



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



UNESCO Chair in
Children, Youth and Civic Engagement
Ireland



Institute for
Lifecourse and Society

Conceptualising Participation in Practice in YAP Ireland:

A CASE STUDY

Key Findings

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August 2021

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YAP Ireland provides integrated community-based support services for young people and their families who typically experience a range of adversities. Previous studies have found significant positive outcomes for the young people participating in YAP services (Devlin et al., 2014:9). A recent study found that the participation of young people and parents was an important and valued component of the YAP Ireland's practice (Brady et al, 2020). As a result of this finding, a qualitative case study of participatory practice was conducted by NUIG in 2021 to explore this aspect of practice further (Jackson, Devaney and Brady, 2021).

Findings

The key findings of the study are as follows:

Key Finding 1:

A commitment to participation is woven through policy, culture and practice in YAP Ireland

The research found that participation is central to everything that YAP Ireland does, from the focus on voice and choice at the level of the young person's Integrated Service Plan (ISP) to the inclusion of young people in organisational processes such as policy, interview boards, and service evaluation, to the provision of collective participation groups for young people and their parents which provides them with an opportunity to have their voice heard on matters that affect them. These practices are underpinned by an understanding of participation based upon the Lundy (2007) model, which emphasises the provision of safe spaces in which young people can be supported to express a view to a relevant audience of decision-makers so that they can exert influence on matters that affect them.

Key finding 2:

Participation is beneficial for young people, parents and service providers

Group participation was valued by young people as it provided them with an opportunity to access social support, develop a sense of capacity, esteem and wellbeing as they are exposed to new ideas, and get involved in projects that aim to address a social issue.

Parents are also often isolated in their circumstances and feel a sense of stigma as they experience parenting as challenging. The local parents groups were found to offer parents a place to access peer support and seek advice for the problems that they are facing. They also have an opportunity to get involved in training and activities that will bolster their parenting skills as part of this group.

Participation practices in YAP are also beneficial for the organisation itself as they are a way to keep informed as to the issues that are affecting young people and their parents. Participatory practice within YAP Ireland also benefits partner organisations such as Tusla as they can access feedback from the people who use its services.

Key Finding 3: Relationships are critical in participatory practice

Practitioners noted that participation takes time to develop as staff and the advocates work to ensure that young people and their parents know that they respect them and will take their views seriously. The format of collective participation that YAP Ireland provides is an informal, relaxed environment, and is valued as a space for socialising and making friendships for the young people and their parents, as well as undertaking projects.

Key Finding 4: Scaffolding practices are of crucial importance in ensuring meaningful participation

In the collective groups, young people and their parents often wish to raise their voice on a particular issue but lack the planning and project management skills to make this happen. YAP Ireland scaffolds their participation by providing structure and support that will enable the project to achieve its aims.

Key finding 5: Participation can present challenges

There are challenges arising in participatory practice that are integral to the context of participation and requires ongoing management due to the nature of the programme and the cohort of service users supported. Some of the challenges highlighted by respondents included personal attributes or challenges facing a young person or parent, group dynamics and resourcing issues.

Key Finding 6: There are opportunities to further enhance and develop participatory practice within YAP Ireland and beyond

Some of the ways in which participation could be further developed include embedding rights-based participation training in the advocates core module training. The organisation could also use research and assessment tools and exercises to explore the extent to which young people felt they participated, and the benefits they gained from participation.

Conclusion

Participation is very well embedded in YAP Irelands' infrastructure and is evidently beneficial for young people, their parents, YAP Ireland and external services who partner with them. Access to the participatory space and the scaffolding activities of YAP Ireland practitioners produce benefits for the young people and their parents. Supporting the participation of young people and their parents are also beneficial for YAP Ireland and other organisations. While the depth of participation that the young people experience may vary, this is respectful participation that is responsive to their needs and interests and supports their personal development and the development of capacities.





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YAP Ireland is funded by Tusla, and the HSE in partnership with Investing in Children



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