



Kite model of youth participation

A voluntary  
youth work sector  
collaboration



# The kite model of youth participation

## A voluntary youth sector publication

The **kite** model of youth participation has been devised to illustrate the essential elements required to grow youth participation in youth work. It contributes to the Department of Education's **Priorities for Youth** policy direction of "strengthening participation in the youth service." Priority 4 confirms that "youth workers will have the flexibility to adopt the most suitable approach to enhancing participation within their setting, reflecting the needs of young people at every stage" The **kite** model explains the diversity of participation within a common framework and demonstrates the voluntary youth sector's commitment to youth participation and contribution to "a flexible contemporary model."

Participation is now enshrined within public policy, as reflected in Priorities for Youth. The acknowledgement of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, (giving young people the right to express their opinion and have opinions taken into account), has been significant in driving participation forward. The Northern Ireland Act (2008) makes specific provision for the inclusion of children and young people in promoting equality of opportunity.

Youth participation contributes to a range of positive outcomes for children and young people, such as increased personal capabilities, positive relationships, improved health and well-being, active citizenship and improved political engagement. Section 5 of this resource identifies the skills, attitudes and knowledge achieved by young people through their participation.

It is within this context that the kite model seeks to capture the imagination of those who currently 'fly the kite' for youth participation and to present a model that can be used to develop and enhance youth participation.

The **kite** model is flexible and can represent the different levels of young people's involvement alongside future hopes and aspirations. It reflects the reality that participation needs to shift and change depending on the context within which it takes place.

## Rationale for the kite model of participation

The **kite** model differs from the commonly referenced 'ladder of participation', as it helps to demonstrate the breadth and diversity of participation work. It also recognises the value of all participation work, rather than a hierarchy where some participation is seen as more valuable and important than others.

Kite flying is second only to football in popularity amongst young people in Brazil, as witnessed by members of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum. Their approaches to this activity illustrate what impact kites can have:

*"In the favela, young people in their spare time love flying kites... when you're going through and you see all those young people flying loads of kites on the roofs, and what's brilliant actually is the young people in the favela make their own kites and they take great ownership and pride in their kites. It's almost like a competition to see whose kite is up the longest.... and in terms of participation, the fact that the young people in the favela are taking ownership, that they're building it themselves and that they are the ones in control, with a sense of pride. So it's metaphorically beautiful."*



## How useful is the model in illustrating youth participation?

Many people have never flown a kite but a large majority have watched a kite being flown. It may seem as though it is an activity for the experienced or skilled. As Dale (1957) would argue, it is best learned by actually trying it. When you start it may take time for the kite to take flight and it may fall and you will need to try again. Similarly participation needs to be tried out, reflected upon and understanding applied; attempting repeated actions to move participation forward.

Ask yourself why you have not been involved in participation work? For many people they may not have been given the chance, the environment hasn't been right or that it appeared too difficult to do.

It is therefore for those who have been involved in participation to impart skills and knowledge and to share their learning with new people.



## What people have said to date about the kite model:

- "It is a clear and reflective model to document and critique your own participative practice"
- "Helps you to articulate the distinct difference between generic youth work and youth participation"
- "It produces a common language while respecting diversity of practices"
- "It values a broad range of participation practices"

## The kite model

### Introduction

The enclosed papers explain the different elements of the **kite** model and interprets them through a range of participation practices being delivered across the voluntary youth sector. Also included are worksheets, focusing on each element of the kite model, to enable organisations to develop and enhance youth participation.

There are 5 key components to the kite model:



## I. Kite in flight

### **Illustrating youth participation in action**

The kite in flight relates to a description of the youth participation initiative. It is not analytical but descriptive, telling the story of the project, its purpose and the actions taken. It should provide clarity on what takes place, what is being experienced, what was felt and why people were involved. This describes the context and content of the work which will vary from one group, organisation or project to another.

The kite has a direction in flight. It may be flexible and may lurch with the wind, but it has a direction. The direction of the kite gives purpose and aim to participation work. The aims of participation work may include one or more of the following;

- Speaking together for a stronger voice.
- Acting together for improved lives.
- Working together to inspire others.
- Changing services, changing structures.
- Preparing for future participation.
- Taking an active role in politics or political action.

Kites need specific optimal weather conditions to support and sustain a kite in flight. This requires a critical approach to identifying and seizing opportunities, being flexible and making adjustments to maximise the potential of participation.

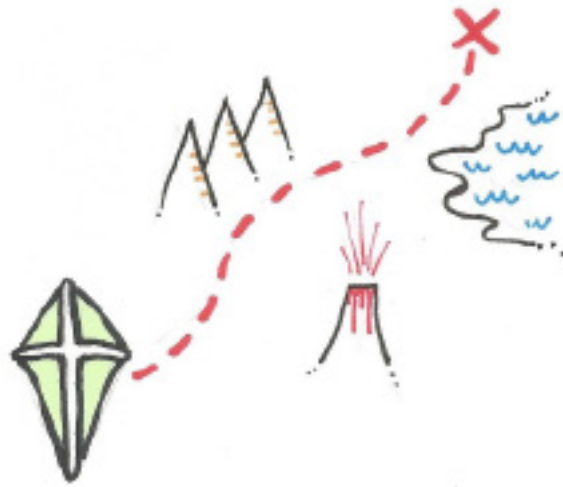
The kite itself is also fluid and moving, with possibilities that the kite may dip and sway with emerging weather conditions like the wind and rain. The kite runner is always looking out for ways to stabilise the kite in flight. This requires an analysis of the interference on the kite strength and focus. The kite runner uses their critical eye and knowledge to think through what is impacting on the kite's stability. For example, reflective practice and critical thinking in understanding the climate of the group, alongside the changing political, social or economic context, is the key to stabilising the swaying kite.



Weather forecasting involves the following processes:

- **Maximising naturally occurring opportunities for participation**

The worker can recognise naturally occurring moments where young people can make decisions, take their own direction and shape the work and promote social change. They can discover ways in which they can have their voice heard within society; whether that is to take action to contribute to their own community or to challenge aspects of society which they feel are unfair or unjust. It is the role of the worker to be a catalyst and pursue and seize these naturally occurring moments so that young people have the opportunity to positively impact on the social, political or economic landscape.



- **Reflective analysis of micro and macro-climate**

When the worker is reflective and analytical, they notice and tune into the views and perspectives of young people alongside other events at a broader level. Experiences are created for young people to understand how they are active participants in their own lives and in the wider world. Taking account of this full picture drives responsive interactions and initiatives that will lift the kite into flight, despite any prevailing weather conditions.

## **YouthAction Northern Ireland**

**"Young people need to have a direct line to government – a voice."**

The *weather* or environment can be an important factor in helping or hindering participation. In this instance the worker was very aware of the *weather*, studying the 'forecast' and identifying an opportunity to 'fly the kite' to maximise young people's contribution to shaping the delivery of services.

In consultations with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), the worker seized the opportunity to suggest a youth fringe event, to promote the active involvement of young people, at a high level European Social Fund (ESF) conference. Although anxious at first the civil servants were committed to young people's participation, as noted by their Minister.

*"The emphatic message of 'Pathways to Success' is that young people themselves have a stake and are part of the solution."* Minister Farry (2012)

DEL agreed to proceed, having confidence in the worker that the event had the potential to meet their aims. By leading on the preparation, the worker then provided the catalyst to involve other youth organisations and young unemployed.

(continued)

### What was in the 'wind' that helped to keep the kite flying?

Effective partnership and collaboration ensured everyone remained committed and momentum maintained. The use of creative and modern techniques, such as survey monkey and a live illustrator, kept everyone inspired and open to the possibilities of a successful outcome. The leadership, drive and determination of the worker encouraged and motivated both the young people and the partners throughout their participation journey.

From the youth fringe event, a manifesto to tackle youth unemployment was produced and presented at the main ESF conference by the young champions. The manifesto detailed a range of actions that would help young people into employment. The conference delegates, including the Minister and high level EU officials were required to respond to the young champions' 'asks'.

Following the conference a new structure was supported by DEL to enable young people to take forward their manifesto actions and inform the Pathways to Success Strategy. This new structure has emerged into a NEET Youth Forum, involving young people in local hubs to promote and support the voice and active involvement of young people.

### Mencap

Taking account of the environment is important to Mencap.

*"It can be a challenge in supporting staff, students and volunteers who have a disability as co-kite runners. As the youth worker you are not only tailoring work approaches to suit the needs of young people with disabilities, you are also challenged to make things accessible all the time for your colleagues with a disability. For example, team meetings often have had to reflect approaches for a worker with dyspraxia and another with albinism and who is partially sighted. Even after qualifying as professional community youth workers these young professionals find it more difficult to gain employment in the sector."*

### YouthNet

This illustrates how the opportunity to establish a young people's grant giving group was identified. It has a clear purpose and the principle of voluntary participation. The discussion on voluntary participation has an unusual spin, emphasising that the crucial aspect of voluntary participation is not simply that young people choose to opt in, but that each young person has the ultimate freedom of opting out and saying no at each or any stage.

*"We had a young people's forum and that forum had a range of opportunities to hear about the work that Playboard was doing or Northern Ireland Youth Forum programmes for 11 to 25 year olds. They were also involved in a young people's grant giving group including the applications, and that was probably the bit of the programme that was an actual and a real experience. They had information in advance and a worker worked with them to help them understand what the applications were asking for. They were also trying to help those young people connect what was in that application to their own experience and their own youth participation or involvement with a youth service or in other parts of their life..."*

## Area I: Kite in flight

Consider the illustrations with young people in relation to youth participation:

- What is the focus of your kite in flight?
- What are you planning to do?
- Who all is involved?
- Who should see the kite flying?
- What things do you need to consider to ensure the kite can fly?
- What might impact on your kite in flight?



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## 2. Kite design

### **The structure or approach**

*The kite design is the plan or blueprint for growing youth participation. This design will include all the elements needed to fly a kite and illustrate how each element will interact to bring the kite into flight. The kite design will be refined and enhanced through the process, but this offers young people and workers a guide to begin the work.*

### **The kite material**

Whether the kite is made of plastic, linen, or lead, it must be made from material which is well thought-out so that is not doomed to failure. Some kites are bogus or imposters and in reality fall flat. As such there is a need to begin with the right intentions; a concept that has structure; a participation approach; and designs that give the greatest opportunity for success.

### **The kite frame**

Participation takes place in various settings with each providing distinct opportunities and using particular methods. The kite frame holds the material in place and the kite strong. This refers to the structures and approaches that are used to facilitate participation with young people, for example, a consultation event, a youth council or committee.



Key elements within the kite design include;

- **An assets-based approach**

Participation work begins with an assets-based approach to young people; from a fundamental principle that all children and young people have the ability to make decisions that affect their lives and the capacity to develop a greater sense of their own agency.

- **Analysis of context**

Context is a defining aspect of participation work. Not only do workers need to take into consideration where young people are and the spaces they inhabit, but also what this says about the needs and motivations of the group? For example, a young person may be homeless or unemployed and as such the worker needs to consider the level of participation intervention.

- **Planned but non-formal**

The context will inform the relevant non-formal actions that are required, especially to engage young people who are on the edges of resources. As young people become more involved they can use the context of their experience to organize towards participative actions.





- **The nature of the group**

The nature of the group offers clues as to the content of participation work that needs to be undertaken, but should not be the sole defining feature. Such groupings may be threaded together by a common single issue, such as rurality or disability.

- **Multi-dimensional individuals and groups**

The worker will strive to build on a common starting point, but recognises that groups are not homogenous but rather having multi-dimensional aspects to individual lives. For example, a young lesbian group is not solely consumed by discussions and projects on sexual orientation or coming out, but can engage in work which nurtures all aspects of being a young woman.

- **Project based or time bound**

Young people may have previously been connected with workers who have misunderstood or let them down. Tangible results may convince the group of the consistency of the worker and the merits of the work. This emphasises the need for participation work to be time bound or to be project based with clear and defined outcomes.

## **Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster**

### **Clear structure and roles**

A well established structure is in place to nurture and develop leadership and promote participation from an early age. Each of the local clubs, 60 in total, are organised through a committee based in and representing a particular geographical area. Junior members from 12 – 16 years sit on local committees alongside their older counterparts and more importantly contribute to all decisions. Older members, up to 25 years, act as positive role models as younger members learn and understand about responsibility, decision making and positive leadership.

The local committees organise a yearly programme of activities including planning for and participating in the yearly arts and drama festival. One of the members described what they do, *"we do everything from deciding what play to put on as well as organising all the hosting of the local competitions."* This ensures that the young people feel real ownership resulting in well supported, well organised and successful events.

This well established structure is embedded throughout the organisation with four members from the local clubs represented at county level. These young people then get the opportunity to practice and hone their leadership and decision making skills by organising county competitions. These successful events are underpinned by strong values around teamwork, a 'can do' attitude and a great belief in volunteering.

### **Opportunities for progression**

Young people represented at county level then get an opportunity to progress on to the Executive Board of the organisation. Here they are able to take on greater responsibility and understand and practice good governance for the organisation.

The young people feel honoured to take on these roles and see this as validation of all their hard work and well honed skills they have practised and tested over many years at club and county level.

## **Mencap**

Investment in approach is important in Mencap.

*"The kite runner requires more preparation with young people with learning disabilities. Time is essential for the participatory work and you need to go at their pace. Talk with the young people and let them tell you their support needs. This is then regularly reviewed as they start to lead. You find opportunities such as one off events where they can take a lead or co-lead. Young people grow and learn together and it is great to see them excel and have a sense of achievement."*

## **Northern Ireland Youth Forum**

The chairperson of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum explains how, within their governance structures young people have the capacity, optimism and willingness to change and improve their own lives and the lives of others.

*"Young people will always have the capacity and the desire and the belief that they can be agents for change. Participation is about empowerment, it's about a process and it's about young people in a position. I believe that young people will always have an interest in decision making, they will always want to feel empowered and they will always have opinions about things that are important to them. That's not to say that all young people will want to get involved in the youth forum, councils and projects. I think it's just a human thing where we as humans want to feel connected, we want to be in control of our own destinies and we want to be able to influence things in our own lives."*

## **Include Youth**

This example outlines a structure, whilst emphasising the personal development of individuals, and how developing a safety net within the programme structures allows young people to make mistakes without feeling personal detrimental consequences.

Include Youth have a young person's forum which meets every 6 weeks. They named themselves '**Ideas, Voice, Action**' and two young people from each area or project attend with issues and ideas both internally and externally. The forum is there to give young people a voice and raise issues and questions with management and board members.

*"What makes us as youth workers different from others is that we are creating that safe environment. That's a value and a principle that should underpin your work, a safe environment wherein young people act out roles and take on responsibilities. They do it within that safe environment where there's a worker there, maintaining the boundaries of what's going on. We are preparing young people for participation and that's as important as just participation. Even when those young people were making decisions about money, they were making decisions where ultimately an organisation was going to take the fall. If they gave money out to a group who blew the money. The young people were never going to be held personally responsible for that, an organisation indemnified to carry that risk, and that's the safe environment, which was explained to young people."*

*Include Youth is committed to the voluntary involvement of young people at all levels of decision-making. We believe in the uniqueness of each young person, that they are best placed to express their needs and that by listening to them and acting on their opinions, this can bring about positive change for themselves and others. We provide young people with genuine opportunities to achieve their right to have their voice heard, providing ongoing support, increasing their confidence and treating them with the dignity and respect they deserve."*

## **Public Achievement**

The '**Youth in Focus**' project was a youth project that brought together two streams of Public Achievement's work: 'Away from Violence' and 'WIMPS (Where Is My Public Servant?)'.

The approach to participation centred on the facilitative role of the youth worker and covered four main stages:

**Recruitment** - invitations were sent via the organisation's database and social media to a set of 'open' nights on the project. Young people found out about the project and self-selected to participate; meetings were set up to begin work on the project.

**Development** - young people then began to take ownership over the development of the project including redesigning the project based on what they wanted to achieve. The young people took a lead role in organising and planning the meetings and the delivery of the project. They each took on specific roles and responsibilities.

**Training and support** - the lead youth worker had a facilitative role, providing the necessary support and guidance for the young people to make the project happen. A number of sessions were organised by the youth workers to equip young people with the necessary media, planning and project management skills needed to deliver the project.

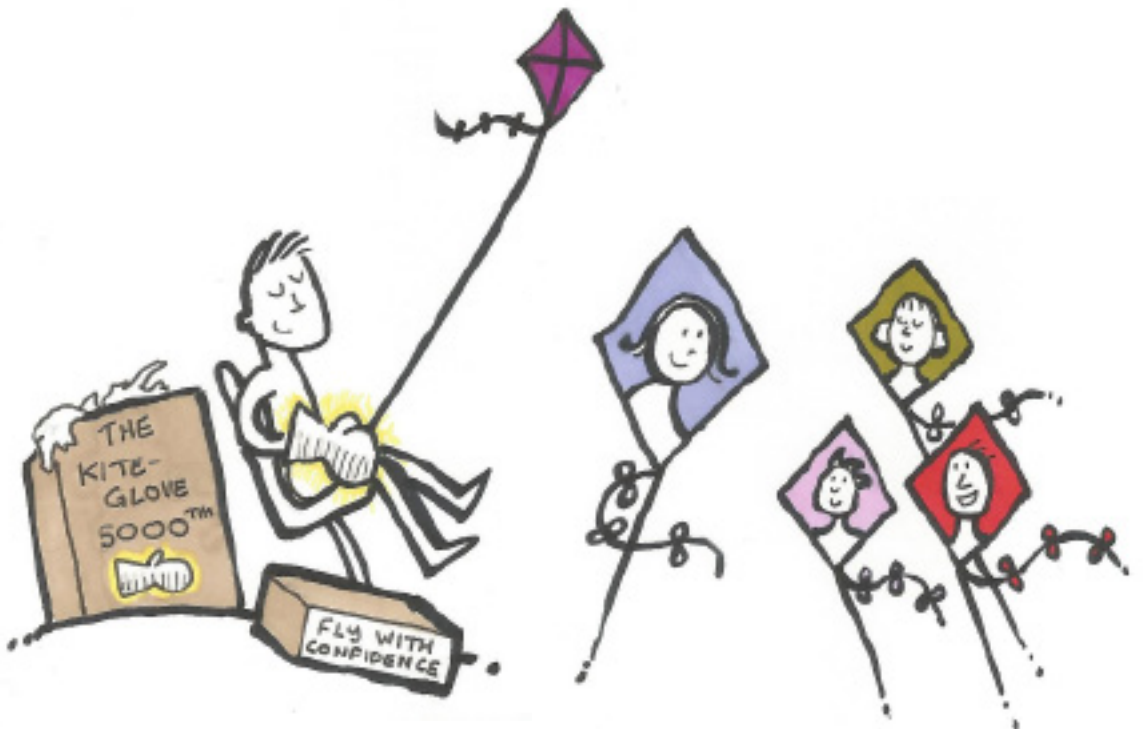
**Delivery** - young people took the lead role in creating the film and also delivering a large seminar event with an expert panel and discussion groups (of both adults and young people).

In the early stages of the application process young people's views were taken into account and adults led the development of the project idea and applied for funds. After funding was agreed young people shared power and responsibility for decision-making with adults and at times made autonomous decisions.

## Area 2: Kite Design

Consider the illustrations with young people in relation to youth participation:

- What are the core components which make the kite strong and resilient?
- What support is needed for you to fly a kite with pride?
- What will help the kite fly with success?
- How are young people central to the kite structure?
- What do you hope to achieve by flying a kite?
- How long do you hope to fly the kite?

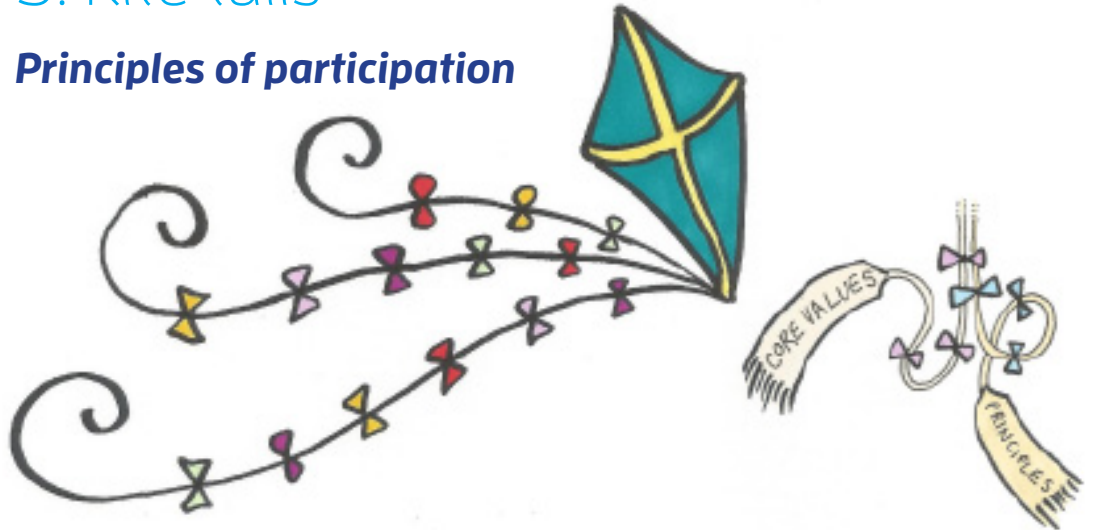


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### 3. Kite tails

#### **Principles of participation**



*The kite tails are the principles which guide the kite. Although they look pretty, they serve a practical guiding purpose towards a kite that is lifting up or in flight.*

Many of the principles of participation work mirror aspects of community youth work values, yet greater emphasis may be placed on specific principles in heavily participative work. For example, principles of collective action and self-help may override self-determination. Above all, the kite tails are proudly displayed for all to see and the clear and explicit display of the kite tails adds strength to the kite. The Literature Review (2014) has articulated how the principles of participative democracy and social justice are woven into the fabric of youth participation processes. Eight principles are emphasised;

- Integrity** - honest consultation and engagement with young people.
- Voluntary involvement** - at the core of youth work.
- User-led** - enabling young people to take action themselves with their own agenda.
- Flexibility and quality** - needs led with built in quality assurances.
- Partnership** - reciprocal nature of learning together.
- Removing blocks and barriers** - anything that blocks progress.
- Accessibility** - to and for all.
- Diversity** - commitment to eliminate discrimination and promote inclusion.

Work with the most marginalised individuals and groups tend to have a focus on participative democracy and social justice. Critical and analytical skills help the young people to understand the nature and origins of their marginalisation. This educational process moves an individual from burgeoning self-awareness of invisibility (or inequality) to a growing group consciousness. This then becomes the impetus for a planned project or group action with a clear connected message and purpose.

For young people who are considered 'less marginalised' or in generic youth work settings this explicit focus on participative democracy and social justice is as needed to create allies for change. Herein young people can develop and deepen their understanding of how power and privilege can be perpetuated. These discussions can open up new ways of thinking about the world and new opportunities to act for a principle that you can believe in. This analysis can be used to challenge historical hierarchies which oppress or disadvantage specific individuals or groups.



## Girls' Brigade Northern Ireland

GEMS is a youth led decision making group within Girls' Brigade Northern Ireland.

Staff and young women described GEMS as being about, *"getting young women to be where the decisions are being made"* and *"encouraging young women to express their voice."*

Young women who were closely involved with GEMS had a strong sense of why it was important for them to be involved in the central decisions of the organisation. They felt an ownership over the direction of the organisation and wanted it to succeed and develop, *"I owe it a lot, women have taken time to invest in me and I want to pay back."*

Some values and principles highlighted as important to the participation process were:

**Being supportive** - young women are provided with mentoring and pastoral support to develop personally and in leadership roles.

**Being relevant** - making the programme relevant to young women and ensure GEMS challenges the relevance of the organisation.

**Being flexible** - GEMS is flexible but provides some structure so that young women can engage effectively.

**Being user-led** - young women make decisions about how GEMS operates.

**Ensuring young women wanted to be involved** - young women understand what GEMS is about and want to see the organisation develop to *'give back'*.

## Public Achievement

The key principles and values that emerged from the **Youth in Focus** project were:

**Authenticity and Integrity** - young people experienced 'real' engagement and 'real' decision making power. It was important that young people were genuinely listened to and their views were acted upon and *"not patronised."*

**Empowerment** - young people had a platform to realise their potential. Workers used statements like, *"we are not here to rescue young people but give them responsibility"* and *"we are providing a space for safe challenge."*

**Citizenship and democracy** - for staff there was an underpinning belief in democracy, which was in keeping with the organisation's mission, *"building democratic communities together."* There was a strong emphasis on involving the wider community and adults in the process.

**Rights based** - it came across strongly that the staff valued young people and believed in their right to have a voice and have a part to play in society. There was a strong aversion to tokenistic engagement with young people with phrases like we are not about *"wheeling young people out"* or *"it's not about something being done 'to' young people but 'with' them."*

Staff also used words like *"educational"* and *"a learning experience"* to describe how they saw young people's engagement in the process. This was backed up by young people who reported enjoying the process and learning through it, *"the work was great, I really enjoyed it and learned a lot throughout."*

## YouthAction Northern Ireland

This example illustrates how principles, devised by young people themselves, provide guidance and keep young people motivated.

The Rainbow Factory 'front of house crew' are an event management group who support YouthAction's College Square North Hub. They have specific roles such as PR, promotion, box office, audience support and event planning. The group have biweekly meetings at College Square North to plan for forthcoming events. The young people also develop transferrable skills for working in any team environment especially where interdependency is required.

**Front of house** is a forum that was previously led by adults including parents of Rainbow Factory members. As YouthAction invested in a new building in Belfast city centre in 2007 young people began to be more connected to the core functioning of their building. A sense of pride and ownership has prompted young volunteers to play active roles in the running of the building, especially in playing visible roles at events. Young people now lead the 'front of house crew' with adult support. The notion of young people's **VISIBILITY** and **RESPONSIBILITY** was central to the growth of the forum. Within the forum an event management model (stage manager, technical manager and front of house manager) is used as a triangulated approach to events.

The management group also interface with a core group of volunteer parents. Together young people and adults share roles which are crucial to the smooth running of events and artistic productions. Roles include costume making, photography, stage management and set building. Monthly meetings are held between the front of house crew and parents' group. This can also involve training and developing initiatives and fund-raising.

The front of house crew created 5 guiding principles: **PATCH (Patience, Assertiveness, Team work, Communication and Hospitality)**. Through roles such as ticket selling, PR, marketing, box office, tuck shop, audience management, event planning and fund-raising the young people develop a wide range of skills. These are all transferrable skills and include leadership, assertiveness, communication and organisational. The youth worker supports the young people to name their personal and work skills which are translated onto their CV's.

In terms of youth participation the group operate mostly at the levels of influence and delegation:

**Influence** - the group decides on how to improve events and identifies roles. They ask for feedback through audience quality control (they give out event feedback sheets and take them back in). They look at the feedback and collate a list of names and emails of people who are interested. The group also identify specific training such as disability awareness and software development.

**Delegation** - is another core function as the group decide on roles and what events they should do. They identify a hierarchy of preferred roles and are flexible in swapping these roles as the need arises. This provides a great opportunity to broaden their skills and experience as they practice and experience different roles.

## Area 3: Kite Tails

Consider the illustrations with young people in relation to youth participation:

- What are the core principles that guide your kite flying?
- What have you observed in life that has motivated you to fly a kite?
- Why do you want to fly a kite? What has motivated you?
- In what ways can youth work provide the platform for you to fly your kite?
- How can those not involved in kite flying get involved?



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## 4. Kite runner

### **The empowering worker**

*The kite runner is the worker who initially runs the kite. Their role is to 'support and stimulate' participation work (Literature Review 2014) and notice naturally occurring and manufactured opportunities for the young people to find their voice. Their role is nurturing and empowering.*

The kite runner is responsible for timing and pace in running the kite. This requires the worker to notice what is happening in the environment. The pace of the runner will ensure that the timescale of work is determined by the young people, not being driven by deadlines of others. Being able to look up and look around becomes increasingly important in running a kite more effectively.

Another function of the kite runner is to nurture and encourage, particularly when the impact of their efforts are obscured or not explicit. The youth worker helps to keep the young person engaged in the process based on an empowering relationship. The youth worker may start off taking the lead role with a group but his or her goal is always to enable young people to take the kite strings for themselves.

Key skills and characteristics of the kite runner include;

- **Facilitative skills**

An empowering participative practice requires the worker to be positive in how they receive suggestions and ideas. It is a dialogue in the truest sense, a two-way exchange of listening, talking and questioning.

- **Creativity**

The worker must draw on their own creativity to overcome some of the barriers or blocks to youth participation that exist and in finding the most engaging methods that will inspire young people to be critical, take decisions and take action.

- **Intensive engagement and relational work**

Workers need to be persistent, inspired and motivated to access and engage young people and motivate them towards critical thinking and action. Boundaries are negotiated and re-negotiated informally as the group, the place and the world around changes.

### **Kites flying together**

The kite runner is a conduit between many parties, building partnerships, communicating with others, building a greater consensus; and working with more than one kite runner. The role of the worker as advocate is balanced with the role in building alliances:



- **Advocacy role for worker**

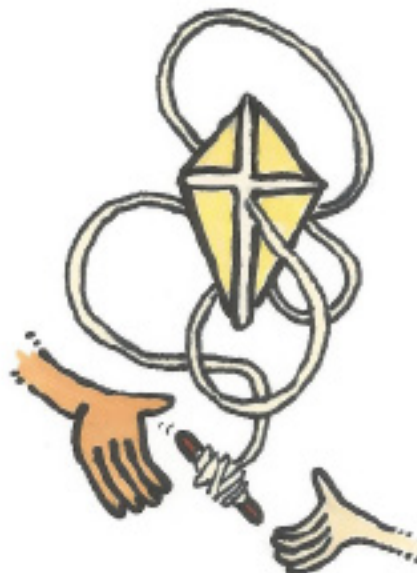
The worker is required to engage strongly with the structures and/or organisations that actively exclude the young person. The role of the worker is to support the young person to advocate on their own behalf, while adding weight to the argument where the young voice is not being heard, understood or taken seriously. This advocacy role requires that the messages from the young person are being clearly understood, interpreted and relayed forcefully to others.

- **Building alliances to combine strength of voice and action**

A further feature of participative work is to bring together individuals and communities with similar situations or circumstances to develop a critical mass. This peer advocacy model then becomes a lobbying force to drive their own needs forward and to drive forward decisions that affect the individual, group and community similarly. Lobbying work can be tedious, slow, requiring time, energy, research, writing and meeting skills. Therefore the youth worker continues to be important in fulfilling some of these many functions which ultimately supports the group aims.

## **Passing the kite strings**

One of the functions of the kite runner is in demonstrating, teaching and empowering young people. Some young people take the strings immediately or quickly, taking charge quite early. For others, where the pace is slower, a collegiate approach can be taken to kite flying, with more than one kite runner; with someone holding the kite; someone holding the string; someone holding the kite tails so they don't get tangled. This includes:



- **Intensive individual support**

The worker supports through gentle encouragement, thought provoking questioning and developing a young person's resilience to face stress filled situations. This is preparation of a young person (some with acute needs or issues) to be their own agent and their own advocate. Work with the individual requires intensive support for them to develop and exercise their own voice; to develop a sense of confidence in devising their own solutions to their own issues; to clearly express a personal viewpoint in anxiety evoking situations.

- **Collective actions**

The group may already have a great degree of autonomy and associated skills which their context suggests. They show the ability to make independent decisions to exist outside current youth work families. Some however, may be excluded through lack of knowledge and awareness of existing resources and services. Others may not be fully conscious that they are being excluded, oppressed or marginalised and therefore exist complacently until such a realisation comes to light.

## **Northern Ireland Youth Forum**

This story tells of young people who were faced with political bureaucracy placing barriers in their way. Young people took the strings of the kite from the original kite runners, with full confidence in their own ability to make a change.

*"One example of a project that the Youth Forum has been working on for a number of years is a North/South Youth Forum so it predates my time in the Youth Forum. For about eight years, young people have been lobbying for a North/South participative body and it has been difficult for them to get this off the ground. I suppose when you're looking at something like that and you're lobbying politicians, you're wading through concrete in many ways in terms of bureaucracy and because it's political as well. Let's not be naive but young people were saying clearly that following the Good Friday Agreement we had a Northern Ireland Assembly, North, South, East, West institutions and young people were saying 'look, we have a UK Youth Parliament, NI Youth Forum, we're lobbying for a Youth Assembly, where's the North/South body?' For years and years it was very difficult to make any great headway but for the past year or so young people themselves ignored all those external factors and the bureaucracy and said, 'do you know what, we're going to do this ourselves.' 'We're going to call a meeting, we're going to see how many people come along to that meeting and we'll take it from there.' The North/South Youth Forum, for me, that is very pure in the sense that young people are leading themselves."*

## **Girls' Brigade Northern Ireland**

The programme worker saw their role as facilitative. In the initial stages of the group they played a lead role in recruiting young women and organising meetings. They also offered support to young women, particularly those who were new to GEMS, to enable them to engage more fully in the process.

In the main, though, young women 'took the reins of the kite' and led GEMS. The worker helped get the 'kite' ready (taking on the burden of the practicalities) so that when the young women arrived they could go right ahead and 'fly the kite' (run the meetings and coordinate the group).

At times the kite runner (programme worker) gently pushed young women forward to take the lead and provided some guidance and support. They also sought to enable them to develop their strengths.

Young women had the opportunity to "learn on the job" and at times had to "make their own mistakes". However, the kite runner made it clear that "they (the young women) always know that I'm there to step in if they need me".

## **Mencap**

The **HUB** focus group was established in 2011. The purpose of the group is to challenge the youth sector to take more inclusive actions towards disability. The young people involved are the experts on their disability and life issues.

One member has come through training and built confidence to now play the role of a peer mentor. Their role includes buddy reading and simplifying tasks. They also carry out peer research with their friends and provide the findings to the youth worker.

## **3 Ways Community Association, Newry**

Young people observe and experience the respectful and meaningful relationships between the staff and volunteers. They recognise different attitudes and behaviours for dealing with issues and in promoting a healthy, fun and humorous place to be.

*"Participation is a natural progression for the young people. Young people learn early stages of decision making and this grows throughout their time with the centre. For example, Joanne worked with a junior group of young people (often on the margins), to organise a junior disco (11-13 yr olds). Young people took responsibility for setting the hall up, laying out the chairs, setting up the tuck shop and petty cash, setting up the DJ equipment, organising the sign in and money collection and cleaning up after them. The values and responsibilities learned here are carried throughout. Adults are in the background.*

*When young people formulate an idea for a programme they also consider how this is going to be resourced. Adults are not looking over their shoulders and they are being trusted to grow and learn. Young people are listened to and learn to not only identify issues and programmes, but also learn practical ways of resourcing this in the absence of funding."*

## 5. Sky is the limit

Participation processes yield rich personal and social rewards for young people who are active and involved. However, this also identifies the changes beyond the individual. The sky identifies the outcomes of participation beyond the individual where substantial change and action arise from participation work.

The outcomes for young people include;

### SKILLS

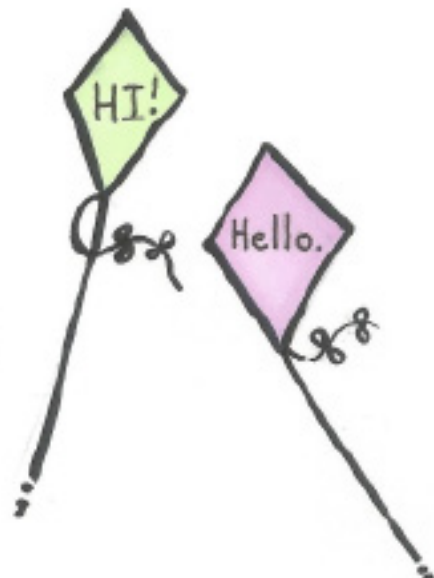
- Thinking skills and assertiveness.
- Decision making and problem solving skills.
- Communication including communication with adults.
- Analytical and advocacy skills.
- Action skills – moving from idea to social action.

### ATTITUDES

- 'Can do' attitude and a positive approach to making things happen.
- Greater awareness of and openness to diversity.
- Greater sense of personal satisfaction through taking social action.
- Growing persistence and stamina in challenging people, policies and structures.
- Increased sense of belonging.
- Greater willingness to act collectively.

### KNOWLEDGE

- Growing consciousness of injustice and oppression.
- Growing understanding of how actions can affect personal and social change.
- Greater understanding of the links between individual circumstances, situations and societal structures.
- Greater knowledge of how policies and decisions are made and influenced.
- Greater awareness of local and global issues.



### 3 Ways Community Association, Newry

3 Ways Community Association celebrates 40 years in 2015. Young people are paramount in decision making within the centre and have their own youth committee. This was unique for Newry and they are proud of being the first community centre to have its own youth committee. It involves young people aged 14-18yrs who meet once per month and have their own constitution. As well as discussing ideas with the community centre they also discuss issues of concern within the local area.

Youth participation is part of the fabric of the association, the motto has been *"don't do anything for us without us."* For example, 3 ways has a vision for the centre to be a dementia friendly building. The Alzheimer Society delivered dementia awareness training and this was attended by four young people and six adults. In this way young people are an equal voice and player from the conceptual phase through to implementation.

Young people also go out with adult volunteers to carry out community audits on the doorsteps of residents. In particular young people help to write down answers to questions for the elderly.

There is also an intergenerational impact whereby the youth committee support many events with senior citizens such as the weekly lunches and Christmas parties. The young people adopt different roles such as dancing with the elderly; two-way storytelling; and walking the elderly people home after the event. They build relationships so that the senior citizens feel safer in their community and homes and they see a young person as a familiar face in the area, rather than feeling intimidated by them.

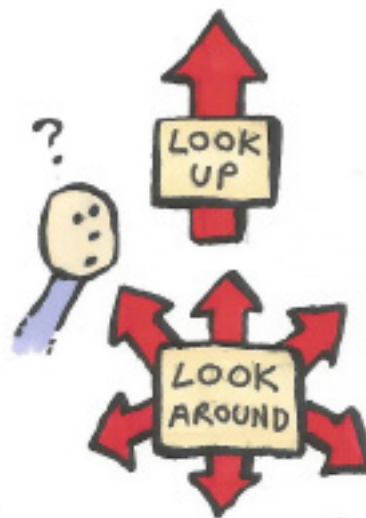
### The social impact

Outcomes beyond the individual range from more responsive youth work services to more responsive social structures and systems. Expressing clear explicit messages to policy makers, driving social action, and inspiring individuals and groups to strengthen their own voice and affect positive change. Substantial social change can arise from participation work. At the simplest level, we change the skyline by adding in something different to the landscape.

Two key actions must exist for a worker and young people to maximise the opportunities for social change.

- **Analysis of exclusionary systems and processes**

An analysis by the youth worker of the dominant systems and processes can deepen their understanding of what change is needed and how this might be implemented. Using this analysis, there is a role for the youth worker to work with organisations and structures to promote and develop participative systems that will provide effective ways in which young people can express and implement the change they wish to see.



## • Strategic input to impact on policy and systems

The youth worker has responsibility to input into strategic or policy matters that impact on young people. Through political dialogue, policy consultations, practice and policy papers and policy meetings the worker can be persistent in challenging disempowering structures, and promoting participative systems.

Social impacts of youth participation and outcomes beyond the individual.

- Greater access to existing services, resources and information.
- Representation of a wider range of young people.
- Greater visibility of marginalised groups of young people.
- More responsive youth work interventions and priorities.
- Clearer and more explicit messages communicated to policy makers from a collective voice.
- Greater social action to inspire individuals and groups towards strengthening and exercising their voice.
- Greater relevance and positive impact of policies to young people's lives.



### **Public Achievement**

The project 'Youth in focus' gave young people a chance to look at some of the issues they felt were important to them and to challenge societal perceptions of young people.

Young people engaged in positive dialogue with fifty young people and adults from communities across Belfast on the issues of how young people are viewed in the media and on ageism.

The film that was created as part of the project has a reach beyond the life of the project as it will be hosted on WIMPS.tv (which has over 3,000 unique viewers a month). The young people will be able to continue to develop their skills in other PR programmes through WIMPS and Away from Violence.

## YouthAction NI

**Let's Talk** is a lively method of engaging young people in political dialogue. The origin of the **Let's Talk** initiative primarily flows from the local BBC programme which has promoted discussion and debate between a panel of politicians and a live audience for many years. Adapting a similar format for youth work was equally plausible, albeit without studio cameras and a live broadcast. However one thing that youth work can achieve is an active and participatory audience of young people.

The youth work **Let's Talk** model reflects youth work principles, with young people at the core of planning, facilitating and evaluating. A safe and fun environment for young people is also at the forefront of the model and 'a young person only' space is facilitated for a short period prior to the actual **Let's Talk** debate with politicians. In practice this means young people;

- arrive to an environment which is welcoming and youth orientated (with live music or refreshments);
- have time to understand the methods being used, the topics being discussed and the expected outcomes (using *world café* methods);
- are able to engage effectively through visual stimuli and non threatening interactive quizzes to gain insight and knowledge;
- are able to participate and debate with one another on an equal footing; and
- have time to consider their deliberations and prepare 'tight' questions and statements for addressing to the oncoming panel.

**Let's Talk** can address a number of burning issues for young people, such as Let's Talk ...policing, Let's Talk ....elections, Let's Talk ....a better Belfast, to name a few. It is an example of safe civic engagement activities, provided by regional voluntary youth organisations, to local youth groups and their members. It is also popular with elected representatives, who circulate around tables, debating with young people and convening a panel debate to conclude.

The youth work **Let's Talk** model demonstrates learning outcomes for young people, particularly increased leadership, advocacy and political engagement.

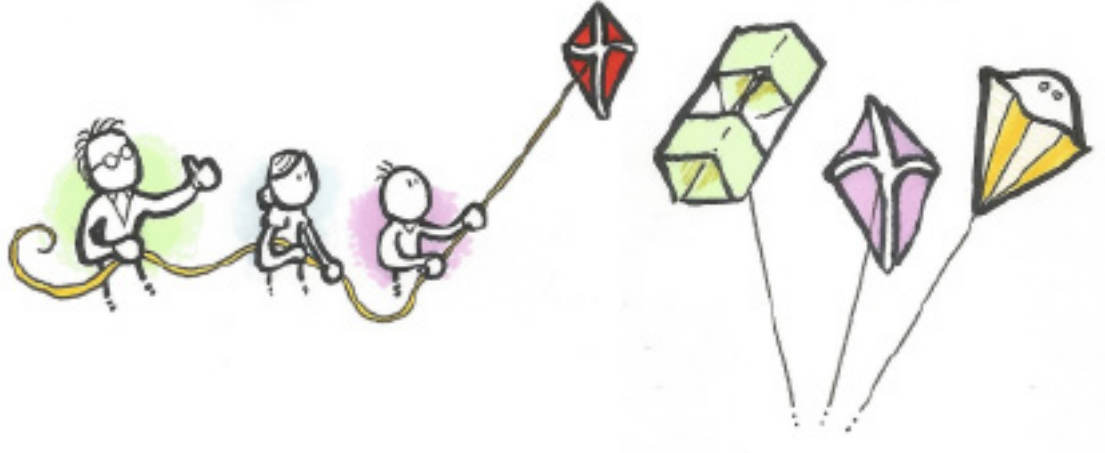
*'It's about a continuing conversation, rather than seeing it as done and dusted. Moving from 'yeah we told them' to the torch being carried onwards.'*



## Area 4: Kite Runner

Consider the illustrations with young people in relation to youth participation:

- Have you ever flown a kite?
- How do you learn to fly a kite?
- In what ways can workers best support kite flying?
- How can you connect with other kite flyers?
- How can other young people be involved in kite flying?



Kite model of youth participation



## Area 5: Sky is the Limit

Consider the illustrations with young people in relation to youth participation:

- How will you benefit from kite flying?
- How will others benefit from kite flying?
- What might change as a result of your kite flying?
- What skills will you have developed?
- How might your attitude change?
- What new knowledge might you gain?
- How will you know that the kite has had a successful flight?
- What will be the legacy of this kite in flight?

Kite model of youth participation

