

Child Participation Case study

How the Irish Wheelchair Association involves young people in day-to-day decision-making in its young adult services

1) Background information

The Irish Wheelchair Association's Young Adult Service supports young adults with disabilities to pursue their goals and build confidence with training in life skills and employability, recreation and social activities.

We create a personalised service plan around their goals and aspirations and identify the programs and supports that will assist them to achieve their goals and aspirations.

Our young adult service caters to many different needs and interests in a safe and supportive environment, both within our community centres and in the local community.

- a) We meet with young people in our community centres and other youth service settings
- b) The age profile of the young people is 16 to 24 years
- c) Most of our young people have a physical disability, but this is not necessary to join one of our clubs or services.

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

Things we considered	What we did
How we make sure that young people feel safe to express their views	We state that this is their service, and they need to 'own' this element and always share their views and opinions. It is made clear that all voices are important and people with communication difficulties are supported to express their opinions.
How we allow enough time to listen to and hear their views	We have a dedicated time at the beginning of each session to ensure young people have time to give their say.
How we make sure that all young people are heard	We take our time and ensure all young people are given the opportunity to share their views and be heard, no matter how big or small the issue they want to discuss.

VOICE: How we gave young people a voice in decisions

Things we considered	What we did
How we support young people to give their views and be heard	We have dedicated sessions during the year to enable young people to give feedback on how their service is working.
How they can raise things that matter to them	We have worked to develop a very open and trusting atmosphere whereby young people are encouraged to bring forward ideas and issues that are important to them.

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How we offer them different ways of giving their views	We have support worker to enable young people to communicate in an individual way (speech synthesizer etc).
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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 show young people that we are ready and willing to listen to views	We allow sufficient time to discuss issues that are important to young people and include relevant decision makers in the discussion.
How we make sure that they understand what we can do with their views	We are very clear and concise, detailing what is possible, what may be possible and what may not be. Where possible we act on their views and requests. We explain that sometimes we cannot act on their requests. For example, we had to be very careful about bringing young people on outings in unsafe environments during Covid lockdowns and restrictions.

INFLUENCE: How we made sure that young people's views were taken seriously

Things we considered	What we did
How they know the level of influence they can have	We use group discussion to be clear and concise and showcase the actions and decisions that came about as a result of them communicating their needs or wants.
How we give them feedback	In general, we give feedback in an informal club setting. If the feedback is on a serious issue that requires discussion this may be by way of formal written communication, which may then be discussed in the informal setting.
How we share with them the impact of their views on decisions	We share the impact of their views on decisions through group discussion or one to one discussion as requested by the young people.
How we explain the reasons for decisions taken	We explain the reasons for decisions that are taken to young people by being honest and providing clear reasoning on what is possible and what is not possible. They understand that we must take account of health, safety, budget and other constraints.

IMPACT

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

We asked parents and guardians to stay outside this safe space to allow young people to find their own voice and start to think independently.

