

CROYDON YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE – VOICE PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

This strategy outlines the ongoing approach for the Youth Justice Service to promote and enhance voice participation from children, victims and families known to the Service. It aims to empower young individuals and parents/carers to actively engage, contribute, and lead in decision-making processes, fostering their personal growth and driving positive change. It is anticipated that their involvement will help the Service to self-reflect and listen to the needs of those using the Service leading to positive outcomes.

By establishing a comprehensive voice participation strategy, we intend to strengthen our commitment of inclusivity, innovation, and sustainable service development.

This strategy has been devised in consultation with Leaders Unlocked a non-profit organisation that enables young people and underrepresented groups to have a stronger voice on issues that impact them directly, who have experience of the Criminal Justice System. This objectivity and expertise has helped shaped our vision and the intention of this strategy.

This strategy does not override the Local Authorities Youth Participation Strategy which should be read in conjunction.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

This Service strategy contributes to the overall Croydon Council Youth voice strategy, the aim of this document is to capture the different ways that the Youth Justice Service captures the views of children and their families within a variety of operational areas. This includes projects that have been on-going including the quarterly youth consultation, as well as new initiatives such as the creation of a more permanent youth forum as well as capturing the views of young victims of crimes.

The strategy follows Child First Principles –

- To see children as children
- Develop pro-social identity for positive child outcomes.
- Collaboration with children
- Promote diversion.

1.2 Purpose of the Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that Children, young people and families who engage with the Youth Justice Service have an opportunity to share their views and experiences, as well as use those views and experiences to improve the quality of service and help enhance practice in line with Child-First Principles – that the delivery of our service

is informed by child-focused, developmentally informed, acknowledges structural barriers and meets the needs of children.

2. RATIONALE FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

2.1 Benefits of Youth Involvement

Involving young people in decision-making offers numerous advantages. Firstly, it fosters a sense of civic responsibility and engagement among young people, promoting active participation in community affairs. Secondly, it ensures that policies and initiatives better reflect the needs and aspirations of the younger generation, contributing to more inclusive and effective governance.

Additionally, it can lead to innovative solutions to complex challenges, as young people often bring fresh perspectives and creative ideas. Lastly, involving children in decision-making processes builds trust and bridges generational gaps, creating a stronger sense of unity and cooperation within the community, ultimately benefiting service delivery and society as a whole.

2.2 Linkages to Organizational/Community Goals.

Croydon Youth Justice Service operates in a number of spaces – Court, Community, Custody and delivers a victim service. Ensuring children’s voices are heard is important in achieving high quality services that are felt as meaningful and purposeful. Organisational goals include the following:

- In line with the Service(s) Child First approach
- Ensuring voices of minority groups are heard and the service is culturally competent and sensitive.
- Using voices to help steer organisational goals such as the prevention and reduction of youth crime.
- Ensuring parents and carers are heard and the service acts to empower parents and at times advocate on behalf of parents/families/carers.

3. PRINCIPLES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

3.1 Inclusivity and Diversity

Inclusivity in youth participation means ensuring that a wide range of voices, backgrounds, and perspectives are represented and heard. It involves actively seeking input from diverse groups within the community, including different ethnicities, genders, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Embracing diversity in decision-making enhances the legitimacy of Service actions, fosters a sense of

belonging, and results in policies that better address the needs and concerns of the entire youth population.

3.2 Meaningful Engagement

Meaningful engagement goes beyond tokenism; it entails actively involving children in a way that their contributions genuinely influence decisions. It necessitates creating opportunities for open dialogue, soliciting feedback, and considering public input in policy development. Meaningful engagement empowers children to feel a sense of ownership over local government decisions, enhancing transparency and accountability. It does not mean that every suggestion that young people put forward is implemented, but it does mean that those suggestions have been considered and children are provided with explanations as of why they were not feasible to implement.

3.3 Capacity Building

Capacity building involves strengthening the skills and knowledge of young people involved in decision-making processes. This can encompass training programs, workshops, and educational initiatives that equip participants with the tools needed to actively engage in governance. Capacity building ensures that stakeholders, including young people, are better prepared to contribute effectively to the decision-making process, improving the quality of outcomes. An example of this is providing a training in interviewing skills for young people taking part in interview panels.

3.4 Collaboration and Partnership

Collaboration and partnership refer to the practice of working together with various stakeholders, both within and outside Croydon council, to achieve common goals. Engaging in partnerships with community organizations and businesses can lead to more comprehensive and effective solutions to local issues. Such collaborations leverage collective expertise, resources, and networks, facilitating the implementation of policies and initiatives that benefit the community as a whole.

4. KEY STAKEHOLDERS

4.1 Youth Representatives

This includes inviting young people that engage with the YJS, be it as perpetrator or victim of crime to have a voice. We aim to consult with those who use the Service to help develop the Service – this may include children and young people being

involved in recruitment processes and having young people present during strategic discussions on the development of Services.

4.2 Adult Allies and Mentors

This includes all professionals working for YJS and Croydon council, as well as community organisations working in the youth justice space. The Youth Justice Service is currently a stakeholder within My Endz a community based initiative that includes statutory and community based partners to tackle Serious Youth Violence. Within this partnership there are Youth Ambassadors who assist and guide the partnership within the community- based work, including the Youth Justice Service.

4.3 Leadership and Decision-Makers

This includes members of the Youth Justice board (Service governing body) as well as senior management of the YJS. Children and young people's attendance and/or participation through feedback of videos/audio will be presented at the Board and parents/carers also given the same opportunity.

5. STRATEGIC GOALS AND INITIATIVES

5.1 Consulting young people in the Youth Justice System

Croydon Youth Justice Service is committed to creating a space for children and young people going through the Youth Justice System, to be able to feedback on their experience in a meaningful way. This is currently done through: feedback questionnaires following Referral Order Community Panels, Turnaround Project end of programme Surveys, quarterly consultation forums (which are done in a group session using mentimeter software and are collected anonymously), Court questionnaires completed at Court, Custody and Resettlement feedback forms.

The aim of these consultations and questionnaires is to create a standardised feedback loop from young people entering the system and ensure that we keep improving the service we provide to our children.

5.2 Capturing the views of young victims and their parents/families

The new victim code (2024) outlines what victims can expect from Youth Justice victim service. Hearing the voices of victims, many of whom are children, is important to ensure that our services are not only achieving what is detailed in the victim code but that services are sensitive to the needs of victims. An end of service questionnaire will be issued to all victims and information collated and reviewed by the Restorative

Lead and Youth Justice Management Team. The Service is a victim centric service and therefore hearing the voices of those impacted by Youth Crime vital in shaping service delivery.

5.3 Integrating Youth Voices in Decision-Making

All the outcomes of group consultations and individual questionnaires are initially presented at the Youth Justice's weekly Manager's meeting as a standardised item. From here information is summarised, including any intended decision making or service change and presented to the Youth Justice's governance Board (Youth Crime Board).

Discussion points include the following -

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

- Creating Effective Communication Channels
- Promoting Youth Participation Opportunities
- Utilizing Social Media and Digital Platforms

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- Performance Metrics and Indicators
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Periodic Review and Adaptation

RESOURCE ALOCATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

- Budgeting for Youth Participation Initiatives
- Identifying Funding Sources

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND MITIGATIONS

- Overcoming Generational Stereotypes
- Balancing Youth and Adult Perspectives
- Addressing Participation Barriers

CONCLUSION

- Recap of Strategy Objectives
- Call to Action and Next Steps

By following the guidelines presented in this strategy, we commit to creating a dynamic environment where the voices, ideas, and energy of young individuals are valued and integrated into our organization's/community's endeavours. This strategy

document will serve as a roadmap for fostering youth participation within the YJS, thereby driving positive change and innovation.

- Sample Youth Participation Action Plan
- Guidelines for Engaging Youth in Decision-Making
- Case Studies of Successful Youth Participation Initiatives
- Feedback and Evaluation Forms

Area	Method	Frequency	Lead
Out of Court			
Referral Orders	Panel Questionnaires	Each panel and subsequent reviews (QR code contained on each report)	Referral Order Practice Manager and Co-ordinator
Court	Questionnaires on tablets	Each young person who has to report to Court staff will be asked if they would mind answering survey/questionnaire.	Court Practice Manager
Turnaround Project	End of programme evaluation	Each young person asked to complete once intervention has ended	Turnaround Officer
Custody and Resettlement	Prior to custody young person provided with evaluation form on how Youth Justice and the Secure Estate has engaged with them and how adequately they feel their resettlement has been considered.	Each young person asked to complete pre-release	Youth Justice Officers

Youth Participation Forum	Event held twice yearly to engage children to discuss the Service and their experiences of associated services. (Education/Police/Health/Social Care)	Bi-annually	Youth Engagement Team on behalf of Youth Justice
Community Safety	A community survey issued to young people on a yearly basis asking for their views on how safety within the borough can be improved and asking for their thoughts on their own personal safety.	Yearly	Community Safety/Youth Engagement/Youth Justice Officers (report produced by Community Safety).
Parents Evening	An invite for parents to meet with the Youth Justice Management Team and discuss – parenting adolescence in Croydon and how the Service can help empower parents to overcome some of the challenges posed.	Bi-annually	Youth Justice Management Team.
Youth Crime Board	Yearly invite for young people to attend one of the quarterly meetings to meet with Board members and express how they find the Service and living in Croydon. The challenges they pose and the changes they would like to see.	Yearly	Youth Justice Service Manager
Youth Justice Disproportionately Action Plan	A number of children invited as part of their reparation activity to help consult with how the Service works with groups who are over-represented.	Yearly	Court Practice Manager
Interventions	All interventions once completed are evaluation		Interventions Lead

	in discussion with the young people who participated. This included the Weapons Awareness Group (WAP), Positive Male Identity Group, Stars and Sista (female group)		
Engage Project	Engage Project delivers work in partnership with the Local Police, within the custody suite. The intervention sits within the prevention model associated with the Youth Justice Service. After each short term intervention is completed – children and young people will be invited to complete an evaluation.	At the end of each intervention	Engage Worker and Co-ordinator.