

---

Practitioner led research report by the Novas Scarman Group on engaging Children and Young People in decision making processes based on the Children Can Do model.

---

## 1. Introduction

This piece of practitioner-led research was funded by a grant from the Children's Workforce Development Council with the intention of identifying effective practice and influencing the continued development of the Children's workforce. The focus of the research was the Children Can Do programme which is a partnership between Brighton and Hove Children and Young People's Trust and the Novas Scarman Group.

## 2. Background

At present the issue of Children and Young People's participation in decision making processes is particularly relevant given the proposed changes to service provision and prioritisation of locality based funding through Local Area Agreements.

The Novas Scarman Group (in partnership with Brighton and Hove Children and Young People's Trust) has, over the past 5 years, been running a city wide programme called Children Can Do. It provides grants of up to £3,000 and dedicated development support, to small emergent organisations that are providing activities and services for CYP aged 5 – 13. The programme focuses on Children and Young People (CYP) who have little access to appropriate activities and who therefore often have fewer chances at the same time as experiencing greatest need. Fundamental to the programme is the principle that it is children-led engaging and supporting CYP to participate actively in identifying their own needs. Thus, CYP are involved in the processes of applying for funding, shaping and designing appropriate activities and services and also in monitoring the progress of all projects that were successful in applying for funding. CYP also make decisions as to how the overall programme funds are to be allocated and prioritised across the city, through involvement in a city wide grants panel.

Over the past 5 years 140 projects have been funded through this programme benefiting over 4,000 CYP in the city. The panel members included CYP with disabilities and were recruited to reflect the cultural diversity of the city as well as all geographical areas. In total there have been 18 panels with over 54 CYP participating in decision making processes

## 3. Aims and Objectives

The Novas Scarman Group's aim in carrying out this piece of research was to identify innovative ways in which practitioners can engage CYP in decision making processes and participatory budgeting. The original research question was ***to see how we can facilitate the engagement / participation of Children and Young People in decision making processes using the Children Can Do Model as an example.***

The main objectives of the research were:-

- a. to identify what the key principles are that need to be in place to facilitate the meaningful engagement of CYP in decision making processes.

To do this required:-

- I. listening to CYP and in so doing learn what such participation looks like from their perspective.
- II. Listening to other key stakeholders across the city.
- III. Identifying the lessons learnt during the implementation of the Children Can Do programme over the past 5 years.
- IV. Developing this model of participation in such a way that best reflects the lessons learnt.

Additionally:-

- b. to identify how CYP can influence decision making in a more meaningful way across the City.
- c. to influence key policy makers both locally and nationally, as to the benefits of involving CYP in decision making processes.
- d. to identify ways of embedding the participation of CYP in mainstream decision making and participatory budgeting processes.

#### **4. Process / Method**

As stated in our aims and objectives we have used the Children Can Do model as the basis for our research. In line with our aims, and the principles of participatory budgeting, we initially consulted with the CYP as to how best to proceed with this research question. The unanimous decision was to make a DVD; this would enable them to learn new skills in an enjoyable and informative way at the same time as capturing their involvement in the programme. From our perspective a DVD would be a powerful visual representation of the principles of engaging CYP in participatory budgeting and decision making processes. It also had the potential to enable us to capture the views and experiences of CYP, parents / carers, adult workers, Voluntary and Community Sector partners, The Children and Young People's Trust and other key stakeholders in Brighton and Hove City Council, participating in the Children Can Do Programme.

To co-ordinate the filming process we engaged Martin Smith of Silver Box Films. He had been involved in a successful application to the Children Can Do Programme (the Famous Stars) and was therefore aware of the ethos of the programme and the various activities that it involved. He also had experience of working with CYP which was critical to the success of this project. We wanted to capture how CYP had participated at every stage of the process from developing their ideas to completing an application form for the consideration of the Children Can Do Panel. We also looked at how CYP have been involved in making decisions concerning the prioritisation of projects and allocation of funds to such projects across the city using participatory budgeting techniques.

In addition to the DVD, we used a number of other processes to capture the information we needed, including evaluation forms used at various stages of programme implementation; feedback given after networking and celebration events; post award support follow up visits; final project report forms; 1:1 discussions and conversations; general networking with groups; attendance at appropriate city wide forum; interactions with voluntary and community based organisations, as well as with statutory bodies and funders.

Additional benefits of carrying out this research project were that it provided an opportunity for CYP to investigate the views of other key stakeholders who provide services to CYP within the city and to find out how they listen and engage with CYP in decision making processes. We used the opportunity of **National Children's Take Over Day**, on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007, for a group of CYP to visit the council and put their questions to a number of different stakeholders including voluntary and community organisations, representatives of B&H CYPT and local councillors. The questions they asked where:-

- *Why do you do your job and is it fun?*
- *How does your job affect the community?*
- *How much money is in your budget?*
- *How many people help you to make the decisions about what your money is spent on?*
- *How many Children and Young People are involved in the decision making process?*
- *How do you know that the money goes where it is really needed?*

An opportunity was also provided for those being interviewed to ask the CYP any questions they had. The full transcript of this event has been included on the DVD that accompanies this report.

We worked in close partnership with the Community University Partnership Programme, which provides support for community based research projects and is based at the University of Brighton. Linsay Hill provided her considerable expertise in the mentoring of this research project as funded by CWDC.

## **5. Literature Review:**

### **What is participatory budgeting?**

Lavan (2007), Blanchford, Boagey, and Jessiman (2006) identify that there are many definitions of participatory budgeting (PB) and that these can be taken to be reflective of the standpoint of various stakeholders who are involved in PB processes. There is a consistency in the literature that identifies the underpinning principles of PB as being: participatory, educational, transformational, empowering, democratic, developmental, creative, efficient, relationship building and able to offer benefits to those who are currently excluded from getting their voices heard. This has led Lavan (2007) to define PB as “an *inclusive and participatory process by which communities can influence how local budgets are*

spent” pp.21. The processes in PB comprise a number of stages including the identification of a budget, discussion and agreement about local priorities by residents, election of representatives to a decision making body and the development, implementation and evaluation of community projects.

### **Participatory budgeting in the UK:**

Participatory budgeting has its roots in Brazil where it was developed in the late 1980's with the aim of involving residents of Porto Alegre in an annual process of deciding how to allocate part of the city's budget. Since then it has spread to other Latin American cities and more recently to cities in Europe. In the UK the Community Pride initiative began work in 1999 to explore how PB could be developed. Subsequently at a national level PB was supported from 2004 onwards by a grant to the PB unit from a government department, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now DCLG). Lavan (2007) suggests that PB was closely aligned with New Labour's urban reformist vision of neighbourhood renewal policies, devolved budgets and the notion of engaged citizenry as set out in the Governments' White Paper "*Strong and Prosperous Communities*". PB is proposed as a means of supporting greater involvement in decision making. Much of the policy has centred on adult involvement. However the participatory rights of children are emphasised in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted by the UK in 1999. Sinclair (2004) argues that policy and law in the UK has not consistently addressed children's involvement. More recently Sinclair identifies that National Children's strategies have given impetus to the participation of children in constituent parts of the UK. Children's participation has been linked with major policy initiatives to tackle social exclusion.

### **Children and Participatory Budgeting:**

Although inspired by International practices PB in the UK has been shaped by local initiatives and research has taken a case study approach with a view to exploring (a) the processes involved, (b) how these have been implemented on a local level and (c) the challenges that PB presents. The aim of the studies has been to report on and inform the development of PB. This literature review has not been able to identify UK research that explores the long term outcomes of PB. This is likely to be attributable to the newness of PB in the UK.

There are few studies in the UK relating to implementation of PB with children. Levan's study conducted on behalf of the Participatory Budgeting Unit explores the implementation of PB in four pilot areas in the North of England and Wales. Only one of these pilot areas specifically sought to engage children in PB. Findings from this review highlight specific factors as being essential to the successful implementation of PB, these include processes related to: engagement, planning, learning, communication, support and resourcing. Literature highlights that it is important for all aspects of the process to be transparent and that it is particularly important for those engaged to know how much money is available to be spent. In the one study that specifically explored the processes involved in engaging young people in PB findings suggest that strategies that are used to engage adults are not necessarily the best for engaging children. For example the process of trying to engage children and young people through public meetings was not successful. Rather training and

engaging youth workers to work alongside young people to determine how best to reach other young people, had a particular advantage especially when trying to involve young people with disabilities and young people from black and minority ethnic communities. This along with other findings suggests that when seeking to involve children in PB extra funds need to be made available to engage adults in supportive/ mentoring roles. Such support was also identified as being key to enabling the decision making processes of PB to be made transparent. As previously suggested transparency is a key element in determining how people define the success of PB. Understanding how decisions are made is identified as being a key element of enabling children to experience the process of PB as being empowering.

Other research in relation to children's involvement in financial decision making has been reported upon by Blanchford et al (2006). Blanchford's paper compares the implementation of PB in Brazil with elements of work undertaken by Youth Bank, the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund in the UK. Blanchford argues that PB processes in Brazil articulate with similar processes that take place in youth work in England but have not necessarily been brought together as a single process and identified as PB. Examples are provided of the positive use of outreach to engage those who are disadvantaged, the implementation of strategies to ensure that representatives from such groups are included as members of grant making panels. Based on case studies from Camden (NYA case study :Camden) and Bolton ( NYA case study : Bolton) the importance of training for young people is highlighted both to enable the development of criteria on which to base decisions about funding applications and the development of project plans.

Overall findings from research highlight the importance of process in PB and suggest some of the building blocks when working with children and young people as they relate to areas of: engagement, planning, decision making and evaluation. The "Children Can Do" model has sought to re-configure these findings into a coherent framework for practice in PB.

## **6. Findings / recommendations**

These findings have been linked to the various stages / processes involved in the Children Can Do Programme and are captured on the accompanying DVD.

### **a. Design of activities / funding application process**

Feedback and discussions with CYP highlighted the importance of having mechanisms in place, from the onset, that ensure that appropriate adult support and supervision is available for all CYP involved in these activities, whilst ensuring that the emphasis remains on all processes being CYP led. In addition, in order to engage the more marginalised groups of CYP during the outreach / application process, it is critical that the support of a fully resourced development worker is easily accessed. The DVD highlighted that the approach taken by the development worker should be one of facilitating these processes and not taking ownership or creating dependency. The DVD captures the importance of developing honest,

open and trusting relationships during these initial stages which become critical later on when engaging CYP in decision making processes / participatory budgeting.

Findings in this section highlight the importance of:-

- *ensuring that appropriate adult support and supervision is available for the most marginalised and vulnerable groups of CYP.*
- *ensuring that dedicated / independent, facilitation and support time (which is fully resourced) is available to support CYP / adults through these processes.*
- *investing time in building trusting, honest, open and lasting relationships with CYP as well as all other participants.*
- *ensuring that the approach to the provision of support is one of facilitating processes and not creating dependency.*
- *ensuring that processes remain CYP led, ownership being very important.*

**b. Training – (Participatory Budgeting / decision making)**

From feedback, evaluation forms and discussions with all participants the importance of providing appropriate training so that informed decision making could take place during the panel / participatory budgeting process was made very clear. This was also highlighted on the DVD. Again it was made very clear that the training needs to equip all people involved with the tools, skills and understanding of the processes so that they are able to participate in a meaningful way. This includes clarifying roles and responsibilities, who can vote and how voting will take place as well as how decisions will be made regarding the level of funding allocated to each project. All participants were in agreement that participatory budgeting is itself a learning process and there need to be ways of reflecting on activities and incorporating lessons learnt into the development of such processes. From reflective learning sessions it became evident that managing the expectations of all stakeholders is critical as well as ensuring that everyone is clear as to what is expected of them including the time and commitment they will need to make.

It was also evident, from feedback given, that any limitations that may effect the implementation of decisions made need to be clear from the start. The use of language (especially jargon) also needs to be carefully considered at all times given the diversity of participants involved in these processes. Discussions with participants, as well as evaluation of the training and participatory budgeting processes, highlighted the importance of training in getting the right balance between making sure decision making is CYP led whilst at the same time ensuring they have access to appropriate information and support so that such decisions made are informed and robust. These discussions also highlighted that if younger children are to be involved, which is very important for progression and

continuity, then any additional support needs must be identified and provided and this is also captured on the DVD.

The need to accommodate different learning styles was also made clear and ensuring that CYP were given the opportunity to 'learn by doing'. Therefore rather than trying to 'teach' all the theory of participatory budgeting at the onset, the emphasis was on offering opportunities to 'have a go' in a safe and supported environment.

In discussions with CYP it was evident that whilst initially they may not have seen participatory budgeting as something that relates directly to their everyday lives, CYP who have been through the process do become very engaged. This was also highlighted in the DVD and indeed CYP often enjoyed mentoring others through these processes. As evidenced at every stage of the Children Can Do Programme the need to build long term trusting and supportive relationships between those involved is critical and helps when guiding people through these often complex and demanding processes. Discussions with CYP highlighted the need for them to feel safe and supported if they are to fully participate in a meaningful way that is fulfilling. Also continuity is important whilst at the same time wanting to include as many people in this process as possible. Discussions with CYP raised issues around anonymity especially when making decisions about the funding of projects in their communities. This needs to be considered and respected given the nature of the decisions being made as well as having mechanisms for dealing with conflict of interest in an open and transparent manner.

Findings in this section highlight the importance of:-

- *ensuring that adequate resources are allocated for training.*
- *ensuring that provision of training appropriately meets the needs of all involved in participatory budgeting processes.*
- *ensuring that issues of representation and diversity are addressed in the composition of all panels*
- *clarifying roles, responsibilities and procedures for participating in decision making processes from the onset.*
- *managing the expectations of all participants as well as clarification of what is expected of them (commitment / time).*
- *giving careful consideration to use of language appropriate to the diversity of participants.*
- *identifying and providing appropriate support for all participants, especially younger children which includes peer to peer mentoring.*
- *accommodating different learning styles including 'learning by doing'.*
- *keeping all activities fun and enjoyable.*

**c. Decision making processes / participatory budgeting**

From discussions with all stakeholders, as well as from other feedback we have received, it is evident that the composition of the group included in the decision making processes / participatory budgeting needs careful consideration. This includes the need to make these processes inclusive, looking at issues around diversity and representation. In addition whilst ensuring the processes remain CYP led the involvement of adults is seen to be important in order to ensure that appropriate technical support is available to allow informed decision making to take place. Evaluation and reflection of these processes has highlighted that this also ensures that a broader based discussion takes place and that decisions made are more robust. Discussions with participants have highlighted issues around voting and the fact that not everyone will be in agreement with the final decisions made. Mechanisms for addressing such conflict need to be addressed and carefully managed. Feedback from CYP taking part for the first time in participatory budgeting / decision making processes highlighted that it can be quite confusing at first. As such the support offered to CYP needs to be appropriate making sure that the training initially offered adequately prepares everyone involved.

Evaluation, feedback and discussions with CYP highlighted the need to make the processes fun and enjoyable and this has been captured in the DVD. To achieve this it was noted how important it is to involve CYP in planning activities from the start.

All participants said how important it was to evaluate activities and through reflective learning incorporate their ideas into planning future activities. Feedback / discussions received from all participants highlighted the importance of clarifying the time and commitment that everyone will need to make to this process from the start. Also making sure that adequate resources are allocated to these processes was seen to be important. A committed group of individuals can in itself be a very powerful driving force when taking this agenda forward in a meaningful way. However all participants agreed that this investment is more than justified in terms of the enhanced benefits, as highlighted on the DVD, as well as through the outcomes and outputs of projects funded through the Children Can Do Programme itself.

All discussions, feedback and evaluation made it quite clear that CYP become more engaged if there is a link between making decisions and something happening on the ground as this really motivates those involved. Participatory budgeting allows this to happen and this has been an important catalyst in establishing a long term commitment from those involved. This has been evidenced by the high level of participation and engagement in the Children Can Do programme and is captured on the DVD. It is clear from our experiences that the geographical areas covered have an impact on the engagement and commitment of CYP as well as having implications on the quality of decisions made. Discussions with the

CYPT and other locally based organisations also highlighted the need to consider ways in which to minimise creation of parallel structures so addressing issues of sustainability.

Findings in this section highlight the importance of:-

- *ensuring that appropriate, fully resourced support is provided to facilitate these decision making processes.*
- *identifying and providing appropriate support especially for younger children.*
- *ensuring participants reflect the diversity of the communities they are representing.*
- *having a clear link between decision making and things happening on the ground.*
- *making sure that all participants have access to appropriate 'technical' support and information that they may need so that informed and robust decisions can be made.*
- *activities being fun and enjoyable.*
- *involving CYP at all stages of planning activities.*
- *maximizing the links with existing structures.*

**d. General / post award support / capacity building**

From our experiences and the feedback we have had from participants the need for adequate time and resources to be put aside to plan, communicate and engage people in all these processes was highlighted. This includes the time of a dedicated and resourced development worker to ensure that appropriate adult support and supervision is available, responsive training for both CYP and adult supporters is provided, issues of child protection are fully addressed, briefing of parents and carers in obtaining appropriate consent happens, safe transport is available, and ensuring that CYP are adequately supported in a way that is compatible to their abilities and in line with the ethos of the Children Can Do programme. Discussions with groups who have been funded indicate that time and resources need to be allocated to post award support / capacity building of such groups. This has been further evidenced through monitoring and evaluation visits and through their final report forms. It is also essential to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place that guarantees the safety of all children who participate in funded activities. The provision of organisational support, with a focus on the sustainability of all activities being funded, was also seen to be important. Discussions with groups and evaluation / feedback from networking events have highlighted how important these post award activities are seen to be. The focus of the networking event is on the promotion of mutual aid support as well as linking groups in to the infrastructural support that is available locally. Once again the approach of the development worker needs to be one of

facilitating processes so as not to take ownership away from the CYP / funded groups, ensuring that children are leading these processes albeit with appropriate support and supervision as required.

Findings in this section highlight the importance of:-

- *ensuring that dedicated, independent, facilitation and support time (which is fully resourced) is available during this transition period to participatory budgeting.*
- *investing time in building trusting, honest, open and lasting relationships with CYP.*
- *ensuring that issues of representation and diversity are addressed in all processes.*
- *ensuring that participants have access to the appropriate 'technical' support and information that they need after receiving funding.*
- *ensuring robust policies and procedures are in place that allows CYP to feel safe and supported at all times.*
- *ensuring that the approach to the provision of support is asset based, so not creating dependency on external interventions.*
- *using existing structures so minimising the need for setting up parallel structures.*
- *considering ways of scaling up Participatory Budgeting, so involving CYP in making decisions about how larger sums of public funds are to be allocated across the city.*
- *drawing up strategies to promote Participatory Budgeting amongst a wider audience both across the city as well as regionally / nationally.*
- *sharing the lessons learnt as widely as possible to influence other decision making processes.*
- *ensuring that CYP's views are heard and acted upon when developing such processes in the future.*

## 5. Abstract

### Children and Young People's engagement in Participatory Budgeting

---

Mike Holdgate, Sue Barnes, Nora Mzaoui

#### Abstract

Whilst government institutions are promoting the engagement and participation of CYP in mainstream decision making processes the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of what is actually happening on the ground is very evident especially concerning the engagement of CYP in participatory budgeting processes. This study was carried out to examine the principles for engaging CYP in such processes, learning from the experiences of the Children Can Do model which has been implemented over the past 5 years in Brighton and Hove. We have produced a DVD which captures the highlights of these experiences with recommendations being put forward in this report. The study demonstrates the importance of providing independent, fully resourced, facilitation of these processes as well as the difficulties of engaging appropriate adult support and supervision, especially within marginalised communities. The challenges that lie ahead are how to ensure that CYP can influence mainstream budgets in a meaningful way that allows those usually excluded from such processes to get their voices heard.

**Key Words:** Children and Young People; engagement; decision making processes; participatory budgeting; support.

---

## 6. Three Key learning Points

- ✓ **Facilitation:** The importance of investing adequate time and resources into facilitating processes in an appropriate way that does not create dependency. This includes the initial outreach visits to support children in developing their ideas. It is during these early interventions that engaging appropriate adult support and supervision is essential especially if participation of CYP from more marginalised communities is to be achieved.
- ✓ **Training:** The importance of providing appropriate training that equips all participants with the skills, knowledge, experience and confidence that allows them to engage in participatory budgeting processes in a meaningful way. The training needs to offer opportunities to gain hands on experience ('learning by doing') in a safe and supported environment which includes peer to peer co-facilitation. The training also needs to be fun and enjoyable.
- ✓ **Decision making Processes:** It is important to get the right mix of participants involved in making decisions about which projects are to be funded and to what level. This needs to be led by CYP whilst allowing adults to provide the technical input and support needed to ensure that there is an informed debate and that decisions made are arrived at in a transparent manner.

**Children's Perspective**

*These learning points were identified and prioritised using our participatory bull's eye – target practice methodology by CYP involved in the Children Can Do Programme.*

- ✓ Making all activities fun and enjoyable
- ✓ Providing training that makes us feel confident about what we are doing
- ✓ Getting adults involved in projects without them taking over.
- ✓ Helping other children when they join the panel for the first time.
- ✓ No Jargon – making things easy to understand

**Bibliography:**

Badham,B. and Wade,H. (2005)*Hear by right – standards for active involvement of Children and Young People – National Youth Agency.*

Blanchford, N. Boagey,J. and Jessiman,T.(2006) *Young people's involvement in Participatory Budgeting – The National Youth Agency – information and research*

Citizenship knows no age: children's participation in the governance and municipal budget of Barra Manso, Brazil. *Environment and Urbanisation Vol. 14 October 2002.*

Children and Youth Participation in the Process of Participatory Budgeting in Berlin Marzahn-Hellersdorf - Marzahn-Hellersdorf in Facts & Figures - Extract from the Homepage of Marzahn-Hellersdorf at Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> 2006.

CEDECA (2005) *Children and Young People in Action – Participating in budget work – The Ceara Centre for protection of children and adolescents – CEDECA – Save the Children Sweden, Regional Office for Southern Africa, P.O.Box 13993, Hatfield 0028 Sweden.*

Department of Communities and Local Government (2006), *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, Local Government White Paper, Cm 6939-1

Gunn,R. *Young people's participation in social services policy making, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University College Northampton.*

Howe,V.(2007) *Participatory Budgeting in Newcastle Neighbourhood Committee 29 Social Policy Team*

Lavan, Kezia.(2007) *Participatory Budgeting in the UK: An evaluation from a practitioner perspective* – Participatory Budgeting Unit..

Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre: *Toward a Redistributive Democracy*. BOAVENTURA DE SOUSA SANTOS. *Politics & Society* 26.4 (Dec 1998): p461 (1).

Sinclair,R. (2004) *Participation in Practice: Making it Meaningful, Effective and Sustainable*. Children and Society Vol 18.pp106-118.

Souza, C. (2001)*Participatory budgeting in Brazilian cities: limits and possibilities in building democratic institutions - Environment and Urbanization* ; 13; 159

Sutton,L. Smith,N. Dearden,C. and Middleton,S. (2007) *A Child's Eye View of Social Difference*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

### **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to:-

- All the CYP and adults participating in this research programme with special thanks to; Downland Court Tenants and Residents Association, Pink Ladies, 15<sup>th</sup> Brighton Scouts and all the Children Can Do panel members.
- Brighton and Hove Children and Young People's Trust, especially Ellen Jones, Elli James and Nigel Jenner.
- Brighton and Hove City Council (Councillors and Staff) especially Ted Kemble and Ann Norman.
- Brighton and Hove Community and Voluntary Sector Forum
- Sussex Clubs for Young People
- Safety Net
- University of Brighton – Especially Lindsay Hill for all her mentoring support.
- Martin Smith – Silverbox Films
- The Participatory Budgeting Unit – Jez Hall
- Save the Children – Imogen Gregg
- Novas Scarman Group staff team
- All the CYP, parents, carers and support workers who have been involved in the Children Can Do programme and gave their time to give us such valuable feedback.