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Centre for Institutional Studies

# Research Report

## **HARINGEY'S CHILDREN'S FUND: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRESS OF THE HARINGEY PARTICIPATION PROJECT**

**Alice Sampson and Julia Selman-Ayetey**

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PROGRESS OF THE HARINGEY PARTICIPATION PROJECT**

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Julia Selman-Ayetey  
Alice Sampson

January 2007

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Setting the scene

Researchers from the urban regeneration evaluation team at the Centre for Institutional Studies, University of East London conducted an assessment of the progress of the Haringey Children's Fund (HCF) participation project between January and September 2006.

HCF aspires to achieve inclusionary participation, whereby changes in systems are expected in order to accommodate the participation of young people in accordance with article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The participation workers aim to support and train young people to participate in policy and practice decision-making, and to develop and co-ordinate structures and strategies to make the participation of young people possible.

The data collected for this research including a wide range of secondary data, interviews with local authority staff with responsibilities for participation (6), and a questionnaire completed by organisations that had received training and attended participation events (6). The work of the Participation Crew, the young people trained to inform decision-makers, was reviewed in an earlier study (Ahmad *et al* 2006) and is not included in this research.

The purpose of the research was to assess the progress of the project to enable the programme management to make decisions about its future. The research identifies process outcomes, and does not explore the impact of the project to find out if participation by young people has made services more accountable and therefore more appropriate for their needs.

### Activities and research findings

The main activities undertaken by the participation workers and their effects are summarised as:

*Raising awareness* by organising conferences for young people, key policy makers and practitioners, and by circulating reports and DVDs on the views and concerns of young people, that emerged during each event. The conferences were well attended with 150 young people attending a Safer Solutions conference.

The research found a high level of awareness about participation but it was less clear that increased awareness necessarily led to new practices and practitioners gave different meanings to participation with some understanding participation as consultation with young people.

*Giving advice* to HCF project managers and to other interested organisations about how to develop participation strategies and how to include children and young people in influencing practices.

It is not possible to generalise from the research findings due to the small sample size and reluctance of some respondents to reveal why they have not made changes to

their practices after receiving advice on participation. However, some practitioners had acted upon the advice and were involving young people in planning the development of their services.

*Introducing and improving practices* by working with various youth groups including the Markfield project's Mpower Group, Wood Green Participation Panel and the Noel Park Young People's Form to develop participation panels, by running participation training workshops for adults and children.

The feedback on the training events from those participating in the research was positive. As a result of the training, participants felt better informed about what participation means and how it can be used. Changes were made to include young people in decision-making and a number of respondents felt that involving young people had made a positive difference to their policies and practices.

During the research period a decision was made to use the Ready Steady Change participation toolkit as a resource and this was being customised for Haringey by using local information. A participation task group was formed to put the toolkit into practice.

Also at the time of the research the HCF participation workers and the Participation Crew were involved in setting up a borough-wide Youth Council and in the training of young people to become members.

*Policy development* through the introduction of a common participation strategy: for all local authority departments, health organisations, and voluntary and community organisations. By mid 2006 a strategic proposal had been drafted by the participation officers and was accepted by the Haringey's Strategic Partnership Board but at the time of the research had not been put into practice although the proposal informed the development of the Children and Young People's Plan 2006-09.

A number of challenges for strategic development were identified in the research. These included a reluctance to engage with young people in drawing up strategies and therefore to relinquish autonomous decision-making, questioning of the value of including young people in strategic developments, and practical problems about organising meetings outside school hours.

Developing a participation strategy across a range of agencies was thought to be ambitious and presented many difficulties. Lack of time and resources, and different organisational cultures were all identified as barriers to achieving a common approach.

The research found different opinions about the practice of participation, ranging from those who thought that young people were '*manipulated*' to those who thought that they were '*genuinely engaged*' and those who thought that '*tick-box*' participation was practiced. However, observing the Participation Crew 'at work', appears to be an effective way of convincing reluctant and sceptical practitioners that young people can make a positive contribution.

## **Sustaining policy and practice developments**

Since 2003 the participation project has made significant progress but at the time of the research it appears that the project is a victim of its own success.

The demand for the services of the officers has grown and at the same time their remit has expanded to include work beyond HCF projects. Yet it remains necessary to continue to persuade policy makers and practitioners of the value of participation, and

to incorporate the participation by young people into their policy making and into their everyday practices in order to achieve a more accountable service able to meet the needs of service users.

### **Recommendations**

These can be found at the end of the report in Chapter 3.

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## 1. SETTING THE SCENE

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### 1.1 Introduction

The urban regeneration evaluation team at the Centre for Institutional Studies, University of East London was commissioned by the Haringey Children's Fund to conduct an assessment of the Haringey participation project. The research took place between January and September 2006.

The intention of the research was to evaluate the impact of the participation project in raising the awareness of the importance of children and young people participating in local policy-making and enhancing the delivery of services. The research also sought to assess the progress of the participation project and ascertain its track-record in influencing policies and practices.

### 1.2 Background to Participation

A central feature of the Children's Fund programme is the involvement of children and their families in planning, delivery and evaluation of the services and activities funded by the programme. Other government initiatives also include the principle that children and young people should be involved when key decisions are made that affect their lives – Every Child Matters and the Connexions Strategy, for example. This approach accords with article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that children have a right to express their views on anything that affects them and for their views to be listened to.

Participation includes involving children and young people in the governance of schools, their community, and local government and giving young people the confidence to complain about services or make recommendations about how they may be improved. Involving service users in these processes has the intention of making services more accountable to young people and therefore more appropriate for their needs.

The national evaluators of the Children's Fund programme found that whilst participation by young people has increased it remains quite limited (Edwards et. al. 2006). A number of barriers to participation have been identified by other researchers of Children's Fund programmes; for example institutional ethos, resistance to change, time and resources, adult skills deficits and children's evolving capacities.<sup>1</sup> Evidence from participatory projects across the world suggests that participation by children and young people that makes a difference when it is understood that it is an outcome that young people 'achieve for themselves within the context of adult support and partnership' (Tisdall and Davis 2004). Providing young people with the opportunities and skills to contribute is how effective practice can be achieved.

Understanding what participation actually means and the practice of how young people and children who use services can be incorporated into shaping policies and services, has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Sometimes children's participation in decision-making processes is one of integration, whereby they are

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<sup>1</sup> Children's Participation: An Evaluation of Somerset Children's Fund. Dialog, March 2005, p. 20

invited to 'participate in adult structures and processes'.<sup>2</sup> While this is a welcomed first step, it has been argued that it is insufficient to simply provide opportunities for children to have their say or participate in adult structures and processes. They should be provided with an opportunity to challenge and change these structures and processes by negotiating their own forms of participation...<sup>3</sup>

But it has been noted that genuine participation involves,

*inclusion* – wherein the system changes to accommodate the participation and values of children, rather than *integration* –wherein children participate in predefined ways in predefined structures.<sup>4</sup>

Inclusionary participation is the type of participation that the Haringey Children's Fund aspires to achieve. It also hopes that it can influence the borough to adopt this approach in a more systematic way. This is most likely to be achieved when adults in key positions accept that the voice of children and young people is not only beneficial but that it is their right.<sup>5</sup>

### **1.3 The Haringey Children's Fund Participation Project**

The Haringey Participation Project (HPP) was launched in 2003 and is situated in the Voice theme of the Children's Fund programme. The aim of this theme is to engage children, young people and their families in the development and the delivery of the Children's Fund programme and to ensure that best practices become embedded in services.

The purpose of the project was to provide a vehicle through which children and young people could have their views about the Haringey Children's Fund acknowledged and any concerns that they may have about the programme responded to. It was intended to set up an advisory committee staffed by children and young people, so that they could be involved "at the strategic level of planning, designing and evaluating services for the Children's Fund".<sup>6</sup> To date an advisory committee has not been established. However, a Haringey Youth Council is being set up and this will involve young people acting in an advisory capacity to practitioners. A group of six young people were trained in public speaking, in conducting research and finding out about projects and how they worked. The Participation Crew have been actively involved in the programme.

In 2005, the purpose of the participation project was expanded to include young people being involved not only in the management of the HCF but also in the decision-making of local services as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Due to this expansion the project was

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<sup>2</sup> Percy-Smith, Barry, et. al., 2001, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 18-19.

<sup>5</sup> See the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Every Child Matters and The Children Act 2004.

<sup>6</sup> HCF, Project Information Form, 2003-2004.

<sup>7</sup> HCF, Project Information Form, 2005-2006.

serviced by two workers, one full-time and one part-time. The intention was to ensure that the child-centred approach of the Children's Fund was mainstreamed into all services that affect children with the local authority and in partner agencies and organisations. The intention was to raise the awareness of the importance, and benefits, of increased participation by enabling young people to contribute to writing a strategy for the borough and developing a toolkit on how to facilitate participation.

### *1.3.1 The Participation Workers*

In essence, the role of the two participation workers is to facilitate opportunities for young people to participate in the Haringey Children's Fund as well as the borough. Their responsibilities include supporting young people in their participation and to assist with the implementation of young people's views in the running of the HCF, schools, community organizations and local authority departments.

The participation workers are employed within the Children and Young People's Services department and report to the Participation and Inclusion Manager as well as the Haringey Children's Fund Manager. The main duties of the participation workers are to:

- 'lead, develop and co-ordinate the structures and strategies that ensure that children and young people can express their views through a comprehensive programme of consultation'
- training in issues related to participation by children and young people
- liaise with partner organisations and services to ensure that children and young people's views are taken note of and acted on as an integral part of the HCF functioning and decision making process.

### *1.3.2 The Participation Crew*

The Participation Crew (PC), also described as a young people's panel, is a group of six young people between the ages of 8–13 who receive training from the Haringey Participation Officers on how to involve young people in participating in their community.

Over the last 3 years, the group has developed a strong bond with each other, have improved their interpersonal skills and learned to work as a team. With the assistance of the participation officers, the Participation Crew have worked with other children and young people in the borough and fed back their views to those in key decision-making positions. They have also trained and informed children and young people in the borough about support, services and activities available (Ahmad, Rice and Sampson 2006).

The Participation Crew has completed training on the UN Convention 'Rights of the Child' in addition to various workshops on young people's participation. The PC have also completed in-depth training on topics such as holding effective meetings, presentations, researching and interviewing skills, questionnaire writing skills and roles and responsibilities. Earlier research identified benefits for young people, including increased skills (Ahmad et. al. 2006).

The PC has collaborated with community agencies such as the Haringey Police Consultative Group, Haringey Youth Service, and Connexions. Through working with various youth groups such as Cosmic and Haringey Shed the Participation Crew

sought feedback from children and young people in the community and on occasions reported these views and opinions to the Strategic Steering Group either through presentations or reports.

The overarching objective of the Participation Crew was for them to eventually establish a children and young people's forum. It was intended that the PC would train the members of the young people's forum with their acquired interview, research, report-writing and presentation skills so that they could take over the Participation Crew's responsibilities. In this way more than 6 children and young people could have an active voice in the management of the HCF. The anticipated Children and Young People's Forum has not yet come to fruition, but as mentioned above, plans are currently in the works for setting up a Haringey Youth Council. In the interim, the PC organized an event in order to recruit an additional 6 members to the group.

#### **1.4 The research: data collection**

The information presented in this report was obtained from e-mail questionnaires, project documents, research reports, literature and an analysis of other relevant documents, as well as meetings with Children's Fund staff. Additionally, researchers met with local authority staff with responsibilities for participation (5) and with a participation officer from Camden Children's Fund.

Questionnaires were sent to nine people at various schools and organizations that had worked in some capacity with the participation project, either through receiving direct training, attending a conference or event organized by the participation project or otherwise. These forms were intended to elicit views on the experiences of other agencies in working with the participation project. Six forms were completed.



*Young people discussing issues of importance to them*

Although the research is small scale, it was designed to gain an understanding about the extent to which the Children's Fund participation was having an influence on the participation agenda within the local authority, and with other organisations who were recipients of funds from the programme. The findings provide information relevant for decisions about the latter stages of the project and the mainstreaming of its activities. The impact of the work of the Participation Crew was not included in this study as this research had been carried out earlier by UEL researchers (Ahmad, Rice and Sampson 2006).

The research for this study identifies process outcomes, and does not explore the impact of the project on services and find out if participation by young people has made services more accountable and therefore more appropriate for their needs.

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## **2. THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PARTICIPATION PROJECT AND RESEARCH FINDINGS**

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*A training 'away day' for young people learning how to participate*

**PICTURE HERE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

At the inception of the participation project in 2003, there was no local authority strategy for including children and young people in the planning, delivery and assessment of services designed to support and nurture young people to achieve their full potential. Whilst an ethos of consultation with young people existed in some local organisations, on the whole, few organisations actively engaged young people in the development of services and service delivery. Indeed the participation workers found that the participation requirement of the Children's Fund programme was a new departure for many managers and frontline staff.

Since 2003 the HPP has become a key player in raising awareness about the participation and inclusion agenda, both within the HCF and in the borough as a whole. The work of the participation workers at project level has assisted projects to adopt participation practices. The incorporation of evidence of participation in service level agreements and regular agenda items on participation at project managers meetings and the Steering Group meetings has facilitated the process of introducing new practices.

The participation workers note that more practitioners are willing to engage in participation and more organizations are contacting the HPP for training on participation methods.

This chapter highlights some of the main activities of the participation workers and charts some of the difficulties that remain.

### **2.2 Raising awareness**

The participation officers have spent much of their time informing HCF project staff about participation and more latterly, raising awareness amongst a broader range of agencies. Raising awareness activities have included setting up conferences, and disseminating information about the participation activities led by the Participation Crew and HCF projects.

#### *2.2.1 Conferences*

The participation workers attended multi-agency conferences; Early Years, Children and Young People's services and Connexions, for example, and have organized and run four major events or conferences since August 2003.

### *Kick Start Event Day*

This event was held to recruit a group of young people to form the 'Participation Crew'. The event began by informing young people about participation, the skills they would learn, and the responsibilities they would have as a member. At the end of the presentation, some young people asked questions. Interested young people filled out application forms to become members of the PC. Following the event, young people were selected by the Participation Officers and notified that they were chosen to become part of the Participation Crew.

### *Noel Park's Have Your Say*

This event was held on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2004 between 1:00p.m. and 5:15 p.m. Its purpose was to provide children and young people with the opportunity to express their opinions and ideas and inform them of the activities available in the area. This event had local talent acts including singers, dancers, rappers and an African drumming group. The Participation Crew took questions from the audience and there was a presentation from Noel Park Outreach project. Another presentation focused on making young people aware of participation as well as face painting, small workshops, including team building, and a raffle prize.

Following the event, the Participation Crew did an evaluation to assess its success. They interviewed 17 children who attended and wrote a short report which was distributed to the Noel Park Neighbourhood Management Team and Youth Forum. To our knowledge, there was no response to this report by the young people.

### *Safer Solutions: Young People's Conference – Youth Democracy Day*

On 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2006, the Safer Solutions conference was held at the TUC centre in Hornsey. This event was jointly organized by the Haringey Children's Service and the Haringey Community Police Consultative Group. A UEL researcher attended this event. The conference was aimed at eliciting young people's views on 10 issues of safety, namely: bullying, anti-social behaviour, police relations, being a victim of crime, drugs and alcohol, violence at home and homophobic, disability, racial and religious harassment.

Approximately 150 young people attended this event. Toward the end of the conference, young people voted electronically, for what they felt were the best solutions to the above 10 issues. The results were written up into a report and the Haringey Children's Service fed the young peoples' views back to schools, the Youth Service, various youth organizations and key stakeholders such as parents and teachers. The Haringey Children's Service also used the results in the drafting of Haringey's Children and Young People Plan 06 – 09.

### *Kick Start II "The Next Generation"*

During half-term, the second Kick Start event was held on Wednesday April 12<sup>th</sup> 2006 at White Hart Lane. This event was held to recruit new members for the Participation Crew. A UEL researcher attended this event.

The Tottenham Hotspur Football Club grounds was an exciting venue and contributed to a very good turnout. However, some young people were disappointed as they thought that they would get to play football or meet some of the footballers. The event took place between 1:00 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. and involved a theatrical performance from the Participation Crew. Lunch was provided and then the young people took place in dance workshops. Following performances from those who took part in the workshop, the Participation Workers spoke to the young people about participation and explained what being a member of the Participation Crew would involve. Due to the popularity of the electronic voting at the last event, it was used again to enable the young people to provide their thoughts on the day's events and the information they received on the participation project and the Participation Crew. Finally, at the end of the event young people were given goodie bags with an application form. The results from the voting were analyzed and produced in a short power point presentation. A participation DVD has been produced and it is planned that it will be distributed to all the schools and HCF projects that attended.

### *2.2.2 Reports & Feedback*

As part of the awareness raising activities, reports on participation were disseminated to the Children's Fund steering group members and project managers funded by the Children's Fund. These representatives were asked to disseminate the findings amongst their respective organizations. Joint-agency reports were also sent to schools across the borough and handed out to youth projects. The circulated reports typically collated young peoples' opinions and experiences of participating on projects and receiving services, and documented any concerns raised by young people.

Whilst the participation officers distributed information from young people, an analysis of documents and minutes of meetings suggests that actions taken by senior managers and steering groups, were not consistently fed back to the children and young people. This included information about why some concerns of young people were not acted upon.

### *2.2.3 The effect of raising awareness*

From the research interviews and an analysis of documents it is apparent that there is a high level of awareness about participation.

### *2.2.4 The challenges for awareness raising*

- Whilst conferences and the dissemination of participation practice has successfully raised the profile of participation, it is less clear that the increased awareness has necessarily led to new practices. Most of those responding to the research questionnaire had attended a conference but had not initiated any changes in policies or practices within their organisation, even though they had responsibilities for making changes and felt more could be done to improve participation.
- It is apparent that participation has been given different meanings, with some working within a consultation framework and others working towards genuine participation. If inclusionary participation is to be achieved, further raising awareness may be necessary. Linking raising awareness to a programme of activities, workshops and role play, to experience inclusionary participation in practice provides an opportunity to bring about tangible changes. The

Markfield Mpower week run in association with the participation project staff is a good example of this approach.

## **2.3 Giving advice**

The participation officers give advice to HCF project managers and to other interested organisations about how to develop participation strategies and how to include children and young people in influencing practices.

Interviewees who participated in the research found the advice useful. It is not possible, however, to reliably generalise from the small research sample but some respondents said that they had acted on the advice and involved young people in the planning development of their services, whilst others had not made any changes. Understandably respondents to the questionnaire were reluctant to give information on why changes had not been made in response to the advice given.

## **2.4 Introducing and improving practices**

The participation officers have also assisted in the development of participation panels for various youth groups including, the Markfield Project's Mpower Group, Wood Green Participation Panel and the Noel Park Young People's Forum. A training package has now been developed to assist practitioners in participation.

### *2.4.1 Training*

The Participation Workers have conducted participation training workshops, for adults as well as for children and young people for various agencies and organisations.

Training offered by the Participation Workers and the Participation Crew has consisted of workshops on Participation and The UN Conventions 'Rights of the Child' workshop as well as focusing on Communication & Evaluation skills. In addition to the training workshops that have been delivered at events and conferences, training has also been delivered to:

- *Staff & service users of; the Markfield Project (a DVD has been produced to assist training), Wood Green Area Youth Project, Muswell Hill Youth Centre, Noel Park Outreach, LAC (Looked after Children) and Haringey Children's Fund Project Managers.*
- *The Children & Young People's Unit staff recruitment panel (a DVD is in production).*
- *Consultation on the Every Child Matters 5 outcomes were undertaken at Noel Park Primary School, Mulberry Primary School and Northumberland Park Secondary School as well as a workshop at The Grove.*

The feedback about the training from those participating in the research was positive. Most of the respondents said that their involvement with the training and the Participation Crew was beneficial. This training has been described as "*extremely useful*" and "*extremely valuable in improving skills and practice...*" by participants. One individual stated that the training by the PW has, "*made my staff understand*

*about participation and what it means and how they can use it in their work*". Some respondents identified positive changes in their organisation as a result of what they learned, for example, involving children in decision making, better staff understanding of participation and the involvement of children in developing strategy. One organisation said that they had just begun to incorporate participation workshops as a result of the training. Furthermore, most respondents said that the involvement of young people had made a positive difference to their policies and practices.

#### *2.4.2 Participation toolkit*

The participation officers had planned to design and disseminate a participation toolkit that could be used by various agencies to assess their level of participation. It was also going to include activities and exercises that could be used by organizations to help increase participation. However, to date, the toolkit has not been developed and at the current time this proposal has been put on the backburner as, in the interim, Connexions has produced a toolkit which is being used by various practitioners. Furthermore, the Hear by Right toolkit has become quite popular with organizations throughout the country.

In 2005 the Participation Workers drafted a proposal outlining ways in which Haringey Council and the HCF could increase participation within the programme and in the borough. This led to the formation of a participation task group to develop a borough wide strategy; and to the development of a participation tool kit – one for adults and one for children and young people - as well as plans to provide participation training to practitioners in the borough. However, in the interim, the Children's Rights Alliance of England, funded by the DfES, developed the Ready Steady Change<sup>8</sup> toolkit to improve and increase participation by children and young people in the decision-making process of public services. The Ready Steady Change toolkit has been customised to make it appropriate to Haringey by using local information and it is used as a resource to increase participation.

Furthermore, Haringey is aspiring to implement the Hear by Right<sup>9</sup> (HbR) standards of the National Youth Association which has become very popular and has been implemented by many statutory and voluntary agencies. The HbR helps organizations assess what level of participation they are working at and what steps they need to take to reach the standard level. It also assists organizations identify where they are advanced in a particular aspect of participation.

The PSHE Officer would like to formulate a borough-wide Youth Charter, which various agencies and organizations could sign up to illustrating their commitment to young people in the borough. This may be something that the participation officers and the Participation Crew could assist with, given their experience.

#### *2.4.3 Youth Council*

At present, steps have been taken to form a borough-wide Youth Council. The participation officers and the Participation Crew have been involved in the planning

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<sup>8</sup> For further information on 'Ready, Steady, Change' please see [<http://www.crae.org.uk>]

<sup>9</sup> For more information on 'Hear by Right' please see [<http://www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright>]

process to determine the future role of the Youth Council. This will be a group of young people, elected as representatives of youth centres and organizations in the borough. It will also include representatives from agencies that work with young people, such as the leaving care team, young carers and asylum seekers. The Youth Council will meet six times a year in addition to taking part in activities. It is hoped that when up and running the members of the Haringey Youth Council (HYC) will have important responsibilities, including developing their role as young participation trainers and advocates. Members of the Participation Crew will also become members of the HYC. The participation officers could provide valuable insight as to how such a Council could maximize the degree of planning, decision-making and action taken by the children and young people that make up its membership. It should be noted that youth councils are already up and running in some London boroughs.<sup>10</sup> The Participation Officers could also help the HYC link with youth councils in other boroughs to identify good practices with the aim of mainstreaming suitable practices in Haringey.

#### **2.4.4 Challenges for practice development**

- The training has been well-received and changes in participation practices have occurred where representatives from projects have attended. Where changes in practice have not occurred further training may be necessary and visits by the participation workers to projects may be beneficial. Using the participation toolkit may also assist with embedding participation in the borough.
- Ensuring that an unnecessary duplication of work does not occur within an agency or across agencies; the processes involved in the introduction of a participation toolkit, the implementation of a participation charter, and the setting up of a Youth Council could all be assessed to ensure that there is a coherent approach within the local authority.
- Using existing expertise to develop new practices and improving current ones. A working group which includes the participation workers and those with expertise in a wide range of agencies operating in Haringey may be a useful way forward.

## **2.5 Policy development**

It is recognised by staff at the Children's Fund that if the child-centred spirit of the programme is to have an ongoing impact on the shaping of services and practices, it is optimal to facilitate the implementation of a participation strategy and to ensure that the strategy is adhered to by ensuring that an action plan is in place.

It is also recognised that an ideal participation strategy is one which all local authority departments, statutory health organisations, and voluntary and community organisations are signed up to. This would enable a common standard to be established, scarce resources, including expertise, to be shared, and a rigorous evaluation of the value of the strategy could be put in place. Whilst this may be the ultimate goal of the Children's Fund team, many challenges exist in achieving this aim.

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<sup>10</sup> For an example of a successful youth council see Lambeth Youth Council. [<http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/CouncilDemocracy/YouthCouncil/>] (Last access 11 Aug 2006).

By mid 2006 a strategic proposal, drafted by the participation officers, was accepted by the Haringey's Strategic Partnership Board and has been used to formulate a participation strategy within the local authority. The strategy has, to date, not been adopted.

### 2.5.1 Challenges for policy development

The main challenges for the strategic development include:

- Engaging with children and young people to develop a strategic proposal to comply with Haringey's model of inclusive participation. The proposal was drafted by the participation workers, rather than young people themselves. The Participation Crew did have some input into the 'thinking' that has informed the proposal but the proposed strategy has not been assessed by young people. It is anticipated that a draft of the strategic proposal is given to the Youth Council for comments. All these activities are time consuming and resource intensive and achieving this level of activity has proved difficult to achieve in practice. Practical problems were identified as a barrier to practice development. For example HCF steering group and project managers meetings are held during school hours, a practice which is common in many organisations. The resource implications for such an exercise may be usefully revisited.
- Trying to 'mainstream' an activity which has no easy 'hook' on which it can be hung. To be successful, a strategy requires local authority officers relinquishing some of their autonomous decision-making powers, and investing time in developing a policy-making structure and procedures to sustain the involvement of children and young people in decision making. A reluctance to make the 'root and branch' changes was apparent from some of the interviews. Lack of necessary resources was also cited as inhibiting changes about how policy is made.
- Within the local authority there are several officers with responsibilities for participation. Research findings reveal that co-ordinated working between departments could be improved; remits do not easily mesh together, and some departments prefer to '*do their own thing*'. Part of the difficulty is that there are different understandings of participation, making the development of an overall strategy more difficult to achieve: whilst the HCF is working towards an inclusive model of participation others discussed participation in terms of consultation with young people and children. Part of the problem was a feeling that the participation approach was a 'top down' initiative; central government '*telling us what to do*' and it was done '*not because we want to but because we have to*'. These attitudes suggest that further awareness-raising about the value of engaging with young people is necessary to obtain broader support within the local authority.
- Co-ordinating the development of a participation strategy across a range of agencies is difficult to achieve. Whilst the HCF has been successful in accomplishing this in other areas of work, the Play Strategy for example, a participation strategy has many challenges. Encouraging agencies to engage with participation has not always been easy; some organisations such as schools were difficult to engage with. Various barriers to a collective approach were identified during the research interviews including lack of time, lack of

resources, a lack of business-like culture, and difficulties with power-sharing, all of which contributed to a reluctance to become involved. Furthermore if agencies did become involved, different approaches to participation practices were identified including practices where it was felt that young people were *'manipulated'* rather than being *'given a voice'* and *'genuinely engaged'*. This practice was referred to as *'tick-box'* participation.

## **2.6 Sustaining policy and practice developments**

Since 2003 the participation project has made significant progress and has come a long way in raising the awareness of the importance, benefit and right of children and young people to be consulted upon issues that affect their lives. Many organisations who have engaged with the project have made improvements in their approach to participation.

The officers have organized and delivered successful events raising the profile of participation, successfully trained the Participation Crew to enable them to carry out interviews, analyze data and present findings on issues of relevance to children and young people in the borough as well as to key stakeholders, given advice and training and contributed to strategic developments.

Of the six people interviewed with responsibilities for participation five believed their organizations could further improve on the level of participation of children and young people in key decisions. Some examples they gave were; increasing participation of young people with learning disabilities, continued training and development for staff, consistent methods of reporting back to children and young people.

Through its awareness raising work and through the activities of the Participation Crew, who attend conferences, projects to discuss their work, the opinions of the participation workers are respected and this enables them to influence the strategic approach to the development of participation within the borough.

At the time of the research it appears that the project may be a victim of its own success; the demand for the services of the officers has grown and at the same time their remit has expanded to include work beyond HCF projects. There remains much unfinished business. The research participants identified a need for:

- further raising awareness to promote inclusive participation and the role of the Participation Crew
- more clarity on the content of their conferences/events, and the involvement of more Children's Fund young people at events
- further advice-giving and training to meet the needs of projects
- the process of strategy development to include children and young people in the decision making
- the development of participation training for senior managers and other staff who do not directly work with children and young people.

The research findings generate a series of questions: Does the project continue with its broad remit or focus on fewer tasks and perform these tasks more in-depth? How many tasks do the participation workers undertake themselves and how many do they encourage others to take on and develop their tasks?

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter summarises the recommendations which are discussed in the above chapters on the research findings.

#### **3.1 Overall recommendation**

The main finding is that the HCF participation project has spread itself 'too thin'; it has become a victim of its own success. Whilst, on the one hand, much of the participation work has been well-received and participation has developed within the Children's Fund, more broadly, further work on the core tasks of awareness-raising, advice-giving and training are all still necessary if participation by young people is going to be truly embedded in policy making and practice development.

The HCF could decide to:

- *Either* mainstream by the participation workers facilitating and/or training others with the local authority to deliver a service
- *Or* focus on embedding the ethos and practice of inclusionary participation more extensively and more 'in depth' in existing projects so that these practices continue beyond the life span of the HCF programme and are upheld as examples of good practice.

It is useful to compare the practices of other CF programmes and to draw on their experiences. Camden CF has developed a centralised policy regarding consultation practices. Any consultation exercise carried out by Camden Children's Fund projects must be reported to the participation and consultation Group, which shares experience and good practice amongst its members. The purpose of instituting this practice was to have a central body that knows what consultation exercises are occurring within the borough as well as to ensure that there is no 'overkill' or duplication of service. This approach is also useful in identifying areas which have not been addressed. The CCF participation officer has worked very well with a small number of projects so that the work that has been done has gone further and deeper in embedding participation.

#### **3.2 Practice recommendations**

Other recommendations that arise from the research findings are summarised as follows:

Action points and concerns contained in reports on consultation and participation exercises collated by young people and disseminated by the participation workers could be systematically responded to by senior managers. (2.2.2)

The participation workers work more closely with projects and services where staff have not engaged with the participation project, where staff have not heeded the advice given to them and where improvements in participation have not arisen from the training (2.3; 2.4.1)

To develop practices within the local authority it is necessary to ensure that there is not a duplication of work, that there is a shared understanding of the meaning and implications of participation by young people. Co-ordinated and focused work may hasten the implementation of the participation strategy, the youth charter, the participation toolkit and the youth council. (2.4.4)

The timing of meetings outside school time, raising awareness about introducing procedural changes to incorporate the involvement of children into policy decision-making and the co-ordination of activities by those with responsibilities for participation within the local authority, in order to improve and sustain the inclusive participation of young people in policy development. (2.5.1)

The participation workers response to the needs identified by those who participated in the research:

- to further raise awareness to promote inclusive participation and the role of the Participation Crew
- give more clarity on the content of their conferences/events, and the involvement of more Children's Fund young people at events
- further advice-giving and training to meet the needs of projects
- initiate the process of strategy development to include children and young people in the decision-making
- initiate the development of participation training for senior managers and other staff who do not directly work with children and young people. (2.6)

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