

RESOURCE

Solihull  
Children's Fund



The  
Children's  
Society



**Involving Children in Evaluating Services**

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### Introduction

The Children's Society is committed to the active involvement of children in the services they provide. In partnership with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Children's Society staff have delivered the Children's Fund and developed new ways of working with children to evaluate and quality assure services.

This report details how children have been prepared to evaluate services and give their feedback to the service provider.

Local experience has shown that services are most relevantly evaluated by the children who use them. Some children may find it easier to speak openly and honestly to their peers, rather than adults, about the services they participate in. Children will share their good and bad experiences with the young evaluators and these are included in the final report.

In the Children's Fund experience, most services are very receptive to this method and as a result make positive changes following the suggestions from the young evaluators. In addition, this supports the Make a Positive Contribution outcome of the Every Child Matters framework.

This guide uses the term "child" and "children" because most of this work has been developed in primary schools. However, the content is also appropriate to young people and has been used with young people up to 14 years of age.

### Involvement of children in evaluation

Each service will have their own way of selecting children for this task. In the Children's Fund, two examples about how we have selected the children are:

- If a service already has a regular group of children already involved in decision making then this group could be selected.
- If the service has contact with a larger group of children, a smaller evaluation group should be formed. Children can be selected by explaining what evaluation is and what is involved. Children are then invited to join the group and a consent form circulated for their parents to fill in. The individuals who return the forms begin the training to become young evaluators.

**Remember:** it has to be the child's decision to become a young evaluator!

At the selection stage, be very clear about how much time and effort participants will have to give to this process. The child needs to complete the whole training before actually evaluating services.

The training has been structured to cover 4 topics that are usually delivered in 6 hours. This can be over 6 separate 1-hour sessions, 2 half days or 1 whole day.

**Remember:** to include ice-breakers, regular breaks and refreshments whilst delivering the training. It is important not to overload the young evaluators with lots of information at once.

Each session begins with an icebreaker activity. These are particularly useful if the group don't know each other, or if the adult facilitator doesn't know the children. Suggested icebreakers can be seen in **appendix 1**.

### Training

Preparing children to become evaluators is essential. This gives them the opportunity to develop the skills needed for evaluation and think about how and what they will do during the actual visit.

The following 4 activities are the basis of training and can be adapted to suit the needs of the group. It is recommended that the first exercise look at asking pre-set questions, followed by role-play and then generating new questions. Finally, the young evaluators need to consider how they will record the information during the visit.

#### **Activity A: Thinking about good and bad services**

The aim of this activity is to express good and bad personal opinions relating to personal experiences and preferences.

**Time: 10 – 15 minutes per question**

- Arrange the children in pairs or small groups.
- Give each group 6 pre-set questions to discuss and write down their opinions.
- When all the opinions have been recorded, the groups come back together and feedback on their responses to the questions. From this, the group will be able to decide more clearly about what they enjoy and what makes good or bad provision.

Suggestions for pre-set questions can be seen in **appendix 2**.

#### ***Activity B: Role Play***

The aim of this activity is to practice sharing experiences and act out personal experiences of enjoyable or poor provision.

**Time: 45 minutes – 1 hour**

The activity follows on well from activity A by making it more realistic.

- Arrange the children into groups of about 6.
- Ask the group to choose what questions they want to act out based on what they have already discussed in activity A.

- Each group will have a chance to show everyone their role-play.

Our children loved taking part in this activity as they get really into the characters and it's a chance to share their past experiences.

### ***Activity C: Generating Questions***

The aim of this activity is to prepare children to generate new questions, practice interviewing and gain confidence in speaking to a larger audience.

The children will need to practice formulating the right kind of questions. With the right questions, they will be able to find out the relevant information about the person. With practice the children will develop these skills and be able to ask the sort of questions that get the information they need.

You can carry out or adapt the activities from the recruitment and selection guidelines, also published by Solihull Children's Fund.

**For children under 8 simple questions can be prepared, for example:**

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- What club do you go to?
- What are your hobbies?
- What is your favourite colour?

For children over 8 they formulate their own 5 questions about what they would like to find about each other.

Working in pairs, taking the roles of interviewer and interviewee, they go through the interview process. Then reverse roles.

When every pair has finished, bring them back together as a whole group. In turn, each pair will stand in front of everyone and introduce their partner and share what they have found out about each other.

### Recording

Children can use a variety of ways to record their findings. For example, video filming, Big Brother style diary room, writing down responses, photographs or newspaper articles.

#### ***Activity D: Thinking about recording***

Arrange the participants into small groups. Give each group a laminated picture card of different ways to record information. **(See appendix 3)**

Each group should discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each method. The facilitator's role is to prompt the group and to write down key points from their discussion.

Each group has to decide which recording method they would like to use. Bring the groups back together and get each group to share what they have decided.

From experience, filming and writing things down are normally the favourite tools. The whole group has to negotiate and decide which one recording method will be used.

### The Evaluation Visit

- A) Pre evaluation visit
- B) Evaluation visit
- C) Writing the final report
- D) Producing a DVD

#### ***A) Pre evaluation visit***

If the children are new to evaluation, it might be helpful to organise a pre-visit to the service. This visit can be useful as they can meet the staff, see the venue and the young people can join in with the activities. This helps them understand the new setting and think about what questions are most relevant.

Following that visit, the children can come up with the questions they want to ask the service users and staff. Commonly asked questions at the Children's Fund have been put into a standard template. The evaluators will also record their observations of some elements of the settings, such as safety and friendliness of staff (**appendix 4**).

Observations are normally score out of 3: -

- 1 = rubbish
- 2 = okay
- 3 = good

Scoring should be kept simple to avoid complicated and unnecessary decision-making. Scoring out of 5 can also be used.

After the final questions for the service users and staff have been decided, the group should practice interviewing each other. This will allow for any final alterations to the questions.

#### ***B) Evaluation visit***

The facilitator usually arranges the date and time of the evaluation visit with the organisation. The children themselves can do this if they prefer.

In Solihull, most evaluation visits have taken place during school holidays. This reduces time out of school and gives more time for preparation and writing up the findings. From experience, young evaluators have enjoyed getting involved in the whole process and

visiting the service. It's a good idea to bring along a digital camera so that the facilitator can take pictures of the young evaluators interviewing and joining in with the activities on offer. A written report with photographs also looks more interesting and shows what the children have achieved.

### ***C) Writing the Final Report***

Once the visit has been completed the children should come back to an office or a quiet place to write up their findings.

It's a good idea if the report is written on the same day as the evaluation, as it's fresh in the evaluator's mind. Leaving it to a few days later requires the facilitator to be more involved in prompting the children's memory and risks influencing their opinions.

The young evaluators in Solihull use the following headings in their reports:-

- What we did
- What we saw
- What people said
- Session Leader: (health and safety, they liked/ not liked, any changes they would make)
- Star rating and why
- Recommendations

The overall service is given a star rating out of 3 stars: -

- 1 = ok
- 2 = good
- 3 = excellent

The evaluators explain their star rating and write clearly about how they came to that decision. Recommendations for improvements are given to the service based on the answers from the interviewees or observations made.

The children decide what photos to put in and where they should go.

Usually, time constraints mean that the young evaluators give their written report to be typed by Children's Fund staff. Older young people could type the report themselves. When the report is typed, the

evaluators review it so they can check everything is okay before it goes to the service provider.

The children also like a copy of the report to show their parents and schools what they have been involved in. These copies can be anonymised to protect the details of the service if needed.

For a sample of a final report see **appendix 5**.

### ***D) Producing a DVD***

Another successful method of recording an evaluation is by filming the interviews and then editing all the footage onto a DVD. This is a very good way of showing what the children and young people have said and produces a high quality, interesting end product that can be shown to a variety of groups. However, this can be very time consuming and requires DVD editing computer software. From experience the following need to be considered when making a DVD report:

- Collect all the interviewees' consent slips prior to the interviews (refer to section 6).
- Find a quiet space in the building to carry out the interviews.
- Make sure that the young evaluators can use the video camera and there is a plug socket or enough battery power.
- Interview a representative group of the children at the service and to interview one or two members of staff.
- The facilitator or technician will need to transfer the videotape content onto a specialised computer with editing facilities.
- After the evaluation visit, the young evaluators will have to look at all the video footage and decide what information they want to keep for the finished DVD. Several secondary schools and colleges have editing facilities that you can arrange to use.
- Editing can be done in two ways. The facilitator can take the evaluators to the secondary school to use their facilities. If the facilitator is confident with the editing process, the group could borrow a laptop from the school and carry out the editing at a neutral venue.

### **Practical Considerations**

#### **Consent**

The young evaluators will need to have parental consent and the parent's contact details. Consent is also needed for photographs to be taken.

If the evaluators want to film the children at a service, then the parents of the interviewees need to fill out a consent form. Therefore children whose parents have not given consent cannot be interviewed. The consent forms should ideally be completed for the evaluators before the evaluation visit.

#### **Transport**

The evaluators will need to be able to get to the venue for the training and the evaluation visit. If a mini bus is used there will have to be two members of staff, one driver and one escort. If a car is used it is advisable that no more than 3 young evaluators should be transported on a journey.

#### **Refreshments**

Refreshments will need to be provided during the training and evaluation process. It is important that any dietary requirements are obtained.

#### **Time commitments to holiday / school activity**

The type of service will determine when the evaluating can be carried out. For example, a holiday play scheme or after school sport session. In our experience all of the evaluations have been conducted in the school holidays and after school. The facilitator needs to liaise with the service provider regarding evaluation dates and then liaise with the young evaluators to see what dates best suit them. This then enables the facilitator to put together a timetable.

#### **If a child wants to opt out**

As stated in section 2, the evaluators need to complete the whole training programme before going onto the visit stage. During the training, if a child decides that evaluation is not for them they can choose to leave.

If at a later stage a child decides to pull out try and have a discussion with them about why. Often an underlying issue with the facilitator or other children may need resolving. If on the evaluation day an evaluator is unable to participate, then it may be best to phone round to see if any other children are available.

### Conclusion

The benefits of involving children in evaluating services are:

- That children gain new skills and experience that increases their knowledge and understanding around this topic and carries over into other areas of their life.
- The service users (children) will have their views listened to, recorded and evidenced demonstrating to them that their voice is valued.
- The service provider will receive the evaluator's report that contains their findings and recommendations. The provider can use this information to improve their service.

### Appendix 1: Ice Breakers

The following exercises can be used as icebreakers at the start of a group session.

#### Exercise 1 – The Sun Always Shines On

- Get chairs into a circle. You will need one less chair than the number in the group.
- The facilitator starts to tell the group what will happen. They say “the sun always shines on people who have brown hair” then everyone with brown hair has to get up and change places. The facilitator has to try and get a seat.
- The person left standing starts again with a different reason why the sun shines on them.
- Examples of what to include could be: -
  - If you are wearing blue?
  - If you feel happy?
  - If you have a birthday in May?

#### Exercise 2 – Famous People

- Everyone in their group has the name of a famous person written on a post it notes on their back.
- They have to walk around the room to meet other members of the group and ask them about the person whose name is on their back. The other person can only answer “yes” or “no”.
- The aim of the exercise is to speak to as many people as possible and to try and work out the name of the famous person.

#### Exercise 3 – Find Someone Who

- Prepare a sheet beforehand with a number of questions that could be asked by the children to find out more about those in the group.
- Find someone who:-
  - travelled here by bus
  - knows the name of their MP
  - likes chocolate
  - supports Birmingham City Football Club
  - can tell a funny joke.

- The children are all given a copy of the questions and they have to go round the group to get answers to all their questions.
- The aim is to get the children to get to meet as many others in the group as possible.
- The game can be made more competitive by offering a prize for the first person to finish.

### **Exercise 4 – Name and Action Chain**

- Get group to sit or stand in a circle
- The first person in the group says their name and does an action
- The second person then repeats the first person's name and repeats the action before adding their own name and action.
- The third person then repeats the names and actions of the previous two in order and add their own.
- This continues all the way round the circle until the final person has to remember all the names and actions.
- The aim of this icebreaker is to get to know the group in a fun way.

### **Exercise 5 – Budge Budge**

- The children and the facilitator stand in a circle
- The facilitator explains the game
- The leader starts off game by walking over to one person saying "budge budge" and adding on the person's name. The leader then swaps places with this child.
- This child then goes to another child and goes "budge budge (name)".
- The game continues until all the children have had a go.

### **Exercise 6 – Three Things I Would Take To a Desert Island**

- Children and facilitators sit in a circle
- The leader uses an object to pass around the circle i.e. a teddy /ball / fluffy dice
- When the first child gets the object the leader says their name and asks "if you were on a desert island what 3 things would you take with you"
- The child with the object states what 3 things they would take with them and then passes the object into the next person asking, "If

you were on a desert island what 3 things would you take with you”.

### **Exercise 7 – Fruit Basket**

- The children sit in chairs in a circle.
- Each child is given a name of a fruit. You could do this by preparing earlier names of fruit on pieces of card or post it notes. There needs to be more than one of each of the fruits.
- The facilitator stands in the middle of the circle and calls out the name of a fruit e.g. apple. All of the children who are apples get up and have to change seats. The facilitator also needs to try to sit down.
- The child who does not find a place stands in middle of circle and calls out another name of fruit and again children / young people have to change seats.
- The person standing in the middle can call out “fruit salad” at any time. When this happens all the children have to get up to swap places. They are not allowed to move into the chair next to them or back to their own chair.

### **Exercise 8 – Fives**

- Children and facilitators stand in a circle
- Explain to the children that you have to take it in turns to count up to 5.
- People can say 1 or 2 numbers at a time.
- Example: - the first person will say number 1; the second person could say 2, 3 and then the third person could say 4. That would mean the fourth person would be the number 5 and therefore be out.
- The people who are out have to crouch or sit down. The next person will start again from the beginning.
- The person left standing at the end is the winner.

## Appendix 2: Six Questions

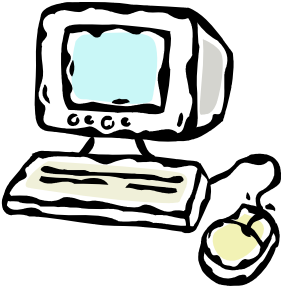
1. I enjoy taking part in things when .... ?
2. I do not enjoy taking part in things when .... ?
3. A good youth club is .....?
4. A bad youth club is .....?
5. I feel welcome at a youth club when .....?
6. I do not feel welcome at a youth club when ....?

### Appendix 3: Methodology

1. Newspaper Article



2. Typing it up on the computer



3. Interviewing



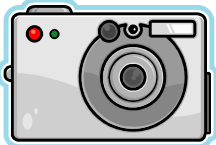
4. Big Brother Diary Room



5. Filming



6. Taking Photographs



**Appendix 4: Evaluation of Services**

**Questions for Play Leader / Staff:**

1. Do you enjoy working here and why?

2. Were there enough activities / equipment for the children?

3. Would you say the children were friendly?

4. Do you think the children have enjoyed being here and why?

5. Have you found the children helpful?

6. Do you have rules and how do you keep them?

7. Can children make suggestions for activities?

**Questions for Children**

1. What activities have you enjoyed doing?

2. Are the activities fun and why?

3. Do you feel safe while you are here and why?

4. Are the staff friendly to children?

5. Do the staff help with the different activities?

6. Could disabled children do the activities as well?

7. What have you enjoyed the most about being here?

8. Has anything made it less enjoyable?

9. Have you learnt anything new and if so what?

10. Is there anything you would like to improve for next time?

11. How would you rate the open access out of 3 stars and why?

Observations:

**1 = rubbish 2 = okay 3 = good**

1. Welcome

**1 2 3**

2. Friendliness

**1 2 3**

3. Range of activities

**1 2 3**

4. Equipment

**1 2 3**

5. Safety

**1 2 3**

6. Number of staff to children

**1 2 3**

7. Child friendly staff

**1 2 3**

## **Appendix 5: Sample Evaluation Report**

**Service:** Playing Out Playscheme

**Location:** Primary School

**Date:** Monday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2006

### **What We Did**

We drove to the School and arrived around 10.50am. We got out the car and spoke to the Play Leader Wendy. Wendy told us about the club and the activities that they provide. Wendy then showed us where to go and we joined in on the the first activity (jewellery making).

### **What We Saw**

We walked through the main gate and we saw jewellery making, sports, a sand pit, den making and mask making. Everyone we saw was enjoying the activities they were taking part in. For each activity an adult was supervising the children taking part. We also saw that the adults were making sure the children were safe.

### **What People Said**

We interviewed 4 children, 2 boys and 2 girls. They told us they enjoyed these activities the most: -

- Den Making
- Sand Castles
- Treasure Hunt
- Bow & Arrow
- Rounders

People also enjoyed the parachute.

3 out of the 4 children said that all the activities are fun. The children told us that they felt safe, especially when the dog came in and a member of staff toured the dog out of the playscheme and shut the gate so the dog couldn't come back in.

### **Friendly Staff**

All the children said that the staff were friendly but one of the children said that they gave children warnings for no reason sometimes.

When asked what have you enjoyed most about being here: -

- You get fed
- Lots of fun activities
- Helping other kids

They all told us they haven't learnt anything new.

For the next playscheme they would like to see: -

- A blow up slide
- Playing tig
- Playing cricket
- More art work

Three out of the four children gave the club 3 out of 3 stars for the following: -

- Because you can play games
- They help you out
- Never been to a better club

The other child gave it 2 out of 3 stars because "it's just ok and they give you warnings without a reason".

### **Play Leader**

We both interviewed Wendy who is the Play Leader, here are some of the things she told us: -

- She has enjoyed working for the club
- She has made lots of new friends both children and adults
- It's been fun doing the different activities
- There are lots of activities for the children to do

Wendy told us that the children were very friendly to her and the other members of staff, also the children enjoy coming here as they do new activities every day.

If the children are helpful they get a special helper badge, everyone wanted to be a special helper.

Wendy told us that they do have rules, but if children break them, they are given a warning. If you get three warnings they call the parents and they are sent home.

Wendy said that they can suggest their own activities if the activities are sensible.

### **Overall**

We felt welcomed at the school. The leader introduced herself to us and made us feel welcomed and safe.

We noticed Wendy going around to all the activities making sure everyone was ok and if there weren't a member of staff with the activity she would sit down with them and watch them until the member of staff came back.

We thought the children were friendly towards one another and the staff were friendly towards the children. We feel there were enough activities that children could choose.

We thought the children were safe but felt the car park was dangerous because children were running across the car park without adults seeing them. We think there should be more staff watching the car park.

The children were polite to everyone and they went straight to an activity, all the children seem happy.

### **Star Rating**

- Out of 3 stars, we award 3 stars

### **Why?**

- Polite and friendly staff
- A range of activities for everyone to have a go at
- Children went straight to an activity
- Children seemed happy when the leader was welcoming them

### **Recommendations?**

- The children told us they wanted tig, cricket, blow up water slide and more art next time.
- Staff should supervise the car park better

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The Children's Society is a leading children's charity committed to making childhood better for all children in the UK.

Our network of centres and projects deliver specialist services for children throughout the country who face danger or disadvantage in their daily lives; children who are unable to find the support they need anywhere else.

Our schools work, children's centres and mentoring schemes help children in local communities develop the skills and confidence they need to make the most of their childhood and play a full part in society.

Our research and campaigning aims to influence the thinking of everyone - from people like you and me to politicians and decision makers - creating real change and making childhood better for all children.