



**CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
PARTICIPATION  
STRATEGY  
2024-26**

# INTRODUCTION

Dudley's participation strategy sets out our vision around participation across the whole service. The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that children, young people and their families have a voice around the decisions that impact upon them. It aims to improve the experience of children, young people and their families by providing opportunities for consultation and co-production.

Participation is not a one-off event, but an ongoing process. It is important that everyone working with children and families understands their role in participation.

This strategy has been developed with children and young people across different forums, and professionals who work across the service.



# VISION

In Dudley, we aim to be child-friendly in all that we do, and we want you to be empowered to participate in decisions about you. We are committed to listening to your voice across all of the services and will work to support you to make decisions about your own lives. We will use feedback and insights provided by you to shape the way we provide our services. We will be 'champions' for you and your families, focusing on respect and equality for all, and ensuring that we are, "working with and not doing to".

# TACKLING INEQUALITY

We recognise that some groups are not heard or do not feel able to speak out, and we are committed to actively seeking out and amplifying these voices.



# DEFINITION OF PARTICIPATION

**Participation** means working together through different networks to listen, learn, understand and provide a service which helps you and your families to have the right support at the right time so that the best possible outcomes are achieved for you.

*It can be defined as:*

- Having the opportunity to be involved in decision-making.
- Having a say in services that affect you
- Being able to influence and shape outcomes.
- Being listened to and knowing that what you say will be taken seriously.





# DEFINITION OF PARTICIPATION

The focus of participation can be seen in different ways:

**Individual** - these are decisions about your own day-to-day life or plan of support.  
e.g. being involved in discussions around your plan and what should be in there.

**Operational** – the way services are run, so that you are contributing to developing/improving services provided to other people as well as yourself.  
e.g. being involved in interviewing of professionals through young people's panels.

**Strategic** – long term plans for service delivery  
e.g. choosing priorities and designing policies that might change what services are provided.

# CO-PRODUCTION IN DUDLEY

“Co-production is where everyone works together on an equal basis, using their skills, knowledge and experience to create better outcomes and find shared solutions to shape more inclusive communities.”

In Dudley, our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Services promote participation with a Co-Production Charter which is based on the 4 Cornerstones Approach:

- 1. Welcome and Care**
- 2. Value and Include**
- 3. Communicate**
- 4. Working in Partnership**

# WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IF WE GET PARTICIPATION RIGHT?

1. You and your families will feel empowered
2. You will feel listened to, and your views will be respected
3. It will help to build self-esteem and confidence
4. Services will be developed and provided that meet your needs



# WHY PARTICIPATION IS PART OF THE DUDLEY PRACTICE FRAMEWORK.

As a child, you have a right to express your views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting you, and for these to be considered and taken seriously. This is set out in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in Section 1 of the Children Act 1989 and S.19 of the Children and Families Act 2014, which together are the legal framework for much of our work.

For you and your parents/carers, participation in planning your own service supports us to provide it in the way which is most likely to achieve the outcomes we are all aiming for.

We can improve services, and design new ones more effectively if we work WITH those who use them.

Involving our community in participation activities supports them to develop confidence and new skills.



# WHAT DO WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT TO SUPPORT STRONG PARTICIPATION?

We want to make sure that we do all that we can for you to participate as best as possible, and make sure that when your views are gained, something happens with these.

We have used Lundy's model of participation to understand what is important to ensure strong participation of families in the work of Children's Services. This model is a way of explaining Article 12 and is a right's-based model of participation. It is broken down into 4 elements: Space, Voice, Audience, Influence.

These are the things that we need to consider to enable everyone's voice to be heard.



# WHAT DO WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT TO SUPPORT STRONG PARTICIPATION?

**Space:** Provide a safe and inclusive space for children and families to express their views

**Voice:** Promote appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views, and those of their parents and carers.

**Audience:** Ensure that families' views are communicated to someone with responsibility to listen

**Influence:** Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon where appropriate.



# HOW WELL ARE WE DOING WITH EACH OF THESE ELEMENTS OF PARTICIPATION AT PRESENT?

## Space

**HOW:** Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Established groups for children and young people in our care (*Make A Difference*), care experienced (*Our Say Our way*), parents of children with disabilities (*Parent Carer Forum*), a wider forum for children/young people who live in Dudley (*Dudley Youth Council and UK Youth Parliament*) and *Young Commissioners*.
  - Opportunities are available for young people to be involved in different projects.
  - Practitioners ensure that the child/young person is at the centre of all that they do.

## Voice

**HOW:** Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

- We encourage the use of different direct work tools to help to gather the views of children and families.
- We have different surveys to gather feedback about services.
- Ensure children and young people receive the right training when joining forums.
- Providing advocacy support where needed.

## Audience

**HOW:** Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Reports presented to Corporate Parenting Board which is chaired by the lead Member for Children.
- When surveys are completed, reports presented to the Senior Leadership Team where key themes and recommendations for areas that can be improved are noted.
  - Managers attending the different forums with children/young people to hear their views and discuss changes in services.
  - Supporting children to make complaints/compliments.

## Influence

**HOW:** Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where

- Involving young people in recruitment and ensuring their views are taken into account when making decisions.
- Turning recommendations from forums into actions, and then feeding back to children and families around what we have done.
  - Developing individual plans that are based on the views of children and families.



# WHAT WE AIM TO ACHIEVE IN THE NEXT 2 YEARS





# 1 EVERYONE IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES WILL UNDERSTAND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO PARTICIPATION AND WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN THEIR ROLE.

- We will develop in-house training around Participation including the Four Cornerstones approach which will build on our Voice of the Child workshops.
- We will continue to engage with Regional Participation work, which includes regional training around participation.
- We will be consistent in how we recognise the contribution made by children and families in helping to shape services.
- We will review the Terms of Reference for our Quarterly Participation Forum and ensure the right people are there.

# 2 ENSURE THAT YOU AND YOUR PARENTS/CARERS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHAPE YOUR OWN SERVICE DELIVERY

- We will work on enabling you to feel part of meetings that we hold with you and your family.
- We will make sure that you are involved in developing your plan and plans are written in a way that is clear to everyone.



# 3 YOU AND YOUR PARENTS/CARERS TO BE INVOLVED IN SHAPING CHILD FRIENDLY DUDLEY, AND THE SERVICES WE AND OUR PARTNERS PROVIDE TO FAMILIES.

- We will ensure that children/young people are involved in recruitment and selection of staff.
- We will continue to support and develop forums with children, parents/carers and work to ensure there is an opportunity for everyone to be involved.



# 4 ALL SERVICES WILL ROUTINELY GATHER FEEDBACK AND THEN SHARE HOW THEY HAVE USED THIS TO IMPROVE SERVICES.

- We will develop new methods of gathering feedback
- We will make sure feedback is provided to decision makers
- We will develop ways of sharing with families how we have used their feedback





# 5 TO INCREASE THE RANGE OF METHODS TO GATHER THE VOICE OF CYP AND PARENTS/CARERS.

- We will continue with the work being undertaken around podcasting
- We will develop further opportunities for consultations
- We will extend co-production into rest of Children's services using social media and other technology



# HOW WILL WE MEASURE PROGRESS?

- A Participation Steering Group will be established to progress our Participation plan. Reporting on the progress of the Participation plan will be included in the Centre for Professional Practice quarterly performance report.
- Once a year we will consult with children/young people and employees to share how we have moved forward with the objectives and gather views on what individuals think about the progress that has been made and we will use self-assessment toolkits to measure our progress. The outcome of these will be reported in an annual report that we will publish on our website.



# CHILDREN'S SERVICES PARTICIPATION STRATEGY 2024 - 26



**M.A.D**  
MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Our youth participation strategy was developed alongside young people from our youth forums

Dudley Youth Council, **DYC** is a group of young people aged 11-19 (up to 25 with disabilities) who all live or go to school in Dudley. They work together to improve the lives of young people, lead campaigns and projects and ensure that young people have a voice on issues affecting them

**Make A Difference** -The Children in Care Council in Dudley is called **Make a Difference** and supports young people in care to have a say on issues that matter to them.

The group members are all looked-after children / young people aged 11-18 who meet every two weeks to discuss topics they feel are important and to provide an opportunity to get their views heard by adult decision-makers.

**Future Voices** is a group of young people from Dudley aged between 14-25 years, who are passionate about raising awareness on preparing for adulthood, health and wellbeing ,health conditions that have an impact on young people lives in Dudley.