

# THE YOUTH CHARTER

Supporting the active participation of young people



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# INTRODUCTION

## Background

In 2006 key partners from a variety of children and young people's services developed the Hackney's Youth Participation Group. This multi-agency group initially undertook an audit using the Hear by Right Standards to gauge where the borough stood in relation to children and young people's active participation. A Participation Action Plan was developed based upon the findings of this audit. One key aspect of the action plan identified the need for a Charter to set out clear standards and expectations around active youth participation. The expectation was that a Youth Charter would enable services to understand how to meaningfully engage young people in decision making and encourage and show more young people and children how to get involved.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledges that those under 18 years of age have the ability, and therefore the right, to be involved in decision-making. In November 2004 the Government published Every Child Matters: Change for Children which set out a national expectation that all services for Children and Young People involve them in taking decision about services and issues that concern them. Over the next few years, every local authority will be working with its partners, through children's trusts, to find out what works best for children and young people in its area and act on it. They will need to involve children and young people in this process, and when inspectors assess how local areas are doing, they will listen especially to the views of children and young people themselves.

Although active citizenship is a key principle enshrined in the UNCRC, Hear by Right, Every Child Matters and Youth Matters much active participation by young people

remains uncoordinated and not well-documented. It is also evident that although young people and children are keen to participate they are often unclear about how to get involved or unconvinced that their involvement will make a difference.

In Hackney, services for young people are committed to ensuring that young people can have meaningful opportunities to be involved and heard. We believe that involving young people in decision-making will result in a balanced, representative and democratic community that ultimately benefits all residents. Over past 6 years there are numerous examples of young people being actively involved with services and projects in Hackney some of which are given as examples in this document.

As well as sending some clear messages from young people to decision-makers, the Hackney Youth Charter is a set of guidelines, designed to provide service providers with the necessary information on how to involve children and young people in ways that are both effective and meaningful.

## The Process Of Developing The Charter

A team of 13 young people were trained and supported to take on the role of peer researchers and conducted interviews with other young people in Hackney.

In total the team carried out 300 individual interviews and 10 focus groups, involving more than 380 young people. The young peer researchers used questionnaires to record responses. The Charter was then developed using the findings of the interview questionnaires and young people's recommendations.

## Purpose And Principles

The Hackney Youth Charter outlines the basic principles and practice required to ensure that the views of children and young people are not only heard but included in decision-making processes.

We believe that:

- Young people are valued members of the community.
- Young people are entitled to the same human rights and protections as all other members of the community.
- Young people are entitled to respect and dignity.
- Young people have unique and diverse gifts, knowledge and skills.
- Young people make valuable and significant contributions to society.
- Services will be more effective and innovative because they will be based on the expressed needs, wants and interests of young people.
- Services will be more accountable to young people who will have opportunities to challenge and progress priorities.

## How To Use The Charter

The charter is designed to provide a benchmark for all services working with children and young people in involving young people in decision-making for the development of policy, programmes and services. The charter is designed to enable service providers and elected members to begin to understand what the active involvement of young people means in practice, and what the benefits can be. However the charter can also be used by or with young people to explore how they can get involved in decision making and what they can expect when they decide to participate in projects.

The Youth Charter gives an outline of the key messages from young people and the key considerations for the process of actively involving young people in decision making. The DVD of the Youth Charter produced by young people can be found at the front of the Charter folder and the full research findings from the project are given in the appendix.



## KEY MESSAGES

**The key messages arising from consultation with young people in the development of the Charter are summarised below:**

1. We have the right to be involved and have a say over services that we use such as youth clubs, schools and colleges, parks, leisure centres and open spaces.
2. When we get involved in projects and services we need to be told from the beginning what is expected of us and what we will get out of our involvement.
3. Young people in Hackney come from a range of communities. Organisations need to respect our different needs and cultures when planning projects, because not all of us want to get involved in the same way.
4. We have our own views and opinions on things that affect us and we want organisations to offer us training to be able to find out what issues are important to other young people in Hackney.
5. We are capable of making our own decisions but we need adults to give us support and information to do so.
6. We want to work with adults in deciding the most meaningful way for us to be involved.
7. We need good standards of training and support to become confident active participants. This will help us to understand what we need to do and make us more committed.
8. We need organisations to help us find out about other projects and services that we can get involved with afterwards. This will help us to feel that our skills are valued and used in the community.
9. We are capable of taking responsibility for ourselves and projects. Organisations should respect this and help us decide the level of our involvement
10. Organisations should encourage us to take part in planning projects and services. They should make sure our ideas are taken seriously when it comes to planning budgets and activities. If we can not be involved with some things make sure you explain why.
11. Helping out with the planning process will help us feel more confident and committed about our involvement and make it feel more real.
12. Adults need to spend time developing good relationships with us. We need to feel that we can trust the adults we work with.
13. Most young people get actively involved because they want to make Hackney a better place. For young people who don't usually get involved in projects a selection of other incentives should be offered, (not everybody like MC'ing or book vouchers)
14. Organisations must treat us with maturity and respect but our involvement should be fun and relevant.
15. We should continuously be involved in inspecting services and projects to make sure that they meet our needs.
16. Every year services and 'projects' should report to young people explaining how they are involving children and young people as active participants.

# INVOLVEMENT

## Why involve young people in decision making?

Children and young people want to become actively involved with a range of services and projects in Hackney\*

\*57% want to become actively involved

## Rights

Young People have the right to be involved and have a say over services that they use or decisions that affect them. In the case of school inspections, school councils acting as representatives of their peers are involved with assessing how well the school is doing.

This is enshrined in both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) and the Hear by Right standards:

75% of young people interviewed knew they had this right

BUT, 61% felt that this right was not always 'acted upon'

## Services And Projects

Young people want to be actively involved with the running of services that concern them; in particular young people want to have an involvement with youth clubs, schools/colleges, leisure centers, and parks or open spaces.

When young people are actively involved in decision making, services are better able to meet their needs. The active participation of young people also brings benefits

in terms of greater capacity for innovation. Take up of services should also increase as they become more accessible and responsive to young people.

## Expectations

Young people need to know what is expected from the beginning, such as how long it will be for, when it will be and exactly what they will be gaining in the process.

Based on the research participating in 'creative ways' and 'thinking it will be fun' were two of the strongest messages from young people about getting involved.

Organisations should recognise that there are more ways of including young people aside from attending lots of meetings. Services or projects will need to meet with young people to set out expectations but make sure the agenda and the meeting is clear and is relevant to the young peoples involvement.



## Diversity

We need to recognise and celebrate the diversity of Hackney's communities and the individual needs of children and young people. Young people will want to get involved with a range of projects in different ways. Organisations need to acknowledge this diversity and allocate sufficient time to get to know the children and young people. Trust and working relationships need to be worked at.

It is important to involve children and young people of different ages, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, gender, class and social groups; this might need to start by working with them in their own communities. However during focus group discussions young people stated that active youth involvement offered real opportunities to get to know young people from different backgrounds.

## Consultation

Children and Young people want to be consulted about issues that affect them, and good consultation should start at the beginning. In order for the consultation to be classified as meaningful young people need to be involved in determining:

- why consultation is necessary
- what will be asked
- the processes that will be used
- what will happen to the information received
- how and when they will be informed of the results

*Example: Hackney a Good Place to Grow Up (2003-4) and the peer research consultation for this Charter are good examples of involving children in designing and implementing consultation.*

...When young people are actively involved in decision-making, services are better able to meet their needs...

**The Youth Charter**

# EMPOWERMENT-

## How to involve young people

...Organisations need to offer real opportunities for involvement and avoid tokenism...

### Meaningful Involvement

Children and young people need to be offered meaningful ways of being involved. This should be decided by the young people themselves in negotiation with staff (e.g. youth workers, teachers, personal advisors etc). This will ensure that they are more committed and understand what is being asked of them. They should not be involved in ways that are tokenistic or involved as a last minute 'after thought'. (See appendix 2 Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation).

*Example: Children and young people have been trained to deliver consultation or to run a project from the beginning as in the creation of the Youth Charter or the LBH Looked After Children's Customer Care Project. In both examples young people have been involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation and have presented the outcomes and key recommendations to service providers.*

### Knowledge

Children and young people are capable of making informed decisions. In order to do so they must be provided with all the necessary information, knowledge and support available to do so.

*Example: Young people have been trained as grant panel members and are now making decisions about the distribution of the Hackney Youth Opportunity Fund.*

Children and Young people should be given the opportunity to lead on consultation through peer research projects. They must be involved from the beginning and offered sufficient training and support. Peer research often leads to more reliable and effective results as young people feel able to talk openly and honestly.

*Example: Students from Clapton Girls School were trained to facilitate consultation sessions with primary age pupils for the 'Building Schools for the Future' Programme*

### Training And Development

Children and young people need good standards of training and support to become confident and able to take on the role of active participants. Organisations must use a training needs analysis to determine the skills and abilities needed for them to get involved.



Tell me - I forget  
 Show me - I remember  
 Let me do - I understand

#### Chinese proverb

*Example: The research team involved in creating this charter were thoroughly trained in research techniques and supported throughout the consultation period. Prior to the training an introductory session was organised to discuss a job specification, which included what the young people could expect in return for taking part in the project. Based on their understanding of the role the young people were able to identify the key areas of training they felt they would need.*

*Example: A group of six young people from Hackney were trained by the National Youth Agency on the Hear by Right standard. This equipped them with the necessary skills to facilitate training to the Hackney Children's and Young People's Partnership Board on how to involve children and young people in project planning, delivery and evaluation.*

#### Progression

Children and young people who have had a positive experience as active participants need to be clearly sign-posted and supported in identifying further opportunities for involvement. This should utilise their skills, build upon their experiences, and continue their involvement within the community.

*Example: Students from Cardinal Pole School, who were part of a student led volunteering project in 2006, went on to train as peer researchers for the Charter project and as leaders of the volunteering project in 2007.*

#### Responsibility

The research shows that children and young people are keen to work in partnership with adults on developing youth projects. Children and young people feel that staff should support them in planning and organising projects in an advisory capacity. Organisations that work with young people must give them the opportunity to take responsibility for project planning, delivery and evaluation.

Every child has the  
 right to express his or  
 her views and these views  
 must be taken seriously.

**Article 12 from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

# RECOGNITION, RESOURCES & SUPPORT

“The level of support needed to secure & sustain youth involvement is greater than that needed for equivalent adult structures”

Fitzpatrick et al (1998), working with young people on estates: The role of housing professionals in multi-agency work, pg 3

## Planning

Children and young people should be encouraged to take part in the planning process of projects and consultation exercises. This will ensure that their ideas are taken on board and that budgets are appropriately allocated. Involving young people from the start increases their knowledge and awareness, offering them invaluable organisational skills and a sense of ownership.

## Trust

Organisations must ensure trust and openness throughout the process between any adults and young people, and between the young people themselves. Organisations must build in opportunities to develop trust and good working relationships.

Trust is essential as children and young people mainly recommend services and projects based on their experiences, whether they are positive or negative.

## Incentives

Children and young people want to make Hackney and its services better. For many this is their incentive to become involved.

Incentives should to be negotiated with the young people themselves, to ensure that children and young people who do not normally get involved in services and projects are able to get involved.

Incentives need to ensure that children and young people feel that it is worth their while getting involved instead of doing something else.

Incentives can include travel expenses, refreshments, skills development, accreditation, vouchers, or additional activities and opportunities.

## Being Taken Seriously

Services and projects must ensure that the involvement and contribution of all children and young people is valued and informs project design and delivery. Children and young people must be treated with maturity and respect.



Meetings should be arranged at times that are appropriate to the young people and which do not clash with school/college or work commitments. Staff will need to work flexibly to accommodate this need.

Young people should also always be informed of the outcome of consultations they have been involved in.

Most importantly children and young people's involvement should be fun, relevant and offer progression onto other projects and services.

The research shows only 10% [of children and young people in Hackney] thought that their ideas are taken seriously [by adults]

## Funding

When planning the involvement of young people, organisations should identify and allocate a budget to cover the cost of travel and refreshments to enable young people to attend meetings. They should also consider if they can cover the costs of incentives to support young people's involvement.

For organisations that actively involve children and young people in their services it is good practice to allocate a budget which young people can decide how to spend, or support young people to access funding to develop their own ideas.

*Example: The Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund are good examples of young people being able to apply for funding to implement their own ideas.*

...Most importantly  
children and young people's  
involvement should be fun,  
relevant and offer progression  
onto other projects  
and services...

**The Youth Charter**

## REVIEW AND EVALUATE

“Young people should have a say over things they don’t like or don’t meet their needs”

(quote from research)

### Inspections and Mystery Shopping

Children and young people should be involved in carrying out ‘inspections’ on services to ensure they are offering quality services appropriate to their needs. This should involve training the young people so that they develop the skills and knowledge to carry out their role as inspectors. This should be an integral part of planning and evaluation.

*Example: In 2006, children and young people in Hackney ‘inspected’ various services in Hackney in 2006, such as sexual health clinics. LBH Youth Service has also developed a Youth Inspections programme to monitor the quality of service provision.*

### Changes To Services

Services and projects should report on an annual basis on how they involve children and young people as active participants. This should be measured against the practice guidelines set out in this charter and / or the ‘Hear By Right’ standards. The report should clearly identify what difference children and young people’s involvement has made to the service. It is good practice for young people to be involved in ‘auditing’ service developments linked to their participation.

### Impact On Children And Young People

As well as measuring the impact that children and young people’s active involvement has on service delivery, equal importance and value needs to be placed on the measuring the impact that involvement is having on the young person’s social and personal development.

*Example: Children and young people who have been actively involved report increases in confidence, taking part in opportunities they would not otherwise have had, new skills, mixing with different young people and developing into responsible citizens.*



## Signposting And Progression

Children and young people need to be sign-posted on to other opportunities once their involvement in a particular project has ended. Some active participation is time limited and opportunities for progression will ensure that young people continue to contribute and services continue to benefit.

Progression should also involve opportunities to take on more responsibility and gain qualifications that may lead to future careers.

## Celebration And Recognition Of Achievement

It is important to recognise and celebrate the achievements of young people. That might include:

- Providing evidence of their involvement which can be used for records of achievement, or job or college applications.
- Recommending a group or individual for an award (e.g. Hackney Youth Awards).
- Gaining nationally recognised certificates and qualifications such as V awards, AQAs or the Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- Publishing or publicising their work.
- Having an end of project celebration / presentation event.

... “The Charter is a step in the right direction, something new, young people need something like this right now... they need the Charter. A lot of them are not informed about what they are allowed to do and what’s there for them”...

**Abena (Peer Researcher, 16)**

## APPENDIX 1

### Findings Of Youth Charter Peer Research Survey (300 young people) on the Incentives For Young Peoples Involvement

It will be Fun	126	Knowing that I was making a difference	50
Work experience	123	Having a say over how small pots of money are spent	48
Developing new skills and Knowledge	121	Representing young people locally	45
Something to put on my CV / NRA	107	Meet other young people or children and make new friends	41
Certificates or awards	100	Believing that there will be a positive outcome/change	35
Feeling Valued	74	Knowing that I was contributing to my community	35
Good workers to support us	70	Having different ways to be involved	35
Small voucher payments	68	Influencing other decision-makers about what happens in Hackney	30
Show a positive side of young people	64	Being able to apply for small grants to run our own projects	29
Knowing we would be listened to & taken seriously	63	Increasing my confidence	22
Regular Training	52	Understanding the project and my role	21
Running our own peer-projects	50		

### When a similar exercise was carried out amongst 4 active groups of young people (40 young people) in 2005 the results were:

Running our own peer-projects	32
Developing new skills and Knowledge	30
Knowing that I was contributing to my community	30
Show a positive side of young people	30
Representing young people locally	30
Certificates or awards	29

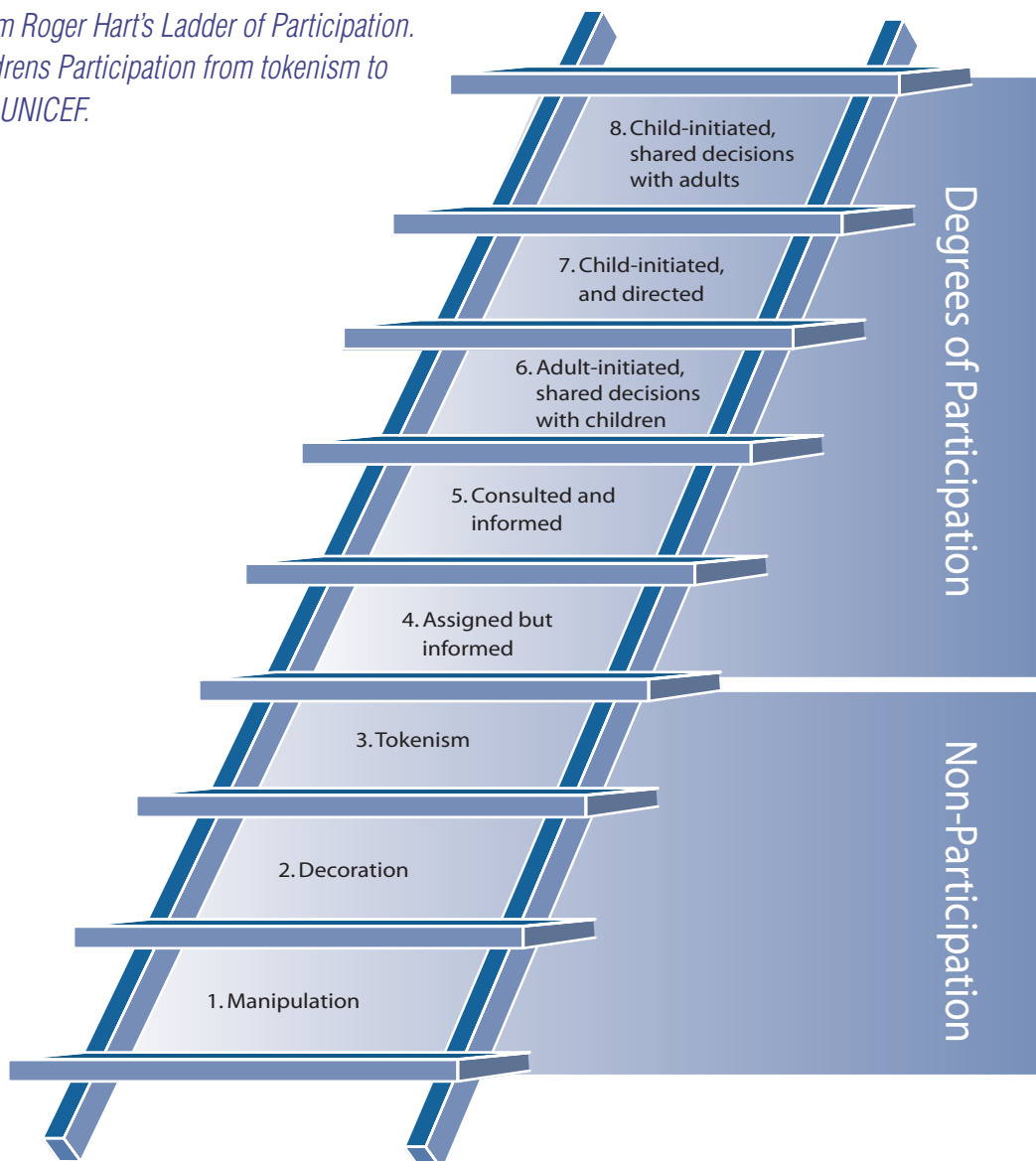


## APPENDIX 2

### Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation

The Ladder of Participation shows youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults as the highest form of youth participation, followed immediately by youth-initiated and directed. Many believe that shared decision making is most beneficial to both young people and adults. Others believe that young people are most empowered when they are making decisions without the influence of adults. Most often, this doesn't exclude adults but reduces their role to that of support. Both viewpoints have merit and each service/ organisation should determine which level of participation is the most meaningful to them

*Adopted from Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation. (1992)'Childrens Participation from tokenism to Citizenship'.UNICEF.*



## What the different levels mean

### 8) Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults.

Projects or programs are initiated by young people, and decision-making is shared among young people and adults. These projects empower young people while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults.

### 7) Youth-initiated and directed.

Young people initiate and direct a project or program and adults are involved only in a supportive role

### 6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth.

Projects or programs are initiated by adults but the decision-making is shared with the young people.

### 5) Consulted and informed.

Young people give advice on projects or programs designed and run by adults. The young are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults.

### 4) Assigned but informed.

Young people are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved.

### 3) Tokenism.

Young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.

### 2) Decoration.

Young people are used to help or “bolster” a cause in a relatively indirect way, although adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by youth.

### 1) Manipulation.

Adults use youth to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by youth



## APPENDIX 3

### Examples Of Active Youth Participation In Hackney

#### •Youth club forums (Parkside Youth Club and Huddleston Centre)

A club youth forum should be elected by the members of the youth club. You may want to do this on an annual basis. Consider how different age groups can be involved. The group must be proactive, meeting regularly and able to set their own agenda with support. A youth club forum should be involved with how the youth club is run, negotiating timetables of activities, they can apply for funding, take part in evaluation of projects, sit on interview panels to appoint staff, help new members settle in, organise some activities, agree on purchase of equipment, establish and monitor ground rules or codes of conduct and can be ambassadors for your project.

#### •Play centre or after school club forums (Benthal Primary School)

Similar to the club forum, except members are likely to be younger so the way you run the group will need to reflect this. Most after-school clubs ask children about the activities on the programme but active involvement needs to be regular, proactive and give the children a clear idea of their decision-making powers.

#### •Estate-based youth committees

(Industrial Dwellings Society estates: 'Makin' It Happen', 10 others in development on RSL and Hackney Homes Estates)  
An estate-based youth forum should represent the views and needs of children and young people living on an estate. They should meet with the Tenant and Residents Forum where there is one and with their social landlord or the Tenant Participation part of Hackney Homes to address concerns or raise ideas.

They can apply to the Hackney YOF fund or in partnership with Tenants and Residents Association to other small pots of funding. They should help create more local leisure and youth activities for children and young people.

...Peer research  
is effective in  
accessing accurate  
and honest thoughts  
and needs of  
young people...

An estate-based youth forum can be a great resource if there are problems with anti-social behaviour. Older members can access youth or play training and with CRB clearance could then run activities for other children.

#### •The Hackney Youth Parliament and its Neighbourhood Youth Forums

The Hackney Youth Parliament aims to be the representative voice for all young people in Hackney and is comprised of four neighbourhood forums (Shoreditch, North East, Stoke Newington and Homerton). Representatives from the Hackney Youth

...Buddy or peer mentoring schemes give young people the chance of taking responsibility in tackling bullying or social isolation...

Parliament organise local events and carry out peer research. Members of the Hackney Youth Parliament also represent Hackney young people at the UK Youth Parliament.

•**School councils, primary, secondary, PRU and schools for disabled young people**

[Horizon and a pan-Hackney forum for disabled students and those with complex or medical needs; playground buddy schemes (Benthal, St Scholastica), peer mentoring schemes (Haggerston, Stoke Newington)]

School councils aim to ensure pupils have a strong voice in schools and colleges and need to be very active in making decisions, organising events, raising funds, Ofsted inspections through the self evaluation framework. Buddy or peer mentoring schemes give young people the chance of taking responsibility in tackling bullying or social isolation.

•**Peer or youth led organisations (Youth Of Haggerston, CityZEN, Today's Young Thoughts)**

These provide an excellent opportunity of progression for children or young people who have enjoyed their active involvement. Peer-led organisations require young people to run the organisations themselves and take high levels of responsibility.

•**Peer-led projects; peer mentoring, peer research, (Hackney; a good place to grow up);**

Organising awards shows and talent contests. Similar to the above, but this means that young people are leading on a specific piece of work rather than running a whole organisation. Peer research is particularly effective in accessing accurate and honest thoughts and needs of young people and children.

•**Peer education projects (Meet the Parents, Clued Up, CityZEN, young people training with the NYA on the Hear By Right standards)**

This involves young people being trained thoroughly as peer educators and then supported to run workshops and training courses for other young people. In the case of



...Volunteering enables young people to make choices about how they can positively contribute to their communities and support the people in them...

•**Faith group involvement, leadership schemes in Muslim, Jewish and Christian organisation**

Lubavitch and NLMCC both train young people from their communities to become young leaders and mentors for other young people.

•**Volunteering through HVA, MV (The Learning Trust's Student (led) Volunteer Leadership Team, Duke Of Edinburgh)**

Volunteering enables young people to make choices about how they can positively contribute to their communities and support the people in them. There are different ways of accrediting young peoples volunteering; through the V awards, AQA's or Duke of Edinburgh Award. Guidance on how to accredit young people's volunteering can be sought from Hackney Youth Service Accreditation Worker.

•**Mystery Shopping projects: Clued Up! (CityZEN and SKY partnership)**

These ensure that young people can inspect services and assess how far they are meeting the needs of young people using them. Clued Up has mystery shopped sexual health services, and SKY's young dads group has assessed support and recognition available for young dads. Mystery shopping should be used to evaluate how well projects and services are performing against the Charter.

the Hear by Right project and CityZEN young people train adults and professionals as well.

•**Connexions young peoples local management group (YLMG)**

Connexions has always sought to put young people at the heart of the service. Hackney Connexions has operated with a young people's management group which has helped ensure that the service meets young peoples needs. They have been involved with peer research, mentoring other young people and giving careers advice and guidance to other young people.

•**Training in play work or sports leadership**

Hackney Play Association and Access to Sports train young people in play work and sports coaching respectively. With CRB clearance young people are able to lead play/ sporting activities or coaching sessions.

**•Youth Inspection Project (Hackney Youth Service)**

Similar to the above these projects enable young people to be a 'critical friend' to projects and services providing them with feedback to aid service improvement. Young people can measure performance against standards they have developed and/ or against national standards (where they may adapt a national inspection framework).

**•Youth board (Youth Offending Team)**

Meeting regularly to discuss issues around living in Hackney, future careers, supporting the community and youth participation. Members also train as, raise funds for and run a peer mentoring programme (NVQ Level). Through which they receive training to mentor other young people through their court order.

**•Focus group (Looked After Children and Young People)**

The focus group produces regular newsletters and is encouraged to express their views at their corporate parent's member's surgery. The focus group have promoted wider user involvement through an in house pilot project and been trained to sit on external provider interview selection panels. They have also helped developed the looked after children and young people professionals training programme, by capturing their views and experiences on a customer care DVD helping to train key stakeholders.

For further information and support or to join a network of organisations working in the field of youth involvement, please contact:

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### Estates, Schools and Organizations involved in focus groups

Haggerston Girls Secondary School - School Council  
and Refugee and Asylum Seekers Group

Cardinal Pole Secondary School

Benthal Primary School Play Centre

London Gypsy Traveler's Unit Girls Group

London Gypsy Traveler's Unit Boys Group

Amhurst Youth Club

Concorde Youth Club

Seacole Centre, Hackney Community College

New Kingshold Estate, Landfield Estate

Homerton Neighborhood Youth Forum

Making It Happen – Industrial Dwellings Society, Estate  
Based Youth Forum

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