

CYCJ's Participation and Engagement Strategy

As we highlighted in [our 2020-25 strategy](#), CYCJ's focus over the coming years is to assist Scotland to comply with international commitments for children and young people in conflict with the law, including supporting implementation and adherence to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Central within that ambition is the role of participation as a means of creating change, privileging the voice of those with experience of the justice systems, and shaping practice and policy. Not only does this reflect Scotland's obligation to meet Article 12 of the UNCRC, it has been proven to have many benefits for the individual, the organisations involved and for those involved in delivering support.

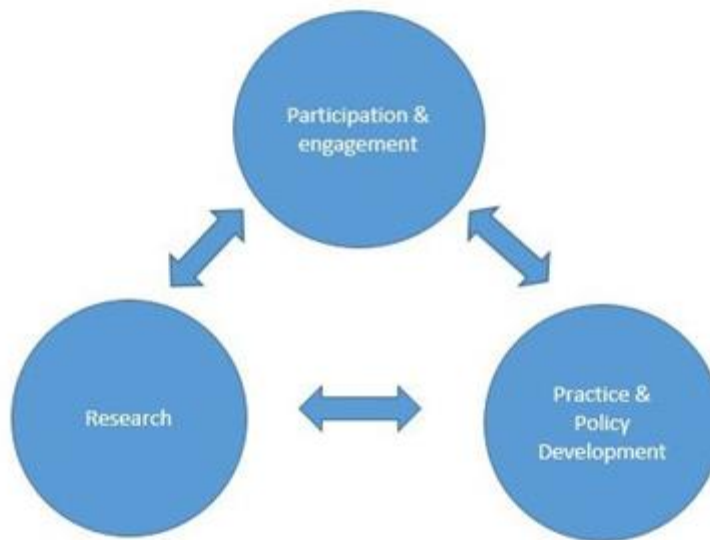
Alongside Scotland's move towards UNCRC incorporation, CYCJ has changed its name, and in doing so has refocused its purpose. Our change of name not only reflects a move away from stigmatising labels, but is emblematic of our commitment to putting children and young people at the centre of what we do. Achieving that requires more than a play on words or a rebranding process. Rather, CYCJ acknowledges that reviewing and reshaping what we do, and how we do it, is essential if we are to live up to the title of the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice.

At CYCJ, we know that many children and young people with experience of the justice systems have a desire to express their views, to be listened to and - perhaps most importantly - to be heard. By doing so, we want to be able to make changes to the various systems which impact on the lives of those who come into conflict with the law.

Work undertaken by CYCJ

CYCJ continues to assist practitioners, policy makers and managers to support children and young people who come into conflict with the law. We do this through undertaking research in this area, and offering practice and policy development support. This work is supplemented and underpinned by our communication and knowledge exchange work, which focuses on improving awareness of evidence in different forms, and supporting dialogue between different perspectives, types of knowledge and viewpoints.

In recognition of the importance of the issue, participation and engagement is now a distinct workstream in itself, through which CYCJ aims to make participation the norm throughout the youth justice sector, and to support organisations to develop their practice. Not only will this aspect of our work influence and shape our partners' work, it will also influence both the research and the policy and practice elements of CYCJ's work.



CYCJ acknowledges that a truly participative organisation is one which embeds and incorporates participation throughout all strands of its work. This is why we will ensure that opportunities to participate and engage with us are woven throughout all aspects of our work: research; practice and policy; communications and knowledge exchange.

CYCJ's model of participation

CYCJ's participation work will be led and driven by the views of children and young people who have experience of the justice systems, adopting a youth-led, flexible and responsive approach which seeks to provide the platform and support to influence change. Participation events and activities will have a relaxed atmosphere, with a focus on building relationships, kindness and being genuine.

Whilst mindful of the varied approaches that can be taken to achieve this, CYCJ adopts the model proposed by Laura Lundy which calls for us to provide the space for children to express their views, support to express their voice, an audience to hear these opinions and for the voices of these children to be given due influence and weight.



CYCJ will incorporate this approach in the following ways:

- **Space:** CYCJ will generate opportunities for children and young people with experience of the justice systems to express their views. This includes Youth Justice Voices and other similar projects, blogs, attending events and other similar opportunities. Acknowledging that these individuals may require additional support, provision will be made that ensures that justice experienced children and young people feel welcome, valued included and safe in these spaces.
- **Voice:** In addition to seeking out voices that are often overlooked, CYCJ will support individuals to express their views without pressure and in a variety of mediums. This will include guiding and accompanying them through the process, offering practical and emotional support where necessary. CYCJ will ensure that the welfare of the individuals is attended to throughout the participation period, including aftercare as necessary.
- **Audience:** Drawing on CYCJ's links to national and local government, and its connections to each role of the workforce, CYCJ will seek to amplify the voice of children and young people who have experience of the justice systems by providing access to those who have power over decision-making processes. We will also draw on these relationships to support decision makers to understand the participation process, to engage in participatory activities and to promote the dialogue between those in positions of authority and those with lived experience. CYCJ will seek to leverage its position to ensure that those with experience of the justice systems enjoy opportunities to speak directly with those in positions of power, with hierarchy removed as much as possible. In all streams of CYCJ's work, consideration will be given to platforming the voice of experience, and incorporating these views into the outputs delivered by CYCJ.
- **Influence:** CYCJ will make use of its strong connections with decision makers at legislative, policy and practice levels to forward the views of children and young people with justice experience, and indeed will seek to have these views heard directly from those affected where appropriate. CYCJ will strive to ensure that these views are given consideration and due weight during decision-making processes, with feedback provided to those who gave the views in order to close feedback loops. CYCJ will seek to encourage partners to adopt a similar position, and use our position within the sector to demonstrate the value of amplifying the voices of young people with experience of the justice systems. We will endeavour to promote a more equal distribution of power and authority wherever possible.

What principles underpin CYCJ's practice?

Having listened to the expertise of children and young people who have experience of the justice systems, CYCJ will incorporate the following principles into its practice:

- **Proactive inclusion:** CYCJ will ensure that those with experience of the justice systems are able to influence and shape the work that CYCJ carries out. This includes opportunities to meet the staff at CYCJ across all workstreams, contributing towards recruitment of staff, and being treated as partners in the work that we carry out. In addition to facilitated meetings between the Executive Governance Group (EGG) and young people, consideration will be given by EGG as to the best way of representing the views of children and young people with experience of the justice systems at that forum, including inviting a suitable representative onto the EGG. CYCJ will proactively create opportunities for those with lived experience of the justice systems to shape the direction of future strategies and annual workplans.
- **Valuing expertise:** CYCJ acknowledges that when those with experience of the justice systems are delivering a task for the centre, the time and expertise of individuals should result in fair compensation for their effort. This will reflect the complexity of the task and be mindful of the current national living wage. Moreover, CYCJ will ensure that everyone who engages with our work will feel that their opinions matter, that their insights have been acknowledged and that their contributions have been important in the overall work of the centre.
- **Research:** In addition to having the opportunity to take part in research, those with experience of the justice systems will have responsibility to influence and recommend a portion of CYCJ's research plan each year. Moreover, participation will include opportunities for individuals to take part in each stage of the research process: design, fieldwork, analysis, presentation and dissemination. Where possible, roles will be found that can contribute to recruitment, transcription, data visualisation, graphics and other similar roles.
- **Mutual benefit:** Those taking part in participatory activities will experience mutual benefit from it; this could be in the form of broadening social circles, taking part in activities, or accessing education, training or work experience. CYCJ will explore the suitability of inclusive accreditation awards. They will also utilise the range of opportunities within the organisation, the University of Strathclyde, and our partners in the youth justice sector to identify mutually beneficial arrangements. Where possible, opportunities could be created to learn about finance, communications, policy and other similar roles.
- **Accessibility:** CYCJ will ensure that the centre is accessible to children and young people across the country. This includes providing participatory opportunities in all locations across Scotland, and supporting online participation. CYCJ will also develop our social media presence to attract and engage with children and young people who have contact with the justice systems. Reports that are produced will be made available in a less technical or academic form, pulling the content into a more appealing and attractive format. Similarly, CYCJ's e-bulletin will include content that is specifically aimed at those with experience of the justice system and will highlight relevant opportunities.
- **Trauma responsive:** CYCJ will bear in mind the challenges that many children and young people have encountered, and will ensure that we behave in a way that provides safety, trust and support, to anyone who comes into contact with the centre. CYCJ will remain open, honest and friendly, and will ensure that anyone taking part is treated with respect and feels valued. Conversations between individuals and those supporting them will remain confidential and only shared with others with the informed consent of the individual, or when someone is at risk. CYCJ will provide the necessary support before, during and after participation activities to ensure no excessive distress is caused. This will mean ensuring that staff are trained appropriately to deal with any particular issue. We will continue to offer access to opportunities to children and young people even when they have not been able to attend every time.
- **Transparency:** CYCJ will be open and transparent at all times, particularly in stating what the centre can or cannot achieve unilaterally. We will ensure that those who take part in our

CYCJ is primarily funded by the Scottish Government and hosted by the University of Strathclyde.

participation work are aware of the limitations that exist, and provide feedback on what impact their views have had.

What will CYCJ achieve by 2025?

Incorporating the principles highlighted above, CYCJ will set out to achieve the following milestones by 2025:

- **Create opportunities:** CYCJ will leverage relationships with our partners to create opportunities for children and young people with experience of the justice systems to develop new skills, talents and experience. CYCJ will continue to proactively seek out opportunities for those with experience of the justice systems to work - on a paid basis - alongside the various teams within the organisation. CYCJ will support partners in Further Education and Higher Education to widen access to those with a history of contact with the justice systems. CYCJ will also identify shadowing or mentoring opportunities within CYCJ, or alongside our partners, which further expand the opportunities available to those with lived experience of the justice systems.
- **Connection across the country:** Drawing on a range of social media approaches, online platforms and digital mediums CYCJ will have a broad reach that means that children and young people throughout Scotland can easily access the resources, information and opportunities available from CYCJ. CYCJ will have created a steering group of justice experienced young people who will influence its participation work, with particular attempts made to invite membership from around the country.
- **Youth led research:** CYCJ will commit to involving children and young people with experience of the justice systems within our research plans. In some instances this will include devising, designing, undertaking, analysing and disseminating the research, whilst providing opportunities for children and young people to develop new skills. CYCJ will endeavour to support justice experienced children and young people who have an interest in research.
- **Presence:** CYCJ will endeavour to ensure that decision-making processes within the youth justice sector listen to and act upon the voice of those who have personal experience of the justice systems. CYCJ will promote means through which this can be done in a trauma responsive manner, acknowledging that bespoke approaches will be required. CYCJ will challenge partners to make participation the norm within the youth justice sector.
- **Public attitude:** CYCJ will strive to change the attitude and narrative around children who cause harm to others. In doing so, CYCJ will draw on all available resources and connections to highlight the challenges faced by this group of young people, but also the underlying strengths and qualities that each possess.

This strategy was co-produced by Marie Gibson, Dale Hibbard, Chris Marshall, Rosie Moore and Bella McQuat alongside Beth-Anne Logan and the CYCJ team. CYCJ wishes to thank them for sharing their expertise and ideas during the creation of this strategy.