

# Good practice guides for organisations working with young people



## 1 Good practice in... encouraging active citizenship

### Introduction

This guide outlines the approaches to encouraging active citizenship that have worked well for projects funded through the Big Lottery Fund's (BIG) Young People's Fund (YPF). This guide provides helpful advice and practical examples for current and future projects based on the findings of the five year UK wide evaluation of the Young People's Fund. The evaluation was carried out by GEN Consulting and Wavehill Consulting.

Encouraging young people to become active citizens was one of the goals of the YPF across the UK. Our research has demonstrated considerable benefits for young people, projects and communities as a result of the engagement of young people in community life as active citizens.

### What is Active Citizenship?

Active citizenship is about taking an active role in community life and making a positive contribution to society. Ways in which active citizenship can be achieved include taking part in voluntary work, involvement in community organisations and engagement with local and national politics.

Encouraging and supporting young people to become active citizens is something which has increasingly been recognised as a policy priority across the UK.

In England, active citizenship is being driven through the Big Society agenda. Government policy also aims to achieve five overarching aims for young people – one of which is 'making a positive contribution'. This is described as:

"Young People engage in decision-making, support their community and environment, engage in law-abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school, develop positive relationships, choose not to bully and discriminate, develop self confidence, successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges and develop enterprising behaviour."

Similarly, devolved administrations in Scotland and Northern Ireland are taking forward the active citizenship agenda. In Scotland, active citizenship is a specific strategic aim for the Scottish Government.

In Northern Ireland, the centrally funded Participation Network, in conjunction with the children's commissioner (NICCY) and other statutory and voluntary sector partners, are working to ensure the active participation of young people in all tiers of government, from school councils to the National Assembly and to achieve their goal of:

"Developing a culture where the views of our children and young people are routinely sought in matters which impact on their lives."

Supporting young people to make a positive contribution and engage with their community is key to facilitating active citizenship.

### The value of Active Citizenship

Encouraging young people to become active citizens has benefits for young people themselves as well as the communities in which they live.

### Benefits for young people...

- ▶ Seen in a positive light by the community.
- ▶ Opportunity to build positive relationships within the community.
- ▶ Opportunity to take responsibility for the aspects of society which affect them.
- ▶ Opportunity to develop new skills.

### Benefits for the community...

- ▶ Young people less likely to participate in anti-social behaviour.
- ▶ Young people bringing forward new community projects and ideas.
- ▶ Young people developing a sense of social responsibility, which they will carry into their adult lives.

# Good practice guides for organisations working with young people

## Supporting active citizenship, what works...?

Feedback from the YPF projects identified the following factors:

### ► Engaging with young people who are at risk of social isolation

Certain groups of young people face a higher risk of becoming disengaged with society and community life, for example homeless young people, or disabled young people. These young people may face significant barriers to becoming active citizens. Specific barriers include lack of

access or capacity to take part.

Supporting isolated, vulnerable or disengaged young people to understand their rights and their responsibilities within society will help remove the barriers they face and enable them to participate with confidence in society.

Providing them with the tools to represent themselves, and the issues that matter to them, will enable vulnerable young people to become active citizens. This is illustrated in case study example 1 which concerns the Centrepoint Youth Parliament supported by YPF.

## Case Study Example 1

### Country: England

### Project: Youth Parliament

### Organisation: Centrepoint

Centrepoint represents the needs of young people who find themselves homeless. It supports around 1,300 young people a year to find a shelter and permanent accommodation. The organisation also supports routes back into education, training and employment.

Centrepoint recognises that being homeless reduces opportunities for young people to understand and ask for their rights and for them to have their voices heard. To address this Centrepoint created the Youth Parliament.

The Centrepoint Youth Parliament provided a voice to young people who had experienced homelessness to lobby for increased recognition of these issues and for better support to meet the needs of young people in this situation. Young people worked to raise awareness of homelessness issues at all levels of society from schools to Westminster.

One young person, who had been a member of the youth parliament for a number of years, spoke about her experience.

During her time with the project she was involved as an assistant to the elected Centrepoint MPs, attending meetings, working on press releases, taking photographs and organising much of the PR and media activity. She was heavily involved in the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) campaign and created a blog and Facebook site to inform people more widely. As a result of her activities she now wants to train as a journalist. She is currently volunteering in the participation team and will help to make a film which investigates the financial situations of young people, especially those that become homeless.

The youth parliament empowers young people. Participants are introduced to democratic process and given the power to bring about change within the organisation and society as a whole. This develops self-esteem and social esteem, making young people feel valued within the organisation and within society as a whole. This has been important in promoting active citizenship more widely.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 5 (2011)

Or

[www.centrepoint.org.uk](http://www.centrepoint.org.uk)

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## ► Providing opportunities for young people to take on responsibilities and learn new skills

It can sometimes be difficult for young people to present themselves in a positive light within their communities, especially if they do not yet have the practical experience or confidence to engage with community projects or take on positions of responsibility.

Taking on a voluntary role within the community provides young people with an opportunity to develop new skills. It also allows young people to demonstrate that they are making a valuable contribution, meaning that they are viewed in a positive light by other members of the community.

The skills that can be gained through volunteering include team-working, planning and organising events and activities, problem-solving and meeting and working with new people.

Once young people are equipped with these skills, they are able to take them forward and use them in other aspects of their lives to help make a positive contribution.

## Case Study Example 2

**Country: Scotland**

**Project: Young People's Advocacy Project**

**Organisation: Dunfermline Advocacy Initiative**

This project recruited 16-25 year olds from the local community to become volunteer advocates for people of the same age who have a learning disability. Through developing a relationship with their partner, the advocate can help the partner to ask for the things they want in life, and can help them to do things they might not have done otherwise.

This project enables young people to develop relationships with others who they might not have met otherwise. It also provides young people (in their role as advocates) the opportunity to be involved in talking to professionals and others about the care of their partner.

By working as advocates young people are able to take on responsibility for certain elements of their partners' well-being. The project also enables young people with learning disabilities to integrate with their peer group, by making friends with and through the volunteer advocates.

For more information see:

**[www.dunfermlineadvocacy.org](http://www.dunfermlineadvocacy.org)**

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## ► Encourage a participative approach

Participation is an essential element of being an active citizen, but it is not always easy for young people to participate in how their society is run.

Encouraging young people to think about the issues which are important to them, and to participate in making sure these issues are addressed, enables young people to take a more active role in the running of society. This is demonstrated by Youth UK in case study example 3.

The knowledge, skills and capacity of those who work with young people is key in this process.

Staff must maximise opportunities for the active involvement of young people and support young people to be involved in ways that best suit them.

There are many ways in which young people can be actively involved in the development, delivery, management and evaluation of activity. This has been a specific focus in the evaluation of YPF where research has demonstrated that young people who are actively involved in their projects very often progress on to be actively involved in other aspects of society.

The benefits, challenges and approaches to getting young people actively involved are considered in more detail in the guide 2 'Good Practice in Active Involvement' which accompanies this series.

## Case Study Example 3

**Country: England**

**Project: UK Youth**

UK Youth employs a steering group model which embraces young people from a variety of backgrounds. The project actively seeks to encourage the participation of young people from a range of different backgrounds. Through the steering group young people are encouraged to develop their thinking about issues such as bullying, racism, sexism and discrimination. This thinking is then put into practice through campaigning in local communities.

UK Youth provides training which encourages young people to explore their responsibilities to society and to their local communities. The project activity enables young people to develop responses to issues identified in the steering group meetings, and to put these responses into practice through positive campaigning.

For more information see:

**[www.ukyouth.org](http://www.ukyouth.org)**

# Good practice guides for organisations working with young people

## Where can I find out more?

There are many sources of information if you are looking to encourage and support active citizenship within your youth project.

For a policy statement on active citizenship see:

### **Every Child Matters (ECM)**

For resources on encouraging and enabling active citizenship visit the **Workers Educational Association** pages on active citizenship.

[www.nw.wea.org.uk/resources/resources.php](http://www.nw.wea.org.uk/resources/resources.php)

For resources, news and information about active citizenship visit the Association for Citizenship Teaching.

[www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk](http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk)

To find out about volunteering opportunities for young people in England visit **Volunteering England**.

[www.volunteering.org.uk/](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/)

To find out about volunteering opportunities for young people in Scotland visit **Volunteer Development Scotland**

[www.vds.org.uk/](http://www.vds.org.uk/)

To find out about volunteering opportunities in Wales visit **Volunteering Wales**.

[www.volunteering-wales.net/index.html](http://www.volunteering-wales.net/index.html)

If you would like information about the national evaluation of the Young People's Fund contact:

BIG: 0845 410 2030

Copies of the YPF evaluation reports and supporting documents are available online from BIG at:

[www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/eval\\_ypf](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/eval_ypf)