relationships (Sinclair et al., 2019).

- developing **employability skills,** including problem-solving, teamwork and collaboration, managing and resolving conflict, self-confidence/self-esteem and communication skills, acquiring new knowledge, critical thinking and making decisions (Arnau-Sabatés et al., 2014; Dixon et al., 2019; Lansdown, 2018; O'Hare et al., 2016).
- skills to **support transitioning from care,** including emotional, social, cultural and practical skills (Cashmore 2002 cited in Davis, 2019; McCarthy, 2016).
- capacities for **civic and political participation** (Lansdown, 2018; McDowall, 2016).

Tokenism and negative experiences of participation

It should be noted, however, that many young people in residential care have had negative experiences of 'participation' that are tokenistic and inauthentic. These include not being adequately informed about the reasons for entry into care, not being prepared for care planning and review processes, and having their most significant preferences ignored or not responded to, such as frequency of contact with siblings, family, or location of school (Bessell, 2011, 2015; Commission for Children and Young People, 2019; Diaz et al., 2018; Glynn & Mayock, 2019; McDowall, 2018). In a study of reunification processes in Spain, young people reported they are not given enough time to adjust to decisions but merely told to pack and then move – into care, between placements, and back to birth parents – which prevents young people's participation and can risk the success of reunification processes (Balsells et al., 2017). Organisations may also engage in consultation activities that are poorly coordinated and their views interpreted by third parties, where decision-makers are absent, and may not receive feedback about how their views contribute to making a difference (Keenan, 2014). The result of these negative experiences can include withdrawal from participation, disengagement, cynicism, feelings of helplessness and lower self-confidence (O'Hare et al., 2016; Roesch-Marsh et al., 2017; Thomas, 2011).



Organisational benefits of young people's participation

Significant benefits are available to organisations willing to embrace authentic engagement with young people, moving beyond the rhetoric of participation, addressing barriers to inclusion, and committing to transparent processes that are coordinated and accountable to young people (Graham et al., 2018; Keenan, 2014; NSW Government Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, 2019). Organisations may gain renewed vision and commitment to collective purpose for those involved in youth programs, especially where they are able to design services and programs closely with young people that are sustainable (Schoenfeld et al., 2019).

Operationally, organisations may develop 'culturally competent care environments' co-designing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (Morgan, Faldon & Palmorales, cited in Commission for Children and Young People, 2019). Participation can achieve improved placement stability and care plans that better reflect young people's preferences (Davis, 2019; Moore et al., 2018), more effective house meetings, residential care environment and decision-making processes (Brady et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2018). Involving young people in residential care also leads to improved staff retention and stability in relationships and understanding of worker's roles (Moore et al., 2018; Schoenfeld et al., 2019).

Organisations can benefit from drawing on young people's lived experience in the development of procedures, documents and policies, that reflect their concerns, culture, and interests (Calheiros, Patricio, & Graca, 2013; Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2012; McDowall, 2016; NSW Government Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, 2019). Youth advisory groups, youth reference groups and board positions are increasingly being introduced as industry-standard practices in organisational development (Schoenfeld et al., 2019). Youth participation also serves to develop cultures of reciprocity, collaboration and improved relationships between staff, managers and young people (Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2012; Dixon et al., 2019).

Partnering with young people in coproduction and co-design of new programs, such as aftercare and transition programs of support, can benefit organisations through building their capacities for innovation and extending business development (Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2012; Dixon et al., 2019; McDowall, 2016; NSW Government Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, 2019). The lived experience of young people, together with the professional experience of workers and service managers is increasingly acknowledged in innovation practice as evidence by policy-makers (Purtell et al., 2019). Participation and children's rights researchers call for greater accountability for decision-making to young people (Borgne, 2014; Keenan, 2014; Lansdown, 2018) (Keenan 2014, Lansdown 2018, Le Borgne 2014), and that co-research and peer review can enhance organisational evaluation (Dixon et al., 2019).

Participation and ethics

Another reason to ensure young people's participation is the gap that exists between the rhetoric and practice of participation. In their analysis of state and federal policies, Graham et. al (2018, p. 2) note the potential ambiguity of participation as a 'hurrah' concept "widely lauded and broadly applied, but lacking the rigour and momentum to achieve the cultural and systemic changes necessary to realise its full potential". Organisations and programs will take different approaches to valuing young people's participation, yet practitioners in residential care can enable participation through their everyday practices: listening to young people, ensuring access to information about their rights, building their capacities to participate, addressing barriers to participation, delivering on commitments, ensuring transparent processes and clear feedback to young people (Larkins 2015, McDowall 2016, Roesch-Marsh 2017). In addition to the obligations contained in the UNCRC, the codes of ethics of the Australian Association of Social Workers, the Australian Psychological Society and the Australian Community Workers Association all codify respect for people's right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Models of participation

There are many theories informing child and youth participation, including childhood studies theory, geography of childhood, children's citizenship theory, and child-centred political accountability (Le Borgne 2014). Similarly, various models can be used to implement and evaluate youth participation. Each has strengths and limitations, and are variously referred to in the literature as models, frameworks, theories and typologies. Those included here are drawn from research involving young people's participation in residential care, or have been used effectively in engaging young people facing multiple forms of disadvantage.

Voice is not enough (Lundy, 2007)

One approach commonly informing rights-based child and youth participation is drawn from Lundy's research with over 350 stakeholders in education, published in a paper titled 'Voice is Not Enough'. Lundy's approach informs the *Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation* developed by UNICEF (Lansdown, 2018), various research projects with children and young people in care in the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the Australian 'Kids Say Project' (Grace et al., 2018). 'Voice is Not Enough' identifies four principles that must be satisfied for the meaningful participation of young people, drawing from the UNCRC: space, voice, audience and influence. The principles are detailed in Figure 1 below.

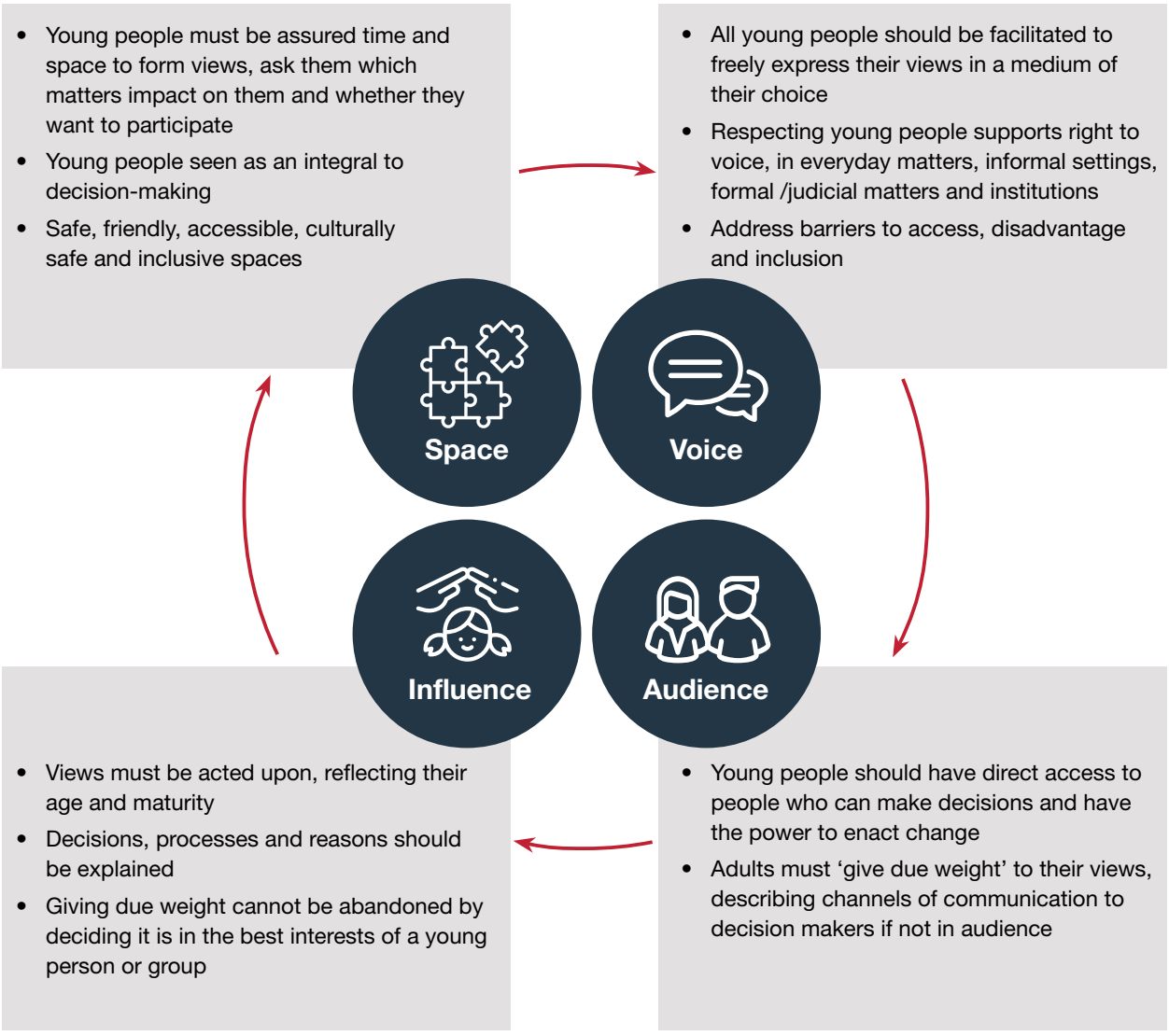


Figure 1: Lundy's four principles of meaningful participation, including adaptations from UNICEF's conceptual framework (Lansdown 2018) and rights-based research with young people in OOHC

Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment (TYPE) (Wong et al., 2010)

This model emphasises the development of critical consciousness in the empowerment of young people, interaction between young people and adults, and the role of participation in the positive development of young people (Wong 2010). The empowerment approach offers young people a way to see their situations as constructed through social and political structures, building their own agency as actors in bringing about social change (Wong 2010). While youth-driven participation may be ideal, such as young people chairing their own planning meetings or convening an action group to design a new program of support for young people leaving care, TYPE recognises that empowerment depends on the relationships between individuals, organisations and communities, especially where the conditions do not allow for young people to act autonomously (Wong et al 2010). In Figure 3 below, the TYPE model illustrates five scenarios. The pluralistic participation type may have high relevance for young people in residential care, where they are actively involved in decision-making but share control with adults, potentially through different roles (as opposed to adult led / controlled decisions).

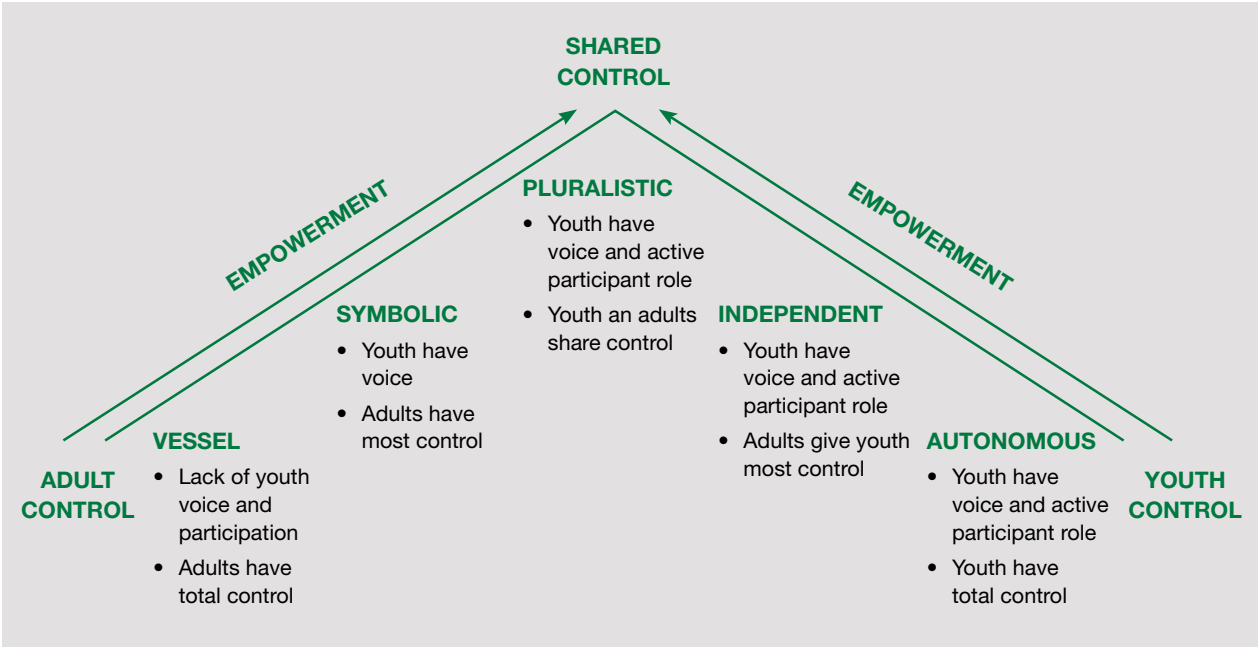


Figure 2: Typologies of youth participation and empowerment (Wong et al 2010).

Pathways to participation (Shier, 2001)

The NSW Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) includes Shier's Pathways to Participation (2001) in *Engaging children and young people in your organisation* (2019), along with essential tools for capacity building of young people and staff and model participation projects. Shier's model frames questions for adults about their commitments to five levels of participation, and has been implemented in international development contexts including children as leaders, researchers and policy actors (Shier, Méndez, Centeno, Arróliga, & González, 2014). The commitments are: **opening,** the intent to undertake young people's participation by an individual; **opportunity,** when the resources and spaces for participation are available; and **obligation**, when a level of participation is committed to as the policy of an organisation, program or group (Shier 2001). The levels are described in Figure 2 on page 23, along with the questions to consider at each level.

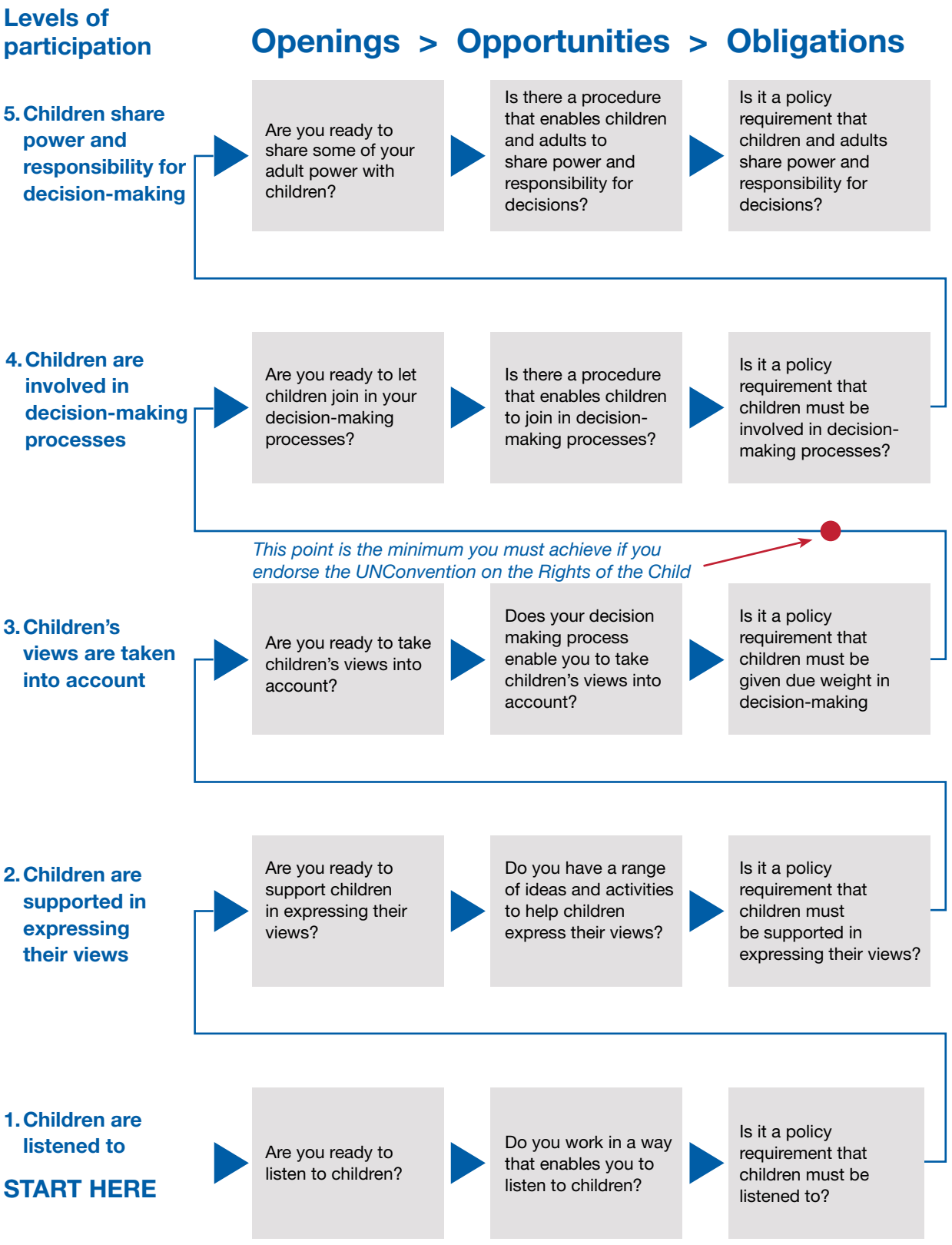


Figure 3: Shier's Pathways to Participation (2001)

P7 model of youth participation (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018)

More recently, Cahill and Dadvand (2018) reconceptualised participation to account for the ways young people may move between different modes and levels of participation within the one decision-making process, organisation or event, and identify the potential consequences of young people's agency. Their P7 model illustrated in Figure 4 below offers a framework for bridging between theory and practice, and thus has keen relevance for practitioners working with young people in the challenging practice context of residential care. The model involves seven domains of participation that interconnect in theoretically informed youth participation; each of the domains is subjected in their paper to critical reflection and application to practice using field examples including child protection.

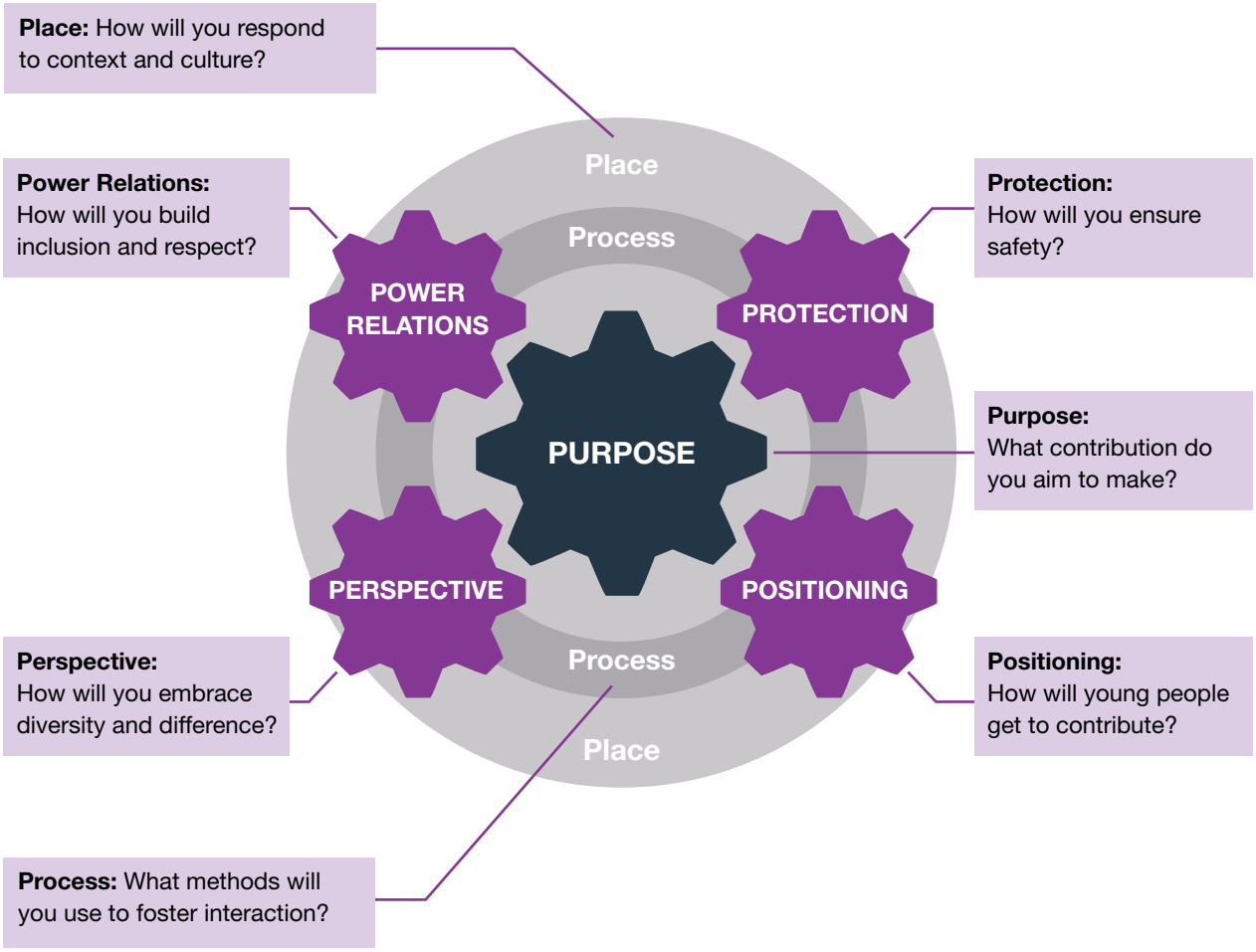


Figure 4: P7 Model A thinking tool for visioning, planning, enacting and evaluating youth participation (Cahill & Dadvand 2018, p 248)

Each of the models included here draws on key social and psychological theories relating to young people's rights: empowerment and citizenship; relationships of power between young people and adults; and the value for young people, organisations and society in having young people develop capacities to exercise agency in decision-making over their lives. The models selected here can be reviewed in more depth through the authors' papers, available for free access through ResearchGate.

The challenge in everyday work with young people is enabling their participation rights, and the next section provides an overview of findings from research that have implications for participation practice in residential care.

Young people's participation: implications for practice

Enabling young people's participation starts with recognising their existing agency; the efforts and activities they already undertake to form and express their views, and to be heard in decisions that affect their lives. Burford & Gallagher's (2015) research with young people in the child welfare and justice systems in Vermont, USA, found that young people experience a multitude of exclusions in these systems, and that for the (mostly white) cohort of young people in the study, family group conferencing improved their satisfaction with participation.

> ***The rules for who can speak, when they can speak, the language they must use, and the decorum they must display must seem to young people like deliberate attempts to frustrate them. Yet, young people risk peril if they ignore or treat the adult processes with disrespect or disdain, as their behaviour may be taken as evidence of their incapacity to make decisions and understand consequences. Frequently their mere presence in meetings, especially if their family is also present, raises concerns that they could be traumatized, or retraumatized, and hence should be excluded from participation "for their own good"***
> **(Burford & Gallagher, 2015, p. 228).**

This quote demonstrates the extent of young people's exclusion from residential care decision-making processes: the language used, 'air-time' for speaking, therapeutic frameworks and cultural practices of decision-making meetings can all work against their involvement. Box 2 below synthesises research into practice advice for people working with young people in residential care, presented in themes based on providing access to information, allowing space for young people to form their views, supporting young people to express views, listening to and giving weight to their views, and ensuring young people's influence on outcomes.

BOX 2: PRACTICES THAT ENABLE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Access to information, awareness and understanding: *building cultural safety and inclusion*

- Cultural safety[i]: identify your cultural background and invite young people to identify theirs, providing positive reinforcement about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and connection to ACCOs. Read and implement SNAICC's guidelines. Provide access to trusted family members and Aboriginal convenors in Aboriginal Family Led Decision-making (AFLDM).
- Inclusion: make information available in easy-read formats, accessible and inclusive for all young people with disability. Young people with disability generally want to be included directly in planning, not have other people speak for them. Use CALD and AUSLAN interpreters, assistive communication devices and technology. Use gender-neutral language, name your preferred pronouns (her/him/they), and invite young people to name theirs. Be open to sexuality and gender diversity.
- Inform young people they can bring a support person with them, a friend, family member or worker of their choice. Explain the reality of the situation prior to entry into care; how, when and where they can participate in decisions; explain how placement decisions are made. Provide information about residences prior to arrival; information about the location and contact arrangements for family members and key workers.
- Be honest, don't tell half-truths; provide age-appropriate information and capacity building to increase understanding of OOHC processes. Explain possible consequences of decision-making and how young people can change their minds.
- Provide information about complaints mechanisms and how to access them.

Space to form views: building *safety and establishing trust*

- Ensure young people have privacy and control over their personal space, a sense of security and reliability about the space; being able to change it to their own taste and preferences and to decide who comes in and who doesn't; they should have a key and be able to enter and leave unless unsafe or legally restricted.
- Use youth-centred decision-making processes: they have a say about who is involved, location and timing of meetings, the agenda, ensure feedback and prioritise their concerns.
- Provide transport, financial and practical support to participate. Spaces should be able to be adapted to individual preferences for lighting/ temperature; include colourful / modern design and comfortable seating; ease of entry/egress; have snacks and drawing materials available.
- Allow young people to access and consult a support person, chosen family member, friend or worker.
- Establish a warm and trusting relationship, be open-minded and caring, aligned to young people's best interests, be 'down to earth'. Work to equalise power imbalances in relationships: recognise how it distorts young people's voices and impacts case work, relationships, and agenda-setting; strive to earn trust and establish a respectful, collaborative dialogue with young people about their lives.
- Engage in youth-adult developmental relationships such as mentoring to promote resilience, develop social networks and provide socioemotional support for realistic goal development and participation.

i - Advice relating to cultural safety and practices for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, families and Communities were drawn primarily from *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle: A Guide to Implementation (SNAICC 2018), supplemented by Family is Culture Review Report: Independent review of Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC* (Davis 2019).

BOX 2: PRACTICES THAT ENABLE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Having a voice, having a say, expressing views: relationships and respect

- Allow young people to experience and talk about ambivalence, especially regarding family, parental and sibling contact. Give them a chance to ask questions, and to change their minds.
- Assume young people want to have a say about matters outside of care; ask their opinions on a range of issues; show interest and give them a choice about HOW they participate.
- Use trauma-informed principles of practice and support young people to develop language and skills for expressing their views over time.
- Use creative art/craft/music and story techniques, in everyday decision-making, planning, and groups.
- Support young people to make complaints and follow them through, including accessing appeals processes and advocates if they are not satisfied with results.
- Support young people to take on diverse roles and leadership, where there are shared values and beliefs, to gain more control over their lives and build capacities for participation

Being listened to and having views taken into account: *listening and accountability*

- Recognise that young people may not have had their views listened to in the past. Recognise the impacts of being ignored, excluded and tokenistic participation.
- Listen well: try to understand from their perspective; demonstrate empathy, compassion and kindness; be honest, informal but professional, reliable and respectful; feed back what you have heard; be an ally.
- Take young people's views seriously: prioritise, respect and value them; consider what they say and the different perspectives it holds; consider the changes that are required to achieve their wishes; engage them and others in considering their best interests; make commitments to them and follow through; report back to them on what action you have taken.
- Be honest about what decisions they can influence, and what decisions are not able to be influenced. If you have the power, be flexible and use discretion with rules to adapt to young people's preferences.
- Transparency: make the decisions reached in meetings explicit where clear commitments are called for, where conflicts arise, and where it is essential for the young person to understand fully for the plan to be implemented effectively. Provide documentation of plans, judicial and administrative decisions to young people.
- Recognise that young people may have different emotional responses to participation, provide feedback and debrief afterwards to build understanding and capacities for future participation.

BOX 2: PRACTICES THAT ENABLE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Influencing decision-making outcomes: *co-creating impact*

- Learn and practice protocols for working in culturally safe and respectful ways with Elders and ACCOs early and consistently to ensure long term impact of decision-making.
- Take action on any commitments/plans in a timely manner and be accountable to young people.
- Take time to feed back and discuss the change that has occurred in young people's lives and the change they have enacted in the world, including the efforts they made that were not successful, and the positive traits they demonstrated.
- Explain decisions that are not aligned to young people's expressed views and wishes including reasons, complaints and appeals processes available.
- Co-create solutions with young people. Young people's messages and learnings can be produced/published in creative outputs and shared with their permission.

Enabling participation in care and case planning and review

'In 20 case plans I was only ever present for one. The only reason was because I broke the door down to get in.'

'Some meetings were at my school and some were after school at the Department.' 'They would say "oh we did your case plan but you were at school". They should have taken me out of school for it.'

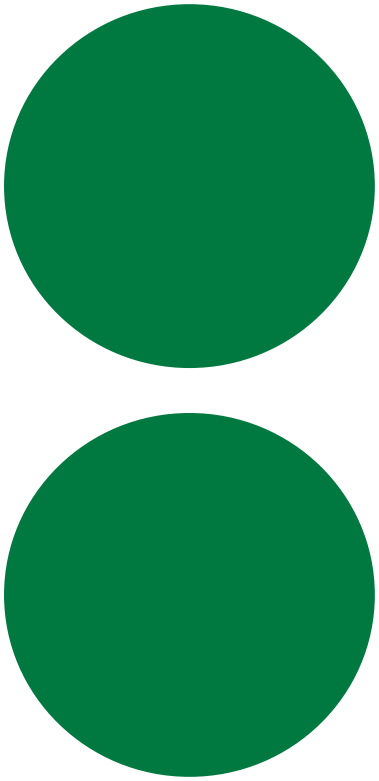
'Never told about them [planning meetings]. Don't know when they happened.'

(Queensland Child and Famliy Commission, 2018, p. 18)

A significant body of research involves the participation of young people in care and case planning, and review of planning meetings and processes. In the most recent review of the Victorian OOHHC system, some children and young people had positive experiences of planning meetings, but most either were unaware of them or felt their participation was tokenistic (Commission for Children and Young People, 2019). Young people may have opportunities to be involved in meetings of multiple adults such as family group conferencing, case planning or review meetings regarding their lives and care. Research conducted with 10 young people about their participation in Child In Care review meetings in England found that seven young people had no say at all when and where the meeting would be held, the agenda and who was going to be invited (Diaz et al., 2018). Three young people in this research chaired their own meetings, and eight reported that they would prefer fewer people to attend meetings about their care. Having multiple strangers involved in meetings about young people's care acts as a barrier to their participation (Diaz et al., 2018; Diaz, Pert, & Thomas, 2019; Thomas, 2011).

The main themes of practice advice across the literature for care and case planning in the research can be grouped into the following themes for practitioners:

- **Provide practical *and* emotional preparation** including understanding reports; attending part or whole meeting; understanding and contributing to agenda setting; building skills, trust and participation over time; and/or chairing meetings. Support young people who cannot attend meetings to influence agendas and make their wishes known through an advocate / representative, through writing or creative expression (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2017; Sinclair et al., 2019)
- **Ensure young people have a person they trust** or have an established relationship with at any planning meeting. Meetings can be made informal discussions with as few people as possible, and young people choose who is present. Minimise the number of people who attend planning meetings, particularly strangers and police unless young people know and trust them (Balsells et al., 2017; Beal et al., 2019; Bessell, 2011; Calheiros et al., 2013; Commission for Children and Young People, 2019; Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2012)
- **Share power/work to equalise power** through informality and power-sharing activities; demonstrate collaboration with other practitioners and family members; ask others to wait, or not speak over young people, to give them time to express their views; challenge disrespectful or excluding language (Balsells et al., 2017; Beal et al., 2019; Bessell, 2011; Calheiros et al., 2013; Davis, 2019)
- **Plans should be individualised and evolve** with the changing capacities and circumstances of each young person. Check back in with young people about their wishes and views – do they still want things that way? Mutuality and checking-in builds relationships and trust over time (Graham & Johnson, 2019; Hitzler & Messmer, 2010; Lansdown, 2011; Larkins et al., 2015; SNAICC, 2018)
- **Cultural plans** should involve the young person, chosen family members and community; promote contact with family, community and Country; name key people the young person can connect with over time; specify activities that support cultural connection; evolve over time as the young person develops; be supported by case work and monitored; and be lodged with the Children's Court (SNAICC 2018, Davis 2019).



Implications for organisations

Organisations can establish a participatory ecosystem to support the establishment, sustainability and impact of youth participation (Fitzmaurice, 2017). Box 3 highlights the practices organisations can implement to create and sustain such an ecosystem.

BOX 3: PRACTICES TO SUPPORT PARTICIPATION IN ORGANISATIONS, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY

Building capacity for safe and inclusive participation

- Invest in information, training and capacity building for young people and staff to support the emergence and sustainability of participatory mechanisms within organisations: cultural safety and inclusion; participation and facilitation; project management; grant writing and management; governance and accountability. Develop information in collaboration with young people with lived experience and compensate them financially for their contributions.
- Ensure culturally safe and accountable supports, including practical support and transport are available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families involved with your organisation, and work with ACCOs to provide culturally safe support to young people.
- Ensure meeting times and locations are consistent, communication with members are sustained and use young people's preferred channels.
- Collaborate with other services to nominate and support young people with disability, LGBTIQ+ young people and other hard to reach groups during their participation.

Providing space for young people to form views

- Provide informal spaces within the organisation where young people can interact with staff, including senior staff in relaxed and comfortable environments, including adapting board rooms or typically adult centred spaces.
- Ensure holistic, flexible and sustained participation through allocation of financial, staffing and infrastructure resources.
- Provide financial compensation for young people's participation, and for transportation costs; provide meals, and leftover food.
- Provide adult co-facilitators to youth participatory mechanisms to coordinate financial, emotional and practical support and to create safe and inclusive spaces for young people's participation development.
- Recruit young people with lived experience in care as experts, leaders, co-facilitators, peer-researchers and paid staff.

Recognition of young people's lived experience expertise

- Establish youth participation mechanisms, invest them with decision-making power that can influence policies and programs for young people as a group.
- Young people should be empowered to develop their own mission and rules of engagement alongside organisational objectives.
- Include young people in review, inspection and regulation processes.
- Facilitators adapt to young people's different and evolving capabilities to participate, to express views and to lead.

BOX 3: PRACTICES TO SUPPORT PARTICIPATION IN ORGANISATIONS, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY

Listening and being accountable to young people

- Executives meet young people directly and in youth friendly/designated spaces or in important decision-making spaces such as board rooms.
- Use surveys, workshops and group discussions regularly to stay engaged with young people and establish listening and feedback loops over time.
- Demonstrate active efforts in giving due weight to the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, their families and Elders.
- Be accountable, give due weight to their views, and deliver on commitments to young people.

Influencing outcomes and co-creating impact

- Consider what aspects of practice, policy and governance are open to young people's influence prior to engaging.
- Establish direct and ongoing relationships with young people, via group and 1:1 discussions, that enable a relationship to be formed and young people to hold the decision maker to account for outcomes of their participation through a relationship of trust over time.
- Adapt participatory mechanisms to the changing interests of members over time.
- Measure, monitor and promote outcomes of participation with young people's permission.
- Inspectors, regulators and reviewers should meet with children and young people directly, as well as meeting with staff, observing participation practice, and reviewing case files to gather a full picture of participation.

Participation in service, program and policy design

Adults must view children and young people as social actors with unique perspectives to contribute, while also recognising their vulnerability. Decision-makers must take steps to ensure that children and young people's voices are not filtered, and that children and young people who contribute their views are given the opportunity to find out how those views influenced decisions.

(Fitzmaurice, 2017, p. 50)

Young people develop knowledge and skills through experience living in and leaving residential care - knowledge that is not able to be gained through other sources and that reflects the care system as it is experienced, not as it is intended or written in policies, programs or plans (Lansdown, 2011). Recognition of this value is inherent in rights-based participation: lived experience is more than a resource; it is the source of experience-based knowledge in human-centred design, which can drive the development of services and programs for and by those whose lives are most impacted by them (Dixon et al., 2019; Lansdown, 2011).

CREATE Foundation demonstrates the value of listening to young people's lived experience in service and program development, through their training of Young Consultants in speak up development programs, a participation portal for children and young people in care, involvement of Young Consultants in caseworker training, and a biannual conference co-designed by young people. Their theory of change rests on an assumption that improving OOHC involves listening to those who are experiencing it, first-hand (McDowall, 2018). As a result, the organisation was able to consult with over 1200 children and young people in their 2018 review of the National Standards for OOHC in Australia.

Recognition of young people's lived experience involves providing support and capacity building to young people to develop their advocacy skills (Purtell et al., 2019). While this capacity building may be resource-intensive, it enables longer-term relationships between young people and adults, and greater impact from participation activities. One common solution may be to collaborate with programs that provide ongoing capacity building and support to young people, inviting them to nominate participants for engagement and co-design processes (Fitzmaurice 2017). Adult co-facilitators should be trained in co-creation and co-design methods of power sharing and creative development with young people and engage in regular critical self-reflective practice (Sinclair et al., 2019).

Involving young people at design, implementation and evaluation stages of programming, and via multiple participation activities and levels within organisations, builds relationships and self-confidence over time, while gaining their input into different aspects of program and organisational development (Sinclair 2019). In discussing the application of participation to organisational and policy settings, Purtell et al. (2019) also note the importance of providing forums where young people meet with adults on an equal footing, and that opportunities for influencing change take a variety of forms, from recruitment to policy and program design. This includes exploring young people's experience and expertise in advocacy, participation and co-design, and only making adaptations where they are needed, so that young people don't feel especially vulnerable or that their participation is 'less than' other professionals. Approaches to the participation in service design that value young people's lived experience expertise include: co-design and co-creation of services; engagement of young people in service design within adult-centred organisations; and participatory research. Young people should always be compensated or paid a living wage in recognition of their contributions, to facilitate access and equity, and to equalise power with paid adults. Sustainability of organisational engagement with young people relies on ongoing support, capacity building and recruitment of members, which can be resource-intensive but deliver significant benefits.

Co-design, co-production and co-creation

Co-design and co-production are used in youth participation literature to describe varying approaches to deep or genuine engagement with young people with lived experience alongside other key stakeholders in service and program design or re-design (Davis, 2019; Dixon et al.,

2019; Purtell et al., 2019). Using co-design, young people's expertise is valued and incorporated into the design phases of a project from the outset; measures are taken to equalise power or even relinquish power to young people in different phases of identifying collecting data about user experience, ideation, prototyping, implementing solutions and evaluation. Co-design has been used in the development of transition from care programs in England (Dixon et al., 2019), in the design of consultation for the Victorian systemic inquiry into OOHC (Commission for Children and Young People, 2019), and is recommended by SNAICC as a method for demonstrating active efforts in supporting strong partnerships with ACCOs in policy and legislative development (SNAICC, 2018).

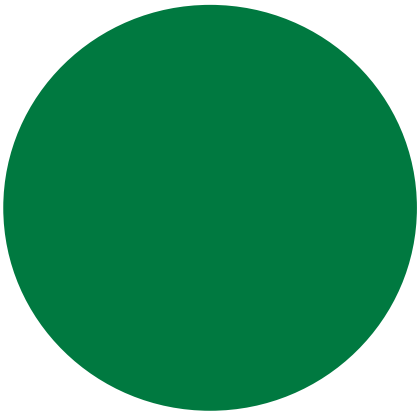
Co-production and co-design involve a deeper level of power sharing and collaboration between service providers and service users than other forms of youth engagement (Tisdall, 2017). It has potential to both elevate the role of young people in residential care through valuing their lived experience, and to improve services and programs that are tailored to young people's needs and preferences. As Davis (2019) notes, however, co-design may be implemented in name only, and processes may not achieve the significant redressing of power imbalances that exist between key stakeholders.

In Aotearoa New Zealand in 2015, 78 young people were involved in a review of care, protection and youth justice systems via interviews, co-design workshops and the engagement of a youth advisory panel (Fitzmaurice, 2017). The co-design process was steered by an expert panel using a design approach which incorporated some co-design activities, but importantly, involved sustained engagement with young people their families and communities. Expert panel members reported that this engagement influenced the outcomes of the service system overhaul, however, the conduct and 'synthesis' of interview data filtered their views rather than being in direct audience with adult decision makers (Fitzmaurice, 2017). This example demonstrates the potential of co-design that is planned, facilitated and sustained with direct relationships between young people and decision makers, the challenges of measuring the impact of young people's participation, and the potential for compromising principles such as Lundy's *audience and influence* (See Figure 1) where it is used within larger participatory and policy making projects (Tisdall 2017).

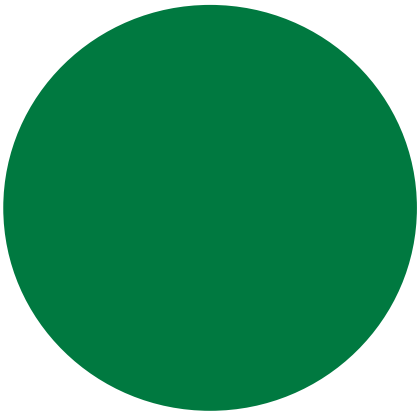
Engagement within adult-centred organisations

- **Engagement in developing and implementing programs, events and materials** involves planning, dedicated staffing and program resources, capacity building and commitment to follow through on young people's contributions, including providing feedback and documenting the impact they made on outcomes.
- **Needs and asset mapping including place-based engagement** in identifying problems and strengths, exploring the way they use systems, spaces and places, and identifying solutions may be used at the start of planning processes including grant development. Young people should be able to see the benefit of their participation for them, and any limitations of their impact on outcomes should be made transparent at the outset. Place based engagement should include local skilled facilitators and be embedded in community to ensure cultural safety and inclusion.
- **Operational development and continuous improvement**, engaging young people in monitoring and review of existing services and programs, process and impact evaluation, recruitment of staff and executive roles, quality improvement and complaints mechanisms. These opportunities should identify and address risks of tokenism and ensure meaningful participation so that young people feel safe, included and capable to participate alongside adults, so that power is shared, and processes are accountable.

- **Governance and leadership roles** can provide increased voice and audience of young people within boards and leadership teams, although usually only offer ongoing opportunities to a small group of 1 or 2 young people. Remuneration, developing the skills and capabilities of young people to participate and ensuring they feel supported and listened to within broader adult-centred groups are important. Youth identified positions, advisory boards and communications strategies can improve the sustainability of these roles over time through ongoing engagement with young people using services and in the broader community. Isolation and disempowerment can be minimised through the direct interaction and mentoring by the organisation's executive.



- **Development of organisational and systemic policy** can involve young people in care through consultation (such as surveys, interviews and online engagement forums); creative arts engagement; co-design and coproduction, where policy/decision makers engage directly with young people's lived experience along with other experts; involvement of young people in budgeting and policy impact analysis. Budget allocations and policy outputs should demonstrate accountability through clear links back to young people's contributions.



Deliberative democracy is one approach to organisational and systemic policy development in which policy makers engage directly with young people, listen and reflect on issues and problems together. From 2015-2018, CREATE Foundation's Young Consultants PLATFORM CREW has held three Hour of Power (HOP) forums in Victoria in which young people advocated for improving kinship care, extending leaving care programs, improving care for young mothers, supporting young people with disabilities and supporting connections with siblings (CREATE Foundation, 2018). While this demonstrates empowering systemic advocacy by PLATFORM CREW, it is also an example of engagement by policy actors in their broader policy agendas. Attendees included senior care sector representatives, ministers responsible for the Victorian youth justice and child protection portfolios, the Children and Young People's Commissioner and Aboriginal Children and Young People's Commissioner. Victoria's 'In Our Own Words' systemic inquiry into OOHC was announced by Commissioner Buchanan at the March 2018 HOP; and following the HOP, an extended care trial was launched, funding OOHC to 250 young people up to 21 years old and their carers.

In a more sustained example, the Austin Youth Collective to End Homelessness (AYC) is a group of 12 young people with experiences of homelessness in one of ten national demonstration programs to address systemic causes and end youth homelessness by 2020 (Schoenfeld et al., 2019). In this region of USA, 76% of homeless young people have come from OOHC and / or youth justice systems, with high representation of young people of colour, young parents, and LGBTIQ+ young people, making this project relevant in Australia. AYC was established by an NGO as a youth advisory board with members nominated by youth services, who shared their lived experience and insights into potential solutions with the youth homelessness demonstration project team during project development. Rejecting a model proposed by adult experts for a 'host home' approach resembling foster care, the AYC advocated for an individually-responsive program including financial (rent and utilities) assistance, mediation and trauma-responsive support services. The project community plan includes their program, and AYC members are involved in assessing proposed

projects (Schoenfeld et al., 2019). In their lessons learned, the project team includes the following for organisations engaging with young people in adult-centred program and policy development:

1. clarify the purpose of the group to ensure sustainability beyond single intervention consultation
2. allow the group to determine and clarify its structure, to ensure that structure does not divert attention away from their purpose, through visioning activities
3. support the group to establish subcommittees to identify issues and work towards outcomes
4. support artistic expression in community engagement and participation
5. provide training and capacity building, not to represent youth issues in adult language, but to equalise power when engaging with adults, e.g. cultural competency, project management, professional etiquette, public speaking, and grant writing
6. provide an adult facilitator(s) to support and coordinate activities, organise meals, finances and transport, and to create a safe space for young people's inclusion
7. clarify young people's roles and remunerate them, including position description, responsibilities and core competencies for members
8. be consistent and flexible with meeting times, location and frequency, adapting to the changing communication styles and needs of members, and ensuring that participation does not detract from young people's development and other commitments
9. ensure adequate funding and resourcing of the project to promote sustainability and impact (Schoenfeld 2019).

Participatory research

Participatory research may include: peer research, where young people take on roles as researchers; engagement of young people in research design, analysis and reporting; action research, in which participants are engaged in processes of planning, learning, and taking action to improve their everyday lives. These approaches can be particularly effective in engaging and empowering young people who may be hard to reach or experience multiple disadvantage, and unlikely to participate in mainstream youth engagement activities (Dixon et al., 2019). Being interviewed and engaged by peers can also be more comfortable for young people to get involved as participants in research projects (Dixon et al., 2019).

One example of participatory research included young people with lived experience as co-researchers to facilitate change in alternate care services and transition services in Finland. Despite come challenges in data collection, co-researchers were trained and supported to interview 53 young people about their experiences of transitioning from care to independence, using semi-structured interviews with both open and closed questions, and added their own questions if they chose. They contributed to research design and dissemination, participating in an international collaboration as the study occurred in four different countries. In addition to empowering young people with new skills and in the production of new knowledge, the project championed the concept of experts by experience within adult-led research parameters (Törrönen & Vornanen, 2014).

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