

Strengthening User Involvement

Castlehaven Community Association



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The Strengthening User Involvement project

The aim of the 'Strengthening User Involvement' (SUI) was to work with two organisations to take them on a journey that would result in each organisation creating their own Youth Participation Strategy. The project recruited two host organisations that would work in partnership with us, and initially applied to be our partners because they wanted to see more meaningful youth participation in their organisations. The two partners were Castlehaven Community Association (known as 'Castlehaven') which is based at Camden in London, and the City YMCA based near to the Barbican and ECI in London.



Each organisation was tasked with bringing together a group of people that would be known as the 'participation group', consisting of young people, youth workers, management staff, other staff (e.g. clerical and maintenance staff), and trustees. This group then met with ICA:UK for some introductory teambuilding sessions which included sections exploring what participation means, people's personal values towards youth participation, and what their organisations were currently doing in respect to youth participation.

Each organisation's participation group then went away on an action planning weekend where we used ICA's eight stage 'ToP' Action Planning Method to come up with the commitments of the organisation regarding youth participation, and turned these into a 12 month action plan of tasks. The participation groups divided into sub-groups to begin the work in the action plan, and then met again for a follow-up session to see how the action plan was progressing and how ICA could help.

The final element of the process was a staff training event for each organisation which enabled staff within the organisations to learn two useful ICA 'ToP' methods for facilitation, to aid them in implementing their action plans. These methods were the 'ToP' Focused Conversation (a way to structure a conversation or meeting that results in decisions and actions), and the 'ToP' Consensus Workshop (a way to work out group priorities and reach a group consensus). This training also included other models and tools such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Need; Tuckman's model of group development; Hart's Ladder of Participation; the planning tool NAOMIE; as well as using drama and games to enable participation through the ArtPad collection of games. Both training sessions included a section on the current National Youth Participation Agenda to add context to the work and emphasise how the national frameworks may be of use to each organisation.

Castlehaven Community Association



Castlehaven is a grassroots based organisation working with a number of different groups of young people in Camden spanning from a Junior club (aged 8-13) to the Senior's group (aged 13-19) including too some thematic work (such as work with the Somali community).

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“concerned with the human factor in world development”

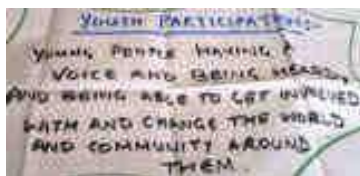
Many of the young people are referred to the youth club because they are identified as being 'at risk' and the club forms part of their support package. The bias is towards younger children to 'hook' them in to youth work as a way to prevent them getting into crime.

The Process

Our first meeting to introduce the theme of participation was working with some young people as young as 8, which meant that the level we worked at was skewed toward the younger age group. This meant we had plenty of breaks and games. We managed to work with the group to build more of an idea about what participation meant to them, so began the journey to creating a participation plan.

Our second meeting to build the team and to explore participation at Castlehaven also had a bias toward the younger age range, so our pace was a fairly slow. The group had lots of young people in it and some staff, and all the staff were very supportive of the young people in encouraging their participation.

The third session consisted of three mini-meetings: one with interested people from the junior youth club, one with the senior youth club members, and one with staff members (including management). This session proved vital in ensuring that people had a better understanding of the aims of the project and how they might get involved. It also became clear that the Board of Trustees operated at arms length to the youth club itself, and that the club had enough autonomy to engage with us without having Trustee representation on the participation group. Although this restricted to a degree the level to which the young people could get involved with the decision making structures within the organisation, e.g. that there would not be anyone in the group who had the power to invite young people to join the board of trustees, it became clear that such a move was not necessarily appropriate at this stage as 'on the ground change' would be the first necessary step in increasing the capacity of the young people, whereas board membership seemed to be a longer term goal to have.



The residential trip to carry out the action plan took place from a Friday to Sunday with 'work sessions' interspersed with outward-bounds activities and games to keep the younger members of the group engaged. The idea of a residential excited and motivated the young people to come along. We used a number of different mediums and

spaces to engage the young people and to reflect different learning styles, such as through movement, games, drama, reading, writing, listening and discussion work. The result was a 12 month action plan with a focus on the first 6 months.

The level of participation was based on moving young people at Castlehaven from being consumers of a service (going along to sessions where adults would plan and deliver the work), so being creators or agents of the work (e.g. helping to plan and deliver sessions themselves).

The focus was on participation through sessions and activities which was the level which was most appropriate to the group. The sub-groups created were: Silent Movers, whose job it was to ensure that young people were able to decide what food they eat at snack times and to help prepare it; Money Makers and Fundraisers United, who were tasked with fundraising for equipment for the club through activities such as jumble sales and cake sales; Haven who were working on developing youth led communication projects such as a *myspace* forum and a radio station for the youth club; and Kids Rule whose task it was to plan and run a football tournament for the surrounding area.

The follow-up sessions were small group sessions with each of the above sub-groups. What worked well was that there was a staff member in each group who helped coordinate the group. The young people particularly liked the idea of organising themselves, and had purchased folders and diaries for their meetings. They had all ran at least one meeting with their sub-group by the time we met with them for our follow-up meetings, and had run the meetings with one of the young people acting as a secretary and typing the minutes up afterwards. In this way, the learning for the young people was as much about self organisational skills as it was about action planning and running their specific projects. The main challenge for all the groups was to sustain the enthusiasm generated on the residential and translate it into action after the residential.

The staff training event was over two days and covered some tools and methods that would be of use in implementing the action plan. The overall feel from the training was that the tools and methods covered were very useful. The general feedback was that the four stage planning tool ORID was a very useful structure to work from and people 'loved the colours and visuals' we employed in our training methods. The group also said they really enjoyed working with one another, as the people who work with the Junior Group do not always get a chance to work with the Senior Group staff.

Those who had management responsibility said that they could use some of the methods learnt when doing staff supervision and when planning projects. The group also felt that through using examples in the training that were tailored to youth work and to Castlehaven, that they gained a greater understanding of the methods, as well as being more confident in running issue-based youth work sessions.

Outcomes

"It was a good experience to see the young people all in one place and excited and sitting down and ideas coming through. They were saying 'yeah we can do this and that' which got the young people excited and empowered about doing things for themselves and young people leading which is good".

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Frances Shank, Manager at Castlehaven

"Like resources - set up, sticky wall, NAOMIE and other little methods, and the coloured writing e.g. ground rules; there was good stuff to see. Loved the residential and liked the way hours were split up by activities" - Jodie, Youth worker at Castlehaven

The outcomes and future of the project have included 70 people playing in a football tournament that the young people helped to run; The Silent Movers group using their skills to organise cooking and food rotas for the Juniors sessions; participating in a community festival and coming up with loads of fundraising ideas, such as making things to sell and making up Smoothie recipes.



The project we have developed is very unique in that it is one of the few processes that starts from scratch working with an organisation and takes them through training and facilitation to a point where they have clear objectives and commitments for how to deliver on youth participation, including a practical action plan. It is particularly unique in that this process is done with young people and adults together from the outset.