

# Bringing children and young people to the heart of Healthwatch

Reflections from LINKs



Every local Healthwatch (LHW) should ensure that children and young people are involved in its work. In some areas this will mean building on the great work that was done in previous years, while for others it will be the beginning of a new adventure.

Whatever your starting point, this document – using examples from LINKs and Healthwatch pathfinders – should give you some ideas and things to think about for your own locality.

We have pulled together some of the key findings from work that the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) has undertaken across the country to engage children and young people in their local health and social care services. The LINKs/ Healthwatch: Getting it right for children and young people project worked with 75 LINKs and Healthwatch pathfinders over the past three years and provided support and training to children and young people, local staff and volunteers, and local authorities. It also included a research report on children and young people’s involvement and consultations with groups of children and young people.

NCB’s research and project work found the outcomes of involving children and young people are:

- ▶ Improved local services including changes to local mental health and sexual health services; a housing improvement for teenage mothers; and some better services for young carers
- ▶ Increased awareness of children and young people’s issues and interests
- ▶ Increased awareness of the benefits of working with children and young people
- ▶ Broader range of contacts and working relationships developed
- ▶ Increased information on local health issues and services
- ▶ Heightened desire to contact and communicate with children and young people directly
- ▶ Different ways to work with all volunteers and local service users developed (adults as well as children and young people)
- ▶ Improved leverage to access funds

As local Healthwatch takes shape in your area you will need to think about how you are going to ensure children and young people are integral players in the work of your new organisation. They can and will be involved in many different ways. There is no one way to engage and work with children and young people. You might go to them to access ideas and views on health and social care issues; they may be involved in the decision-making or the governance of your local Healthwatch; and they may be contacting you to access information on local services or to find out more about your work.

To start you off thinking about different ways of involving children and young people we have identified nine areas you should explore. Covered in more detail on the following pages they are in brief:

### Identify and communicate benefits both for your local Healthwatch and children and young people.....p. 5-6

You will be fulfilling your duties; deepening your knowledge and understanding of your local population; and engaging current and future health and social care users. The children and young people will receive support to develop skills, knowledge and confidence whatever their level of involvement.

### Use local connections and networks.....p. 7-8

Your local voluntary and community sector will have information and access to lots of groups of children and young people. They will know who has done what and how best to work with certain groups of children and young people who might not normally have their voices heard such as disabled children and young people, those living in local authority care or young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). Schools and colleges can help you too.

### Be creative and flexible.....p. 9-10

Children and young people have busy lives and other commitments – you may need to meet with them at different times from your usual meetings or go to different places. Think about whether there are opportunities to piggyback on events that are planned where children and young people will already be. Review and learn together. Things won’t always work as you plan – change them if you can.

### Be smart.....p.11-12

Use statistics from your local area to help you identify who to talk to and what to do; make links with national organisations or neighbouring areas who may be able to help you; know your environment and what is happening locally. This will help you to tap into the right people and ask the right questions.

## Communicate effectively.....p. 13-14

Ask children and young people how they would like to find out about Healthwatch and what they want to know. Make sure information is provided that is attractive and easy to understand for children and young people and is available to them in the places they go and in the formats they use. Keep on providing information, feedback and opportunities.

## Know the issues.....p. 15-16

Listen to children and young people's needs and priorities and keep activities focused on them. And don't forget the needs of certain groups who find it harder to get their voices heard. At the same time you can explore issues that concern the general population or topics that focus on the future of health and social care. Children and young people tell us that they are interested to explore issues that don't just relate to them directly.

## Demonstrate commitment.....p. 17-18

Everyone involved in your local Healthwatch needs to demonstrate a positive attitude to working alongside children and young people. Think about getting training and support for this so that everyone is working in the same way and has the confidence and skills to do things right.

## Use different methods of involvement.....p. 19-20

Not all children and young people will want to come to traditional meetings with agendas, minutes and action points. Think about other ways you can hear from them – through going to visit them in their schools or clubs, workshops, social media, events they have already planned etc. And think about how you might best hear their views – through music, drama, art or photography perhaps.

## Provide access to decision-makers.....p. 21-22

It is important that children and young people have the same access as others you work with to the people who are making decisions in your area. They can be involved on a number of different levels, in direct and indirect ways.

# HOW THIS RESOURCE WORKS

In this document we have tried to summarise the already available information and present it in a fresh way.

It is designed to be dipped into, not read from cover to cover: some of it you will already know and some of it may be food for thought. It isn't a comprehensive how-to guide but a celebration of many LINKs' hard work and the valuable lessons they learnt along the way.

## Each of the nine theme pages contain:

“Quotes from LINKs staff, volunteers, and children and young people.”  
Wise person

LINK wisdom

Examples of where LINKs have involved children and young people in their work or what they found out during the process.

## Tips and suggestions

These are suggestions based on the information from LINKs and NCB's work with them. They are based on NCB's research and interviews with LINKs, LINKs annual reports, websites and legacy documents.



## Tell and sell

How are you going to explain the role of LHW to children and young people? And help them to understand what's in it for them?

Collect examples of where LINKs and LHW have supported children and young people directly to improve services or have their voices heard in their local community. And examples of what they have got out of it personally.

The best people to explain why LHW is important to children and young people are ....children and young people! Think about supporting and training some young people to be ambassadors for your work. They will be able to speak directly to young people and will bring back useful information.

Be clear with your staff, steering groups and adult members/volunteers about why children and young people should be involved in your LHW and what benefits it could bring to not only to the organisation but them as individuals.

“ Sell the benefits of involvement - young people can be very practically minded (What's in it for me? How am I making a difference?) ”

Barnsley LINK

“ Certainly part of my steepest learning curve has been doing this. It's also been incredibly enjoyable. ”

NCB research participant

# BENEFITS

### For other organisations in the area

NCB's research found that by indirectly publicising existing youth groups and highlighting their needs the LINKs had provided leverage for some of these groups to get funding.

### Improvement in services

LINKs reported a number of improvements to local services including changes to local mental and sexual health service opening hours, housing improvements for teenage mothers, and improved speech and language service changes.

## Appeal to CVs

Lots of young people are keen to expand their CVs or personal statements and taking part in their LHW will help them do that. You will need to think about how you can support young people to demonstrate what they have done in their CVs, make certificates to recognise what they have done or write references for them.

## Skills development all round

Unless you are all absolutely 'LHW ready' there will probably be some training and support that you could do with to get you, your staff and volunteers up to speed on all that you are expected to do. It's important that children and young people you work with have the chance to develop skills too. That way you will be building the skills, confidence and capacity of all the people you work with and giving them important transferable skills.

## Making a difference

Be clear about how getting involved with LHW can enable young people to help improve services for all young people, their family and the wider community.

### Interesting opportunities

Promote the interesting opportunities that LHW can offer to young people.

- ▶ Trying new things
- ▶ Learning new skills
- ▶ Improviing self confidence
- ▶ Meeting new people of different ages and backgrounds
- ▶ Getting involved in their community
- ▶ Learning about how to influence within their area.

LINK wisdom

**Kensington & Chelsea LINK** were keen to challenge pre-conceptions of young people in the borough and increase their sense of ownership and participation in their health and wellbeing services. They recruited two apprentices to initiate 'The Den', a project where teams of young people pitched what they considered to be viable health and well-being projects to a team of 'Dragons' with the aim of winning funding to support and deliver a six month peer-led project.

One project given support and funding aimed to highlight young people's views and concerns on social reality issues in the form of print and photography.

Another project was given support and funding to organise a residential trip to break down barriers between young people in the area.

## Find out about volunteer services

There are organisations that match up volunteers with volunteering roles on a national and local level. Some of them are aimed at children and young people.

Find out if there is volunteer organisation in your area and arrange a chat to see how they can help advertise volunteer opportunities with LHW.

Look online to see if any of the national sites could be of use. They may be able to promote your volunteering opportunities wider than your current reach and they may also have useful resources and information.

LINK wisdom

**Coventry LINK** worked with V-involved ([www.vinspired.org/vinvolved](http://www.vinspired.org/vinvolved)) to devise the role of a young LINK volunteer. The volunteering role was advertised via the volunteer's centre, the national Do-it website ([www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk)), local universities and colleges.

Six young people were recruited, all of different backgrounds and ages. The connection with V-Involved provided an added incentive for participation as the volunteering counted towards a certificate.

A young volunteer for **Sefton LINK** found out about the opportunity via the Do-it website.

## Use existing groups and projects

Make use of existing organisations, networks, projects and programmes in your area. Building and maintaining relationships with young people is a hard task, especially if it isn't the main remit of your organisation.

Existing organisations will already have the contacts, skills and experience to work with different groups of children and young people.

“I'm already on three different groups, I wouldn't join another one. If you do this, you need to work with existing groups rather than starting another.”

Young Kent LINK member

“...the difficulty we find with LINK is because we have to cover everything and everybody...we don't have the expertise to work with that whole group. It's getting the right people to do the work. We couldn't have accessed those young people with the capacity and the old fogeys that we've got, it just wouldn't have worked.”

NCB research participant

## Know your people, know your strengths...(and your weaknesses)

Who knew Barbara used to be a film-maker? Find out what skills your LHW has access to and use them for the benefit of the organisation. It will make volunteers feel valued and also highlights the skills gaps that need to be filled.

People don't always make the links between their own experience and how it could be useful and others are too modest to offer their expertise. What about organising a skill mapping exercise? It could be a good way of encouraging people to become more active members or to encourage more intergenerational working.

# MAKE CONNECTIONS

### Use networks to network

Map out the networks that your staff and volunteers are part of to get a clearer idea about your potential reach.

It could be a good relationship building activity and spark ideas about promoting the work of LHW and finding interested parties.

### Link to others and share promotion

You can also connect through other networks by signing up to voluntary sector e-bulletins and mailing lists.

They provide information that might be useful to you and your young volunteers. They may also provide reciprocal links to help you to advertise events and opportunities and to highlight the work of LHW.

“[The] LINK circulate newsletters to the Participation Officer for the Youth Service in the Borough. We attend regular meetings with the service and invite them to any events we host.”

NCB research participant

## Make engagement varied and flexible

Children and young people's commitments and priorities change and this is heightened by external pressures such as exams, caring for family members or siblings, social lives! Making engagement flexible and not penalising them for being unable to make a regular commitment will help to maintain engagement after all of your hard work to get them involved in the first place. Accepting a more transient level of participation might help to make their involvement in LHW more workable.

Ensuring varied opportunities for getting involved will also help to keep people interested and widen the opportunities for people to fit it in with their lives and preferences.

## Accept defeat...and then get over it

You can't do everything and it is unlikely that you will be able to make LHW a success for every young person in your area. Be realistic with your expectations for the young people involved.

“ Having more interactive displays and activities kept the young people engaged.

Avoid lengthy talks. ”

“ **Kent LINK**  
I appreciate the flexible working hours of the PALS volunteering scheme. I have not volunteered in over two months due to my final year workload but I know I can pick up my post when it is more convenient for me. ”

**Young PALs volunteer**

**BE CREATIVE  
BE FLEXIBLE**

## If you can't get them to come to you...go to them

Identify opportunities in your local area to work with children and young people in their own spaces. Perhaps host a Healthwatch meeting there and get them to set the agenda, chair the event and organise the feedback to the rest of the Healthwatch group. Getting out and about will also help in areas where distance and travel barriers are an issue.

LINK wisdom

**Slough LINK** went to the town centre during the summer holiday and canvassed young people on the street.

**Islington LINK** offer to go to groups and do a presentation about LINK and what it does.

**Bournemouth LINK** went to youth clubs and youth advice centres to get young people's views.

LINK wisdom

In a project initiated by a young member, **Leicestershire LINK** thought the quickest route to the most varied group of young people would be via schools and so they embarked on a 'Health Awareness Roadshow'.

The roadshow visited four schools, with over 750 young people taking part in over 48 health workshops. The workshops were designed and delivered in partnership with health and voluntary sector organisations in the area and covered a range of topics including eating disorders, mental health, rights at the doctor, healthy eating and self harm. The variety of workshops gave the schools choice for their students.



LINK wisdom

**Brighton and Hove LINK** organised stands at a number of parents evenings in schools and held activities for young people at local events.

The LINK also participated in an existing young people's unemployment scheme. The three young people they supported all went on to employment.

## Piggyback!

There is ALWAYS something going on in your area that you can piggyback on.

What local projects are there and what events are taking place that you can use to build relationships and promote the benefits of Healthwatch?

## Make use of free resources

You don't need massive budgets to gain new skills and knowledge. Lots of small voluntary organisations make the most of existing free training, conferences and events as advertised via CVSS and other online networks, resources and free e-bulletins.

As a social enterprise you should be eligible for most free or subsidised training.

Offering training opportunities to volunteers not only improves the knowledge within the LHW but gives volunteers a role and an opportunity for personal development.

LINK wisdom

Some LINKs signed up to NCB's free health bulletin that contains information about emerging policy, free events, training and resources. Email [health@ncb.org.uk](mailto:health@ncb.org.uk) to sign up.

You can sign up to Healthwatch England's newsletter at: [www.healthwatch.co.uk](http://www.healthwatch.co.uk)

## Make the most of free (or cheap) press

Any opportunity to increase local knowledge about LHW and make it a household name is going to be useful. Lots of LINKs found that the vast majority of young people didn't even know that LINK existed.

Promote and celebrate your work and especially that of your young members.

Get to know your local newspaper contacts, student press, online networks and free bulletins.



**Bristol LINK** ran a project that gave young black carers a chance to explore their thoughts about health services. They created a striking mural that was used to promote the work of the LINK in the local newspaper and online.

## Clear and coordinated

Reminders are useful but keep the amount of information and the number of emails you send to young people and professional gatekeepers as low in volume as possible to avoid confusion, lost details and frustration.

LINK wisdom

**Leeds LINK** experienced an increased interest from students after posting an advert in a student union magazine.

## Get real, avoid jargon

Strengthen your communication by using examples of how LHW has made a difference for individuals and communities.

Using examples to illustrate LHW makes it easier for people to understand what LHW does - making a stronger case for them to get involved.

JARGON

NARRATIVE EXAMPLES

LHW is the independent consumer champion for the public to promote better outcomes in health and social care for all.

Joe, 15 got in touch with LHW when he couldn't get an appointment with his GP without telling his parents

## Do you really want me?

Make sure that the messages you are giving out are clear, consistent and backed up by all aspects of the Healthwatch.

Some LINKs websites invited young people to get involved but more often than not online registrations and sign up forms didn't have a field for those aged under 18 or 16, and the images used on most LINKs websites were rarely representative of the younger membership (or welcoming).

GET INVOLVED WITH HEALTHWATCH



# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

## Facebook and Twitter are for life not just for Christmas (or getting more young people in your stats)

Facebook and Twitter are often lauded as the one-stop-shop to young people's engagement but NCB's research and Kent LINK's work has found that social media is better used as a provider of information than as a replacement for face-to-face interaction.

Social media is also high maintenance, requiring a well thought through strategy and regular updating. It can pose issues around accessibility for some and confidentiality for others. The technology changes rapidly and you need to keep on top of new trends. And some people just want to keep it social!

Don't discount it but perhaps think carefully about how it can add value rather than replace other forms of communication.

And most importantly - ask the advice of a wide range of young people in your area before you get stuck in.

Young people very rarely respond to emails and use Facebook only for gaining information rather than interaction.

Kent LINK young people's development worker

I'm fed up of people doing everything just on the internet. I don't have a computer at home so have to check things out at school or the youth centre.

Kent Young LINK member

## Youthproof it

Get young people involved BEFORE you start designing materials, events and workshops or at the very least get them involved to check things over to make sure they are up to scratch.

LINK wisdom

**LINK Vice Versa in Bedford** is a group of young people who are able to provide support to organisations in the area about how to make their publicity, publications and services more suitable and successful for young people.

**Sefton LINK** commissioned Sefton Young Advisors to 'youth proof' its promotional material.

## Know your numbers, use your stats

In addition to your duty to work in a way that represents your local community, utilising information about your local area and demographics can help you think about who you need to include in your LHW. Between 12-30% of your population will be children and young people. Review key documents, such as your areas Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Health and Wellbeing Strategies.

ChiMat ([www.chimat.org.uk](http://www.chimat.org.uk)) has lots of data and tools to help you find out about children and young people in your area.

### LINK wisdom

Brighton and Hove LINK used their local Children and Young People's Plan and information from the Office for National Statistics to get a good idea of the young people in their area, for example the percentage of vulnerable children.

### If Kent had 100 children .....



## Involving schools

Kent LINK found that working with schools was incredibly beneficial for them and young people frequently mentioned school as the top place for LINKs to reach them. Kent LINKs top tips for working with schools were:

- ▶ **WHEN:** Schools were more likely to be engaged after the Christmas break but before the exam period in May/June.
- ▶ **WHO:** Make sure letters/emails are addressed to someone by name to make sure they don't get lost in the system.
- ▶ **HOW:** Offer a hook, e.g. aligning to their curriculum, course syllabus, PSHE learning.
- ▶ Schools were also more open to a half day style of event.

“ Always state it's free, we don't have to do anything, and it ticks one of our boxes, i.e. complements curriculum/ PSHE learning/ Health Schools etc. ”  
Headteacher working with Devon LINK

# BE SMART

## Know what you are supposed to do before you try to do it

This might sound daft but NCB's research showed that a handful of LINKs thought that children and young people's health services were outside of their remit.

- ▶ Be clear about what it is you are supposed to do, how LHW fits into and interacts with the new health structures
- ▶ Be clear about LHW's responsibilities in relation to children and young people's health improvement, health services and social care services
- ▶ Be clear about children and young people's rights when accessing health services and making choices
- ▶ Share the information with your membership and community in plain English.

The Local Government (LGA) website has some useful briefings: [www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)

“ Young people are proving great advocates in recruiting new participants ”  
Devon LINK

## Involve children and young people in planning and promotion

Not only does this show your commitment to involving children and young people meaningfully but it helps you plan effectively and use resources efficiently.

For example, young people can advise on what times of the year are busy for them due to school or let you know about clashes with other local, national or worldwide events that may prove more popular than yours!



## It's not all sex and drugs you know

Lots of LINK legacy documents list sexual health, drugs and smoking as topics that were covered in relation to young people.

These are important issues but some LINKs were surprised by the issues that young people raised, such as peer pressure, exams stress, acne and body image. The LINKs recognised that young people sometimes saw health and social care quite differently.



Mental Health is a massive issue. Everyone's always more focused on sexual health/drugs and alcohol because you can see the effect they have.



Young person at Kent LINK event

## Aligning with wider priorities

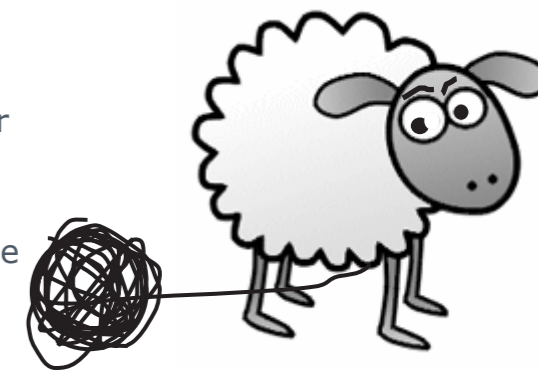
Keep up to date with national bodies, like Healthwatch England and neighbouring LHW (you can find the contact details on HWE's website) to make sure that you are making the links with their priorities that will help your work.

## How long is a piece of string?

"What are the health issues affecting adults in your area?"

How would you answer this question? Where to start? Lots of people who consult with young people about health are guilty of asking questions that are not only vast and vague but categorise young people into a homogeneous group. Individuals can provide a perspective but they can't speak for a whole age group.

Involving them in planning for activities and priorities can help to narrow down the focus and provide you with more useful information.



## FAQs

Do you know what the most common health and social care topics and issues that children and young people may approach LHW about? Do you know where to direct them?



They came back to us with issues like peer pressure and body image. How they view health and social care is quite different to how the LINK traditionally thought of health. We tended to think of it from a service provision point of view.



NCB research participant

# KNOW THE ISSUES

## Get outside help and knowledge

LHW isn't going to be able to provide specialist knowledge for the needs of every young person in the area.

Finding out about organisations and making connections to existing groups will provide support to:

- ▶ Reach under-consulted groups
- ▶ Reach over-consulted groups
- ▶ Discuss sensitive issues.

For example, the Children and Young People HIV Network has a resource site and free e-bulletin for anybody interested in issues affecting children and young people living with and/or affected by HIV.

[www.ncb.org.uk/hiv](http://www.ncb.org.uk/hiv)

### LINK wisdom

Kent LINK felt that working with other groups reduced the risk over-using a particular group. If workers felt that the young people were at risk of consultation fatigue they could flag it and signpost the LINK on to other sources of help.

### LINK wisdom

Barnsley LINK worked with a hospital and local school for children and young people with special educational needs in order to engage with young people who may have ongoing health issues and therefore a particular interest in the work of the LINK.

## Why don't you like us?

It's not all about you!

Many LINKs spent a lot of their precious engagement time with children and young people asking them why they didn't want to be involved in the LINK.

Yes, it's good to ask for feedback but be bold, be exciting – do something different and people will want to be involved.

Similarly make sure that you don't get stuck just asking what is wrong with things, and not involving young people in designing solutions.

## Attitudes and perception

A positive attitude towards children and young people was said to be vital to the success of their involvement. It helped them to feel welcomed, valued and respected and demonstrated commitment to them being involved across the organisation's work.

Working directly with children and young people helped to change some LINKs staff and volunteers' attitudes towards them; improving their awareness of issues that affect children and young people and the benefits of working with them. This changed attitudes to future working with children and young people and also acted as an impetus to work with other 'easy to ignore' groups such as homeless people and travellers.

“Accept that supporting young people is time consuming but definitely worth the investment.”

Devon LINK

## Involvement in all LHW functions

What you do will be better if you follow through on your commitment to including children and young people in every aspect of LHW.

## Training

Are your staff and volunteers confident to work with people of different ages and backgrounds? Would they benefit from diversity or participation training?

Confidence amongst LINKs staff and volunteers was a recurring theme in NCB's research, but it may also be your young volunteers who need training to enable them to feel comfortable and confident to contribute.

Providing training will improve your LHW and provide development opportunities for volunteers that make them feel valued and committed to continued involvement.

## Support

Nurturing and support were described by LINKs as crucial aspects of involving children and young people.

In terms of maintaining a group they said it was essential to show that their input was valued, as well as putting added effort into extra reminders and maintaining regular contact.

# COMMITMENT

## Equality and diversity

Have you identified the different and diverse groups of children and young people that you will need to work with and the issues they face?

Are you committed to improving health and social care services for everybody that uses them?

It is important to get the widest input possible to ensure that LHW is an accessible and successful consumer champion for everyone.

LINK wisdom

**Kensington and Chelsea LINK** worked with a local outreach team during the nights to talk to homeless people in the borough about their experiences of health and social care services.

The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) [VIPER project](#) has resources to support organisations to give disabled children and young people in decisions that affect them:

CDC also has resources such as '[Disabled children: a legal handbook](#)', a guide to the legal rights of disabled children and their families in England and Wales. It explains the difference between what public bodies must do to support disabled children and that which they may do.



LINK wisdom

Leicester LINK based their engagement procedures on the 'Hear by Right' guidelines, in line with the councils, NHS, school nurses, health visitors, Connexions and many voluntary sector organisations in Leicester.

By adopting the Hear By Right strategy, the LINK immediately benefited from a wider network of organisations who were already engaging with young people.

## Protocols, procedures and standards

A comprehensive check list of things that need to be considered when working with children and young people will be incredibly valuable for your staff and volunteers.

The list should include information on: transport, reminders, consent, parental responsibility, safeguarding, confidentiality and data protection, incentives and rewards, expenses, criminal record checks.

Look into existing standards that you may be able to adopt to support your work with children and young people.

## Be honest - is it boring?

Are young people bored because they are young people or is it because it is boring?

In the same way as most adults are reluctant to give up precious free time to do things that they find boring, young people are unlikely to commit to something that is mostly dull.

Similarly, young people can endure boring bits, but they need to be counteracted with clear messages about why things have to be done in a certain way, what the benefits and outcomes will be and balanced with more rewarding, fun or social tasks/events.

LINK wisdom

One LINK bravely reported that a young people's survey initially called 'M8 Av UR Say!', was changed to the simpler 'Have Your Say' following consultation with various young people's groups who considered the original title patronising and unappealing. Failed marketing averted!

LINK wisdom

One young Sefton LINK volunteer, who represented young people's view on the steering group expressed frustration at some of the processes, pointing out that deciding how minutes should be produced took weeks - BORING!

## Remember - you're probably not cool

Sorry.

Don't try to assume that you know what young people will like - you might get it right but you might not.

Remember to run things past your target audience.

## Get it right for young people - get it right for everyone

The barriers to involvement that young people reported with LINKs will be the same as those experienced by many members of your local community, e.g. not able or willing to attend meetings, use of jargon, a lack of confidence or understanding as to why they should get involved.

If you can make LHW inviting for young people to get involved the likelihood is that you will be doing things that encourage other members of the community to get involved. A win-win situation! NCB's research revealed that for some LINKs the different ways of working adopted to work with young people led to a change in their approach to working with older people.

## Break from the norm

Lots of people don't feel comfortable talking about issues in a traditional meeting setting so why not combine it with another activity.

For example, Devon LINK combined a discussion around health issues with smoothie making.

NCB staff and a group of young people excluded from school took a walk through their local area to help them think about what was important to them in their local environment.

Chatting about feeling unsafe from halfway up a tree they had just climbed gave them a sense of freedom to express what changes they would like to see in the park.



“

New engagement methods in meetings can be fun and motivating for everyone - not just young people

”

Barnsley LINK

“

Pizza works well!  
NCB research participant

”

## Don't forget the small things

Small adaptations to how you do things can make a big difference. For example make sure you always provide refreshments at events, provide freepost or stamped addressed envelope for parental permission mail, send a quick text reminder before meetings, thank people for coming along.

Incentives and rewards were seen as an important way to attract people to get involved, as well as a thank you for continued engagement.

## Not just young people

Try to include children and young people as individuals in their own right, with their own identity beyond that of 'child' or 'young person'.

- ▶ What are they interested in?
- ▶ Who else would they like to support?
- ▶ What skills do they have to share?

**Also**, remember that **younger children** can input too. For example, giving nursery children a simple camera and asking them to take photos of the things in their nursery that they like can give a completely new perspective on what is important to them. The photos they have taken can help to plan changes to their environment and gives them the opportunity to be involved in the whole planning process.

## Don't forget the social aspect

Having an opportunity to make new friends and seeing familiar faces is often given as one of the main incentives for getting involved in groups and activities - so don't forget to consider it in your planning and marketing.

“

Virtual (online) meetings have been suggested but in our experience face-to-face contact is essential to maintain momentum and commitment to the group.

”

Devon LINK

# DIFFERENT INVOLVEMENT

## Speaking for themselves

Where possible children and young people should be supported to represent their peers in formal health and social care structures and/or present their views first hand to decision makers in the area.

You can explore how they can be involved in local health and wellbeing boards, local authorities and clinical commissioning groups as well as with local Healthwatch.

## Inspire lasting change

Across health professionals, the LINKs projects were said to have created or increased a desire to work and communicate with children and young people and to do so directly rather than only via their parents.

“The NHS used the young people’s film for staff training and the communications team have used it for their website and to show how to engage with young people and raise awareness of their concerns.”

Kensington LINK

## Promoting their views

Sometimes it won’t be appropriate or possible to include children and young people, or indeed other members of the public, in direct discussions with decision makers.

Most of the work that LINKs did with children and young people was gathering views such as doing surveys and consultations with them. This is important and valid as long as the process has been carried out thoughtfully and thoroughly and everyone involved is kept informed during the process.

LHW should ensure good links with the children and young people’s leads within the area so that their views can be indirectly fed in on a regular basis.

“The actual voice of the young people is powerful when speaking to commissioners.”

Sutton LINK

## Use it, don’t lose it

If you go to the effort of getting children and young people’s input don’t just sit on the information or put it in a cupboard.

“We have regular meetings with the local authority Children’s Strategic Manager.”

Dorset LINK

## A real opportunity

The *‘We would like to make a change’* report on children and young people’s participation in strategic health decision-making from the Office of the Children’s Commissioner provides a useful insight into current involvement in health service design and delivery.

It sees the current reforms as a real opportunity to be bold: to embed, strengthen and promote the involvement of children in decision-making throughout the system.

## Within local Healthwatch

It’s just as important that children and young people are involved in the governance of your local Healthwatch. They can be involved as decision makers, e.g. having a place alongside adults on the board or their input should be represented during LHW decision making processes. For example some LINKs set up children and young people’s sub-committees made up of volunteers and LINKs staff who had experience of working with or on behalf of children and young people.

“Our children and young people subgroup meets quarterly to discuss the outreach work and identify any areas where we feel work needs doing.”

NCB research participant

# ACCESS TO DECISION MAKERS

## Recognition, feedback & celebration

Whatever their involvement, it is very important to make sure children and young people know where their views will be fed in right from the start and what has happened to their ideas, opinions and suggestions. For example, not everyone will want to present their work in front of a health and wellbeing board, but you do need to make sure that everyone who was involved in generating the content for that presentation finds out about what happened and also what is GOING to happen next.

Sometimes the next steps will be out of your control so it is important to manage expectations about what changes might happen and explain clearly when things don’t change as a result of their input.

You can feedback in lots of ways: in person, through newsletters, by email, by phone, through contacts or through celebration events. Find out what works best for the children and young people you work with.

And, don’t forget to ask for feedback about how you did and how the process worked for everyone involved.

Demonstrating to the whole community how children and young people have been listened to is also crucial.



**Kensington and Chelsea LINK** announcing the prize winners of ‘The Den’ project.



## TIPS, QUOTES, DOS AND DON'TS

For three years the National Children's Bureau (NCB) was funded by the Department of Health to champion Local Involvement Networks' (LINKs) and local Healthwatch pathfinders' engagement with children and young people. This resource pulls together some of the key findings from this project and provides ideas and examples to help you plan how children and young people can be involved in the work of local Healthwatch.

NCB worked with 75 different organisations and undertook training and consultancy; policy and advocacy; research; consultations with children and young people; and information and networking provision.

Thank you to all of the children and young people, LINKs and Healthwatch pathfinder staff and volunteers whose hard work contributed to this document.

To find out more about this project including the source material for this resource go to:

[www.ncb.org.uk/healthwatch](http://www.ncb.org.uk/healthwatch)

The website also includes details of the support and training available from NCB.

For further information email:

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Working with children,  
for children