

# Child Participation Case study

How young people from The Mayo Tusla Youth Advisory Committee were involved in developing key messages for adults who deliver services to children and young people

## 1) Background information

### a) The specific project or initiative on which we involved young people in decision-making

The Mayo Tusla Youth Advisory Committee was set up through a funding stream for youth participation. They were set up to work with Tusla and Tusla funded agencies in County Mayo. Their purpose was to provide advice to Tusla and increase the level and success of youth engagement and youth participation in decision-making. Tusla appointed an experienced youth worker from Foróige to facilitate and drive this project and support the Youth Advisory Committee throughout the journey.

### b) The topic on which we were you looking for their views

We wanted to find out how young children and people felt when they were attending a new service and ideas on how to make this process easier.

### c) The reason we wanted their views

The young people who were members of the Committee identified this as an important issue for young people accessing services within Tusla.

### d) The decision-makers that facilitated and listened to their views

Tusla management.

### e) The age profile of the young people

13-18 years.

### f) Other relevant information about the young people (e.g. disability, ethnic background, social disadvantage, etc.)

Mayo Tusla Youth Advisory Committee includes young people with disabilities, young people in care, young people from a mix of backgrounds and young people from a disadvantaged area

## 2) How we gave space, voice, audience and influence to young people's views

**SPACE: How we ensured a safe and inclusive space to hear the views of young people at**



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Things we considered	What we did
The space or setting where we got their views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The young people from Mayo Tusla Youth Advisory Committee met in a youth project in a space which was designed by other young people. This is a comfortable space with comfy chairs, access to snacks and food and items they needed to work on their project.</li> </ul> <p>There were also planning days held off-site in a residential centre to build teamwork and focus on the project.</p>
How we identified the young people to be involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This project was part of the ongoing work of the Mayo Tusla Youth Advisory Committee.</li> </ul> <p>The young people were involved in a voluntary capacity and were identified through Tusla staff, Tusla funded services and Mayo Comhairle na nÓg.</p>
How we involved those who were directly affected by the topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some members of the Youth Advisory Committee were directly affected by this topic and others were not.</li> <li>In order to engage further with young people directly affected by the topic, the Youth Advisory Committee carried out a piece of research with young people.</li> <li>This was a mixture of an online survey which was shared by the Youth Advisory Committee members and in-person focus groups facilitated by committee members in national and secondary schools.</li> </ul> <p>Paper versions of the survey were also circulated to staff working with young people such as social workers, traveller support groups and youth workers.</p>
How early in the process they were involved in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Youth Advisory Committee decided on the topic of the project and carried it through to completion.</li> </ul> <p>They were involved from the beginning.</p>
How the process was inclusive and accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The members of the Youth Advisory Committee volunteered to be involved and were supported by a staff member who remained throughout the project.</li> </ul> <p>They were supported to be as involved as possible.</p>
How we made sure they felt safe to express their views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Youth Advisory Committee had a strong group contract and were supported by a dedicated youth worker.</li> <li>Time was spent on relationship building between the group, the staff member and the decision makers locally.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committee members chaired their meetings and made decisions as a group.</li> <li>• The young people had several ways to share their ideas and views including an ‘ideas wall’ which was outside the main room to enable young people privacy to share their ideas, group discussions and some young people texted the youth worker with their ideas and these were shared anonymously with the group.</li> <li>• They also attended training on Research skills with the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre in NUI Galway to build their skills and confidence in research practices.</li> </ul> <p>The youth worker was available to meet with individual committee members to support them if needed.</p>
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## VOICE: How we gave young people a voice in decisions

Things we considered	What we did
How we informed young people about the topics on which we wanted their views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The young people from the Youth Advisory Committee spoke to adults who work with young people and asked them how a young person would typically get involved in their service.</li> <li>• They gathered information regarding intake process, communication, and the location of meetings. Members of the Youth Advisory Committee visited a few services to see what they looked like.</li> </ul>
How we made sure they knew their views would be taken seriously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A steering committee was established at the beginning of the project, which met approximately every two months.</li> <li>• The young people attended the Steering Committee meetings. The Tusla Prevention Participation and Family Support (PPFS) Manager also attended these meetings. Senior management attended on occasion to talk to the young people. At these meetings, the adult decision-makers communicated to young people that their views were really important and would be listened to.</li> </ul> <p>They discussed their research idea with the UNSECO Child and Family Centre research team and the Tusla managers locally in advance of the research taking place. They were interested in the topic and what the findings may be.</p>

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<p>How we informed them about level of influence they could have on decision-making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the beginning we were unsure of the level of influence we might have on decision-making. This was discussed with the Youth Advisory Committee.</li> </ul> <p>Through discussions with the staff and management, the young people were happy that their findings would be listened to, they decided quite early that in order to have influence they would need to make a big effort to disseminate the findings to the adult who work face to face with young people as well as management.</p>
<p>The methods we used to get their views</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In working with the Youth Advisory Committee members, we used group meetings and residential planning days.</li> <li>• At these sessions, these we used 'idea walls', post-its, discussions, and brainstorming.</li> </ul> <p>In the research the committee carried out they used surveys and focus groups.</p>
<p>How we made sure they could identify topics they wanted to discuss</p>	<p>We made sure that the young people could raise issues that were important to them from early in the process through brainstorming at meetings, research and general agreement within the group.</p>
<p>The topics and issues they raised</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The main topic of interest to the young people was how young people felt when they were attending a new service and ideas on how to make this process easier.</li> <li>• They found through their research that young people were nervous about meeting professionals for the first time and that they had worries and concerns about finding the building, who they would be meeting and what they would be asked.</li> <li>• As noted earlier, the young people decided to develop 8 Key Messages for all adults who work with young people.</li> <li>• The young people decided to organise a staff conference for adults who work with children to launch their 8 key messages.</li> </ul> <p>They consulted with experts in youth participation including Professor Laura Lundy as part of their planning for this event.</p>

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## AUDIENCE: How we made sure that there was an audience (decision-makers) for young people's views

Things we considered	What we did
How we developed a report or record of the young people's views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Youth Advisory Committee members along with the staff member wrote up a research findings report. The young people were involved with this and approved each version.</li> </ul> <p>They developed their findings into a list of messages and worked with a graphic designer to create a poster version. Again, the young people approved this.</p>
How we checked back with them that their views were accurately represented	We checked back with the Youth Advisory Committee on a regular basis in person.
How we involved the decision-makers who are responsible for influencing change (other than yourself)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members of the Youth Advisory Committee sat on an advisory group with the local Tusla Prevention Participation and Family Support (PPFS) Manager.</li> </ul> <p>They reported on the progress of the project at these meetings.</p>
At what point we involved decision makers other than yourself in the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We involved decision makers from the beginning of the process.</li> <li>Senior management within Tusla Mayo engaged with the group from the beginning and met with them at intervals throughout the project.</li> </ul> <p>The young people also met with Tusla staff at conferences and team meetings to present their findings and 8 key messages</p>
How we and other decision-makers showed our commitment to listening to, and acting on young people's views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As a staff member I showed commitment through regular communication with the young people.</li> <li>Decisions were made by their group through democratic means. Respect for each other and regular feedback on decisions were vital within the project.</li> </ul> <p>The decision makers showed their commitment through investment in the group and the provision of additional hours to increase the staff time on the project. They also regularly attending meetings with the group.</p>
How we supported young people to play a role in communicating their own views to decision-makers	<p>The Youth Advisory Committee members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fed back to decision makers themselves,</li> <li>designed and ran the launch of the key messages, and</li> </ul>

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	attended a Tusla Conference where they hosted a workshop on their project for Tusla staff and young people.
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## INFLUENCE: How we made sure that young people's views were taken seriously

Things we considered	What we did
How young people were given updates at key points in the development of project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people were informed of developments at the regular meetings.</li> </ul> <p>Any feedback received was communicated to the group through their staff person</p>
How their views were acted on by the appropriate decision-makers (what happened to their views)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Almost 100 Tusla staff attended the conference that was organised by the young people to communicate the the 8 Key Messages. The conference was organised and hosted by the young people with support from staff.</li> <li>Guest speakers, including the Ombudsman for Children, spoke at the conference and praised the young people for their simple but effective guidance for adults who work with young people.</li> <li>Following the conference, they were invited to attend a National Tusla conference to deliver a workshop on the research and their 8 key messages.</li> <li>The poster of the 8 Key messages have been widely circulated to Tusla staff locally and is displayed in local offices. It has been included in an academic book on participation.</li> <li>The young people were invited to UNESCO to present their project.</li> </ul> <p>Due to time constraints, we were unable to carry out further research to see if adults have been using the 8 key messages. This would be something we would prioritise if we were doing this project again.</p>
Whether we continually checked back with young people about the ways we used their views with decision-makers	Once the project was completed many of the young people aged out of the Youth Advisory Committee. Therefore, it was not possible to continually check back.
How they were given full and age-appropriate feedback explaining	Feedback was given at the regular meetings with the Youth Advisory Committee and discussed at these meetings.

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how their views were used (or not) and the reasons for decisions taken	
How we enabled them to evaluate the process throughout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Youth Advisory Committee reflected on the process at each stage, and we discussed how the different steps went.</li><li>• There was no formal evaluation completed in this project. This is an area we would improve on if we were completing this project again.</li></ul>

## IMPACT

### What changes were made because of children/young people giving their views?

- Changes in staff behaviour are difficult to analyse however the group received emails from management and some staff about how practical the messages were and how small things would make a difference. The Ombudsman for Children attended and spoke at the conference, and he said he would keep the messages in mind for future work.
- The poster of the key messages hangs in the three social work departments in Mayo and smaller copies have been circulated to all Tusla staff in Mayo.
- The project was included in a book about youth participation and the chapter was co-written with members of the group. (Child and Youth Participation in Policy, Practice and Research)
- We have heard that the poster is also being used in some third level institutions.

## 3) The learning for our organisation

### 1. The key learning for the organisations involved from the process and outcome (end result) of involving young people in this initiative

Including young people was a very positive process. They asked questions from their point of view and thought of things that adults may not have considered. Simple changes that could make children and young people feel more comfortable were suggested in this project and, if taken on board, these could have a positive impact on young people who attend services.



The process of involving children and young people takes some time, commitment and input from the organisations involved and needs to be supported from staff on the ground right up to senior management for it to be as successful as possible.

## **2. Looking back, how did the final outcome compare with our initial assumptions and those of other decision-makers involved in the process?**

The young people took the project much further than was expected. The outcomes were practical and relatively simple to implement into practice. The conference that was held to launch the 8 Key messages received a lot of positive feedback from staff and management who attended. The group received an increase in requests following the conference with staff seeking to involve young people in decisions and to get advice from them.

## **3. What worked well?**

- The support from management in Tusla to take on this project.
- Having a dedicated staff person to support the young people through the process.
- Giving the young people time and adequate training to successfully complete the project.
- An openness from the young people to get involved.

## **4. If we were doing it again, is there anything we would do differently?**

This project started quite modestly as a small research project. It grew and developed as the months went on. If I were doing this project again, I would have thought 'bigger' from the beginning. The evaluation piece could have been stronger and more consistent throughout the project, and I would have given more time to reflection.

