



Conceptualising Participation in Practice in YAP Ireland: A Case Study

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1. Introduction

This case study reflects on participatory practice within the Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) Ireland to identify strengths and challenges associated with participation in practice, consider future areas of practice development and deepen understanding of what participation entails in practice when working with marginalised youth. A multimethod exploratory study was undertaken, drawing upon the perspectives of practitioners, parents and young people using qualitative interviews and focus groups. In addition to this, secondary analysis was conducted on data collected as part of a recent study of practice in YAP Ireland, where participation emerged as a particular strength (Brady et al., 2020). Documentary analysis was also conducted on all YAP Ireland policies and practice guidelines relevant to participatory practice. Key learning was generated via a process of thematic analysis and synthesis of findings with the relevant discussions surrounding youth and service user participation in literature.

Introduction to the Youth Advocate Programme (YAP) Ireland

The YAP programme is an intervention for young people who are considered 'high risk' (Brady et al., 2020). The model aims to benefit the community by providing an alternative to the institutionalisation of vulnerable young people, through the operation of integrated, family and community-based programmes of support services for young people and their families. These young people and their families typically experience a range of adversities, including family dysfunction and fragmentation; poverty, neglect, and abuse; community violence; involvement in the criminal justice system; and mental and behavioural health concerns (Silva et al., 2019). YAP Ireland aims to support young people through adversity using a strength-based approach in a wraparound service that is family-driven and youth-guided (Silva et al., 2019:2). This approach is based on the belief that each youth, and his or her family, have the capacity to grow and evolve by activating protective factors including social supports and the development of skills and abilities to foster personal development (Silva et al., 2019:2). Overall, findings from previous studies indicate significant positive outcomes with improvements in factors which enhanced the wellbeing of the young people participating (Devlin et al., 2014:9).

Introduction to the Concept of Participation

Participation usually occurs within organisational and institutional contexts, where various agencies seek to improve outcomes for service users by drawing on their knowledge as experts by experience in order to provide relevant effective support that meets their needs (Checkoway, 2011; Gunn, 2008; Moriarty et al., 2007; Mossberg, 2020; Muench et al., 2017). Participation can occur at an individual or collective level depending on the whether it is participation in decisions relating to individual welfare, input into policy and service, action on an issue of common concern, or the generation of

knowledge for an organisation (Kennan et al., 2015; Lansdown, 2019; Moriarty et al., 2007). Commentators in the field of youth participation maintain that if participation is to be successful, organisations must be committed to meaningful, rather than tokenistic, participation (Lundy, 2007; Muench et al., 2017:50). Long-running discussions have considered the meaningfulness or quality of participation to be reflected in the degree of influence or control attained in practice, and whether this is appropriate for the circumstance (Horwath et al., 2012; Lansdown, 2010; Treseder, 1997). However, others have argued that participation is not just a matter of influence or control, it is a developmental task for young people, and can provide personal benefits for service users who engage in such processes (Lansdown, 2019; Munro, 2001; Slettebø, 2013). It is clear from these accounts that participation can be a multifaceted experience for service users, spanning private needs and public provision, agency, and personal development in organisational contexts, and this is central to the consideration of participation in this case study.

Overview of Participatory Practice in YAP Ireland

At the level of the individual, YAP Ireland strives to centre the young person throughout their programme of support, by involving them in decision-making from the moment they engage in the service to assess their needs and plan their goals, through to feedback and evaluation as an aid to improved practice (Brady et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2019:4). This is intended to empower youth and families to express their needs and identify what resources and capacities they have that can assist them through the identification of gaps and strategies. Participation of the youth and their family in this process is important, as while YAP advocates initially 'do for', they aim to progress to 'do with', transitioning to 'cheering on' their clients as they achieve self-sufficiency (Silva et al., 2019:9).

YAP Ireland (2020b) also offers eight different forms of group participation which is accessible to both the young people and their parents so that they have an opportunity to raise their voices within YAP and their wider community. These include:

- Regional youth participation groups – groups come together to work on a project, learn a skill, do a sporting activity or to just have some fun.
- Regional parent /carers participation groups – peer support, to work on a project, learn a skill, do a sporting activity or to just have some fun.
- National Youth Forum - young people from all around the country come together to work on various projects of their own choosing.

- Youth CEO Group - young people to work closely with the CEO, pick a topic that they want to work on and out of this they will publish a report. The Youth CEO Group also co-host the National Event and the Annual Report Launch with the CEO.
- National Parents Forum - YAP Ireland runs a Parent Forum each year where parent/carers from all around the country come together to work on various projects of their own choosing.
- Interview Panels – YAP Ireland is committed to having young people and parent/carers on all interview panels for all roles nationwide, supported by training run twice a year to ensure that there is a group ready and available to participate on interview panels as the need arises. Where possible, national Advocate recruitment is organised so that the interviews take place during mid-term and summer holidays to facilitate young people and parent/carers involvement.
- National Events – Each year YAP Ireland holds a National Conference where we bring together up to 300 young people, families, funders, partners and staff to showcase the work carried out by the young people and families throughout the year.

In addition to this participatory practice within their service, YAP Ireland also delivers participation support to other organisations as they are the assessors for the Investing in Children Awards Scheme. YAP Ireland also provides group facilitation skills training for other organisations and trains young people to facilitate their own agenda days. Furthermore, YAP Ireland works in partnership with TUSLA staff in seed fund initiatives on local participation projects.

Structure of Report

The policy context for participation in Ireland will firstly be outlined to provide a foundation for the consideration of practice in this jurisdiction. Secondly, the literature on youth and service user participation will be reviewed to aid reflection on practice. This will be followed by a description of the methodology used in this study before the documentary support for participation in YAP Ireland is reviewed. The findings of the qualitative exploration of practice and experience will then be presented, followed by a reflection on the learning from this evaluation regarding the strengths and challenges of practice as a prelude to the conclusion on areas for further development.

2: The Policy Context for Participation in Ireland

In child and youth policy and legislation, Ireland has continually evolved towards greater respect for the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them, underpinned by a respect for their rights under Article 12, and towards working in partnership with parents in the context of early intervention, prevention and family support. This section provides an overview of the policy supporting youth participation in Ireland.

Provisions for Youth Participation

Youth participation emerged as a policy focus in the *National Children's Strategy* (DoHC, 2000) which promoted a respect for their views in decisions and policies affecting them in both public and private spheres, in policy and service development, and evaluation and research. This was to ensure that their lives will be better understood, and quality supports and services will be delivered (DoHC, 2000; Hayes, 2002). This was followed by the *Agenda for Children's Services* (2007), a handbook for practitioners in children's services that promoted the participation of service users in planning, implementation, and evaluation to ensure better outcomes. The integration of participation into policy continued into *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (2014) which aimed to guide policy development relevant to children to support their development and wellbeing across relevant government departments. Goal 3 of this document promotes the involvement of children and young people in the decisions that affect their lives at both a local and national level as fundamental to social inclusion (DCYA, 2014; Kilkelly, 2014). This policy document was followed by the publication of a *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making* (2015–2020). This document focuses solely on participation in decision-making as a means to address the challenges in children and young people's lives (DCYA, 2019:4). This strategy prioritised the participation of children and young people at a statutory level in relation to the social services delivered to them, the development of policy and legislation, and research (DCYA, 2019:5).

Within the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making* (2015–2020), participation is framed by the Lundy (2007) model. This model outlines four practice variables that must be evident in practice if participatory rights are to be achieved as per the requirements of Article 12 of the UNCUC (1989). This article affirms that young people have the right to express a view on matters that affect them, and that this view must be given due weight in line with their emerging maturity. In order to achieve this aim, the Lundy model prescribes that a safe space, support for voice, access to an audience who feedback on decisions in order to ensure influence is leveraged is appropriate. This rights-based conception of participation has also been integrated into YAP Ireland's Participation Strategy (2020).

Children and young people's participation is also governed by the *Children First Act (2015)*, which provides parameters for protective practice when working with children and young people to ensure their participation both universally and in particular contexts. Section 2. 5(c) refers to its application in "formal consultation with, or formal participation by, a child in respect of matters that affect his or her life". As this Act further outlines how children with particular vulnerabilities can be safeguarded under *Section 10(8)*, it provides a frame for best practice in child welfare and protection systems that is of relevance to initiatives that aim to promote the participation of a cohort of children and young people who have experienced trauma and may have continued vulnerability depending on their particular circumstance (Kilkelly, 2014: 7). This includes a mandate to report disclosures of abuse or harm.

Provisions for Service User Engagement

A number of policy developments in the Irish context also support increased collaboration with service users across a range of services (Connolly & Devaney, 2016). In 2007, a National Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy, '*Your Service Your Say*', came into effect to ensure that the people using services provided by the HSE have every opportunity to comment on their experiences, both positive and negative (Department of Health and Children, 2008a). The *National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Service 2008–2013* (Department of Health and Children, 2008a) uses the term 'service user' to include patients, carers, parents and guardians. This strategy identifies greater service user involvement as having a positive impact at an individual, community and national level. The Strategy also sets out guiding principles for service user involvement, including that service users should be centrally involved in their own care; that open dialogue, trust and mutual respect are essential; that service user involvement must be based on inclusion, diversity and equity; and that initiatives must be systematically evaluated, with learning disseminated across health and social services (Connolly & Devaney, 2016).

Provisions Relevant to Parental Participation

Supporting parents is the first goal of *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (2014)* as the evidence confirms the importance of parents to childhood development to future prospects and social mobility. This framework prioritises supporting parents through universal access to good-quality parenting advice and programmes, as well as targeted, evidence-based supports to those parents with the greatest needs. Programmes and interventions used should be proven to increase parenting skills, confidence and capacity; reduce parental stress; improve child wellbeing and behaviour; and increase the enjoyment of, and satisfaction in, parenting (DCYA, 2014). There are also provisions for participatory practice in policy documents relating to parental and family support. *The High-Level Policy Statement on Parenting Support (DCYA, 2015)* promotes a focus on parenting and family

support for Tusla to improve outcomes for children in recognition of the dependency of children upon their parents. This document promotes 'partnership with children and their parents' in the provision of support services. This aspect of practice is promoted in recognition of the fact that family support is more likely to be effective if is tailored to the family's definition of need, be based on strengths, and involves the service users in collaborative problem solving resulting in greater commitment to outcomes (DCYA, 2015:14).

3: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review explores research literature relating to the participation of service users in processes intended to support their input and engagement on both an individual and collective basis. This includes literature on youth participation in welfare contexts, collective participation in public contexts, and service user participation. The first part of the literature review focuses on why participation is important, while the second part focuses on the enabling and constraining factors that may affect participation.

Meeting the Needs of Service Users

In reflecting on participatory practice in a particular context with a particular cohort of service users, it is important to be mindful that the majority of families involved in child welfare services experience multiple chronic stressors which can have implications for young people's development, trust in adults, engagement in education, social integration and risk-taking behaviour (Bruyere, 2010; Slettebø, 2013; YAP, 2020). Involving service users in decision-making can lead to enhanced caregiver and child outcomes by drawing upon their experiential knowledge to ensure that welfare services provide appropriate relevant responses to their often-complex needs (e.g. Bessell & Gal, 2009; Champine et al., 2018; Forde & Martin, 2016; Moriarty et al., 2007; Mossberg, 2020; Muench et al., 2017; Rodriguez, Cassidy and Devaney, 2018). This is because it supports improved decision-making by professionals who intend to make positive changes but who do not know the young people they interact with, ensuring interventions are relevant, acceptable to the young people and therefore more effective (Cashmore, 2002; Kennan et al., 2016; Nolas, 2015; Swallow et al., 2007; van Bijleveld et al., 2015).

Supports the Positive Development of Youth

In addition to achieving the goals of welfare practice, evidence from exemplary cases of youth participation suggests that when participation works, it can promote personal development (Gallagher et al., 2012; Forde & Martin, 2016; Hedberg et al., 2017; Nolas, 2015). A particular feature of participation in partnership with supportive adults is the development of skills and capacities such as communication and decision-making, as youth take on new roles and responsibilities (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007; Ramey et al., 2017; Tisdall, 2017). These experiences of active youth participation have also been linked to greater self-efficacy, empowerment, agency, and resiliency for the youth, along with a positive sense of self as a contributor to group projects (Cockburn, 2005; Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007; Muench et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2017; Schoenfeld et al., 2019). However, there is potential for this particular benefit to be reduced as there is evidence that the personal impacts on

young people are influenced by the extent to which they feel they have actually effected change and positive outcomes (Checkoway, 2011; Forde & Martin, 2016; Ramey et al., 2017).

In addition to personal development, the literature surrounding young people's participation discusses how access to supportive relationships that meet individual and collective needs in group formats can play a central role in supporting wellbeing (Cockburn, 2005; Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007; Forde & Martin, 2016). Bruyere (2010) argues that youth participation in healthy relationships, experiences and opportunities lessens the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviour, while buffering young people from depression and behavioural challenges, promoting prosocial behaviour and improved personal outcomes. This centrality of relationships to participation and the link to wellbeing requires attention given that one of the most important benefits of collective participation that has been identified by children themselves is the development of new friendships (Forde & Martin, 2016; Thomas & Percy-Smith, 2012).

[Access to Forms of Social Support for Marginalised Adults](#)

Slettebø (2013 581) maintains that peer support and self-help enable positive gains in terms of self-esteem, ability to cope with the challenges of daily living, attitudes towards parenting and perceived social support that are of particular benefit to parents in contact with welfare services. Studies have found that service users particularly valued the friendships available to them as a result of participation, as it alleviated a sense of isolation in their experience, provided a structure to their weeks, and helped service users cope with challenges that they may be experiencing (Muurinen, 2019; Slettebø, 2013). Service users can also feel empowered by collective involvement, as experts by experience, as they strive to make improvements in service provision, overcoming negative self-perception of themselves as service users (Carr, 2004; Muurinen, 2019; Slettebø, 2013).

[Form of Social Justice](#)

A consideration of the marginalised circumstances of many service users provides a basis for the amplification of service user voice beyond the organisation, as these circumstances may be influenced by issues emerging in the wider societal and governance sphere (Bunting et al., 2017; Carr, 2004; Ginwright & James, 2007; Lansdown, 2020). In discussions surrounding the participation of young people in contact with welfare services, it has been recommended that participatory practice should include some form of dissemination and awareness raising beyond the initiative itself, so that relevant decision-makers who can affect change can respond to the concerns of young people (e.g. Larkins et al., 2014; Mannay et al., 2018; Warming, 2006). In addition to raising awareness on lived experience, amplifying the voices of marginalised people in this action orientated way may provide an opportunity to create positive social and political identities in the face of difficulties by raising the level of

consciousness to rise above a purely individually oriented analysis of their problems (Carr, 2004; Slettebø, 2013).

Strengthens Community Engagement

Participation in organisational settings may also enhance community connections and strengthen civic competencies (Checkoway et al., 2005; Schoenfeld et al., 2019; Ramey et al., 2017). This may be because the longer that people participate, the more they align what they do with collective shared goals rather than individualistic factors, so they emerge better connected and ready to become active, productive members of society in adulthood (Birchall & Simmons, 2004; Ho et al., 2015; Wyness, 2018). As with young people, service user participation may also help create a stronger sense of community (Moriarty et al., 2007). This is because collective co-production of services makes use of existing social capital to allow valuable outcomes to be achieved and, in turn, provides activities through which further social capital can be built (Bovaird et al., 2016). Needham (2012) maintains that the sorts of capital created by this form of participation can benefit service providers and the broader community as well as the people who use services. This is achieved by driving publicly valued outcomes through social networks such as discouraging substance misuse; providing peer or parenting support in times of crises; or local initiatives to encourage neighbours to keep an eye out for child abuse or domestic violence (Bovaird et al., 2016; Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012; Muurinen, 2019; Slettebø, 2013).

Organisational Benefits

While participation in individual forms of personal decision-making can enhance engagement with services, and ensure that the needs of service users are appropriately addressed, active collective participation can also provide benefits for the supporting organisation (Bovaird et al., 2016; Moriarty et al., 2007; Mossberg, 2020; Muench et al., 2017; Webb, 2008). Goosen and Austin (2017:37) maintain that service user involvement has had the largest organisational impact in the realm of knowledge creation for health and social care through the engagement of “experts in their own experience”. For this reason, service users have participated in staff training programs, contributed to service developments, policy change, personnel hiring, advocacy, programme planning, and research (Goosen & Austin, 2017). Professionals who engage with participatory initiatives often report a renewed sense of purpose in their work, a more holistic view of youth’s interests and abilities, increased confidence in their ability to effectively work with youth and a greater clarity of purpose for their programmes and services (Schoenfeld et al., 2019). In Slettebø’s (2013) study, social workers noted that their attitudes towards the parents had changed, and they realised that this supported better co-operation as they realised that parents had strengths and capacities as well as challenges.

Enablers and Barriers to Participation.

This section will reflect on enabling factors and barriers to participation, focusing first on organisational factors including culture and professional capacity, secondly on relationships and trust, and thirdly on participatory practices.

The Organisational Context

The wider context may have an impact on an organisation's capacity to respond to service users' ideas and directives, as these may be intrinsically linked to wider issues which cannot be easily addressed (Carr, 2007). However, as Carr (2007:268) suggests, it may also be due to the fact that their participation challenges "the very fabric of the institutions in which it is taking place" exposing issues around service development and delivery, and problems with the political, economic, strategic and structures of the organisation. Organisations may also find it difficult to respond to service users and ensure meaningful participation due to conflicting agendas, varying mandates, and resource implications (Carr, 2004; Byrne & Lundy, 2015). Whatever the reason, many commentators have argued that initiatives tend to become little more than mechanisms to lend legitimacy to decision-making processes while failing to address problematic structural issues (Forbes Hodge, 2005:164). So, to avoid the perception of tokenism, agencies should be clear from the outset about what can and cannot be done as a result of participation and the extent of user influence in the given circumstance (Carr, 2004; Schoenfeld et al., 2019).

Professionals may be reluctant to support the participation of young people if they feel that they are inherently vulnerable or lacking in competency (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018; Hill et al., 2004; Hinton, 2008; Matthews, 2003). This is more likely to occur in those organisations that perceive youth as a "passive need" recipient of expert services (Havelick et al., 2016). Even if young people are afforded the opportunity to participate, they may be limited in terms of control over the agenda or processes as a result of the assumption that adults "know better" in decision-making processes (Checkoway, 2011; Perry-Hazan, 2016). This can result in token participation which Gal (2017:60) argues is more damaging than non-participation, because the invitation to participate creates expectations that remain unfulfilled. For this reason, it may be important to reflect more on adults' competence to support participation rather than the competency of young people, particularly in light of the rationale for participation presented previously (Le Borgne & Tisdall, 2017). Professionals' disposition towards parents is also identified as a potential barrier to participation with adult service users as their effective engagement is dependent on professionals being willing to listen, and also to try to understand parents' points of view (Darlington et al., 2012 in Connolly & Devaney, 2016; Slettebø, 2013). This is especially important for parents who may perceive relationships with professionals to be unsatisfactory (Connolly & Devaney 2016; Slettebø, 2013).

Because of the barriers that may present in certain organisational and professional contexts, the organisational culture, and beliefs or philosophy around participation, are important to consider as this influences the likelihood that participation will be experienced as meaningful (Havelick et al., 2016; Ramey et al., 2017). The way an organisation frames participation in policy can help professionals have a shared understanding of the principles of practice, and what it entails, from the management to practitioner level, and this can be reinforced by a support system for professionals underpinned by established processes and experiences (Gal, 2017; Havelick et al. 2016; Kennan et al., 2016; Ramey et al., 2017). The adoption of conceptual approaches has been suggested as a useful tool for organisations that intend to support participation as it can provide a prescription for practice that can frame the intentionality of those that initiate participation and as a result, influence the outcomes of practice (Cavet & Sloper, 2004; Tisdall, 2016). The Lundy (2007) voice model has been put forward as a useful resource in participatory practice for this reason (Forde & Martin 2016).

The Engagement of Marginalised Service Users

The participation of marginalised service users in welfare contexts may be challenging to promote as this cohort they may have had difficult interactions with professionals that have resulted in a lack of trust, with implications for their engagement (Connolly & Devaney, 2017; Gal, 2017; Gazit & Perry Hazan, 2020; Schoenfeld et al., 2019). The engagement of this cohort may depend on building supportive trusting relationships (Carr, 2004; Gal, 2017; Gallagher et al., 2012). In the literature surrounding young people's participation, it is argued that a welcoming and friendly space maintained over time where young people can develop trusting relationships is an essential ingredient for young people's participation providing a positive atmosphere where children and young people feel safe to express their views (Havelick et al, 2016; Lundy, 2007; Muench et al., 2017; Rytönen et al. 2017). Adult service users in welfare contexts also need to be able to trust the people they are working with, and to know that they will be taken seriously (Carr, 2004). As they may be anxious about their circumstances, or ambivalent towards professionals, the perception of empathy in a non-judgmental space can promote their engagement (Hedberg et al., 2017; Moriarty et al., 2007). Research has shown that treating parents with respect in interactions where communication is willing, supportive, and collaborative facilitates positive outcomes (Connolly & Devaney, 2016).

For marginalised disadvantaged service users, their economic circumstances may mean that there is a high cost for participation some service users may not be able to achieve (Goosen & Austin, 2017; Moriarty et al., 2007). Cultural and social barriers may also impact participation in programmes, as personal experiences of discrimination and marginalisation, or different cultural attitudes towards child-rearing and engagement with authority may mean that service users are difficult to engage (Carr, 2004; Goosen & Austin, 2017; Connolly & Devaney, 2017). The accessibility of participatory spaces

also matters, for example the geographic location can present a barrier to engagement (Katz et al., 2007; Connolly & Devaney, 2017). For this reason, organisations who seek to promote the participation of marginalised groups should strategise to overcome any personal, practical, or cultural barriers relevant to their circumstances, seeking out ways in which to promote and support the participation of the targeted cohort in appropriate ways.

A review of service user participation literature found that the pace of work in formal meetings can be exclusionary and could potentially affect the quality of engagement with service users. Furthermore, formal language can discourage dialogue, limiting service users' contribution and impact on decisions (Carr, 2004; Moriarty et al., 2007; Perry-Hazan, 2016). For young people in particular, many commentators have suggested that formal processes are particularly problematic, risking an unsatisfactory tokenistic experience of participation unless the young person can adapt to these processes (Horgan, 2017; Jans, 2004; Tisdall et al., 2008). However, there is widespread agreement that successful participation is based upon having varied and flexible approaches that are relevant to the needs of different service users, and that informal methods may be particularly useful (Moriarty et al., 2007). It is important to note that participatory practice can, and should, vary dependent on the context, the issues, the target group and stage of project or intervention (Carr, 2004; Treseder, 1997). For this reason, it is important to consider how the participation spaces can be adapted in order to support the effective participation of young people and service users. In the youth literature, flexible creative processes that are less prescriptive in aim and function where children and adults collaborate on a variety of projects of social, cultural and political significance have been suggested as a remedy to adult limitations on participation (Gazit & Perry Hazan, 2020; Moss and Petrie 2002; Moss, 2006). This moves away from formal, adult-defined structures of participation to a more open and creative practice which can foster the development of children and young people's agendas (Moss, 2002).

In addition to an appropriate format, it is widely agreed that young people require information and practical support if they are to have an input into decisions (Brady et al., 2018; Lundy, 2007). To prevent youth from feeling overwhelmed or intimidated when asked to engage with other community members, they need to be equipped with the same information, resources, and skills as their adult counterparts (Schoenfeld et al., 2019). It has been suggested that in rights respecting practice 'scaffolding', which entails the supportive practices that enhance children and young people's capacity to participate, can be gradually withdrawn as the child's competence and independence increase (Cashmore, 2011; Gal, 2017). These scaffolding practices can include the use of appropriate child and youth friendly methodologies, along with training and skill-building opportunities (Archard & Skivenness, 2009; Schoenfeld et al., 2019). This point is also salient for adult service users, as research has shown that they may feel poorly informed and unfamiliar with the terminology and mechanisms

used by professionals, with implications for their experience of participation and capacity to contribute (Connolly & Devaney 2017:10).

Finally, the structures of communication to key decision-makers must also be considered if effective participation, characterised as changes in services, policies, and institutions, is to be achieved (Larkins et al., 2014; Ramey et al., 2017). These responsive structures are necessary to ensure accountability to the process (Lundy, 2007). This means that attention needs to be placed not only on the effectiveness of participation in conveying the reality of young people's experiences and values to decision-makers, but also how young people's voices are responded to (Thomas & Percy-Smith, 2012; Percy-Smith, 2006).

Summary

The academic literature clearly shows that supporting the participation of youth and their parents who are engaged with welfare services has numerous benefits for the service user, for the organisation and for the community. It can make decision making more relevant to the needs of the young person or service users, and so advance the goals of organisations seeking to drive improvements in people's lives. It can support personal development and a sense of self efficacy for the service user, while improving their personal identities as they take action on issues that affect them. It can also drive the generation of knowledge that can improve organisational policies or processes, or professionals' practice. In supporting service users collectively, it can develop the personal and social capital that can be of benefit to the community at large through the reduction of social harms.

However, supporting the participation of marginalised and disadvantaged young people and their parents can be difficult, and this requires attention to be given to the barriers that may arise in practice, and the appropriate strategies needed to ensure successful, meaningful participation. There may be cultural barriers to participation within organisations that may result in a lack of responsiveness, or indeed support for participation, due to the dispositions of professionals. A supportive organisational environment of participation should address this issue through well-developed policies and a philosophy or framework for practice that can ensure professionals implement participation in a way that is meaningful. Barriers may arise due to the circumstances of marginalised young people and their parents, and organisations need strategies to overcome these, including practical support and inclusive practices. In particular, participation is an inherently relational practice, involving interactions between organisations and service users. Attention needs to be paid to the circumstances in which these relationships are formed, particularly as those young people involved in welfare services may have prior experiences with services that make them

ambivalent towards participation. Furthermore, the formats and supportive practices within such initiatives should be mindful of the needs of participants to support their meaningful participation.

4. Methodology

This section outlines the methodology used to explore participation within YAP Ireland. This research study aimed to explore the processes of participation and their relevance to YAP Ireland, and its service users, in order to reflect on current practice and support organisational learning. A qualitative mixed method approach was conducted over three phases, which are described here.

Desk Research

The first phase consisted of desk research, which entailed a literature review focused on youth and service user participation, together with an analysis of Irish policy relevant to participatory practice, in order to enrich the subsequent data analysis with learning from the literature and context specific drivers of participation. This was followed by an analysis of organisational documentation in order to review and assess structural indicators that support participation in YAP Ireland.

As part of this phase of research, secondary data analysis was conducted on the findings of the preceding report on practice in YAP Ireland (Brady et al., 2020) in order to mine the data for information regarding participation. The data mined for evidence of experience of participation included one to one interviews with key stakeholders including the CEO, the Chairperson of the Board and Directors of Services. Ten case study data sets gathered through 50 semi-structured interviews were also reviewed, each one focused on the experience of a particular young person, a parent and the practitioners involved in their case. A series of eight focus groups were reviewed for information regarding the experience of participation. These focus groups included two young people's groups, two parent groups, two advocate groups, and two groups made up of YAP Ireland staff and board members, involving a total of 85 people. The findings of a staff survey returned by 185 respondents were also included in this secondary round of data analysis for information on participatory practice in YAP.

Fieldwork

The second phase of research entailed qualitative field work in which 13 one to one interviews were conducted with 12 stakeholders in YAP including the CEO (n-1), Directors of Services (n-1), Service Managers (n-3) Team Leaders (n-3) and Advocates(n-3) and Parent (n-1) in order to explore their perspectives of participation within YAP Ireland. These interviews were semi-structured in format. This form of interviewing has some degree of predetermined order that allows for comparison across diverse cases but still ensures flexibility for the respondent to answer based on their own experience (Srivasta & Thomson, 2009:75).

A further two focus groups were conducted with young people (n-9) and parents (n-3). Focus groups were chosen for this element of research as the research participants shared experiences of the object of this study and could support each other to generate learning in a group format that rebalances the

power dynamic between the researcher and the researched to support engagement (Callaghan et al., 2003: 52; Daley, 2013:1044; Finch et al., 2014: 212-3; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:60). It has also been suggested that focus group participation is particularly suitable for children and young people as they replicate a natural and familiar form of communication in which children talk together with peers in a format that is less intimidating than a face-to-face interview (Gibson, 2012: 150; Seim & Slettebø, 2011:502).

Following an initial round of data analysis, two further focus groups with Key Informants (n-6) and Advocates (n-6) were conducted in order to explore in depth the scope and level of participation achieved in response to emergent findings regarding scaffolding practices. These focus groups used a typological frame derived from O’Kane and Lansdown’s (2014) toolkit for the evaluation of participation in organisational contexts. This toolkit is intended to prompt reflection on the scope and depth of participation at different points in programmes. The scope of participation refers to the points at which participation occurs, ranging from needs analysis to planning, implementation and evaluation, while the depth refers to the extent of control that a participant has in the moment of participation, which begins with adult initiated, moving towards collaboration, to child led and initiated.

The respondents were sampled using a purposive non-probability approach in conjunction with YAP Ireland in order to ensure that the various subgroups of respondents with a variety of relationships to participation in YAP were selected (Lewis, et al., 2003: 78; Cornwall & Jewkes, 2001: 1670). An equal and balanced mix of decision-makers and management staff, and advocates involved with direct practice, parents and young people was sought.

Data Analysis

All primary and secondary data from interviews and focus groups were processed using NVivo analytical software to conduct a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis entails identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within respondent accounts in order to provide a rich description of a social phenomenon (Braun & Clark,2006). This process entails a process of familiarisation, followed by the generation of initial codes, which identifies a feature of the data that is interesting. In this case the initial coding was data driven, rather than theoretically driven. From this coded set of information broader themes could then be identified, for example, the social aspect of participation (a code) and personal development (code) could be grouped under the broad theme of the benefits of participation. These themes are then reviewed for coherence. These themes are then mapped into a final report or narrative intended to capture the data set (Braun & Clark,2006).

Research Protocol

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee and by the TUSLA Research Ethics Committee. Ethical safeguards implemented included participant consent, right to withdraw without consequence, anonymity, and duty of care. Attention was paid by the research team to the care and support needs of the young people and family members participating in the study with a NUI Galway Distressed Person's Protocol and Child Protection Policy adopted as a guide for practice.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews and focus groups were conducted online in order to adhere to public health guidelines. Participatory methods suited to the age group were used. Efforts were made to ensure that the research was age friendly and accessible for the young people, and included the use of visual feedback mechanisms such as polls and emojis within the online conferencing application to facilitate ongoing consent, nonverbal agreement/ disagreement and engagement with the research questions.

Careful consideration was given to the settings of the online conference tool to ensure the safety and privacy of research participants. Recording was disabled for all participants except the host, direct messaging for participants was limited to messaging the host only, and participants could not enter the focus group without being admitted by the host in order to ensure the group was supervised at all times. Waiting rooms were set up to facilitate the onsite support of advocates should a need for support arise due to disclosure or distress.

All data collected through the research study was immediately anonymised and stored on password-protected online storage facility. All members of the research team were Garda-vetted, trained in Children's First National Guidelines (2017), and followed the NUI Galway Child Protection protocol. All processes associated with contacting research participants to obtain and use their personal data was compliant with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Findings 1: Organisational Support for Participation (Policy and Culture)

This section explores the support for participation practice in YAP Ireland in policy documents and the culture of practice.

Support for Participation in Policy Documents

As part of YAP Ireland's Strategic Plan (2020-2023) participation and voice are highlighted as key practice values that form the basis of strategic goal 2: that the views of children, young people and families make an impact in YAP Ireland and wider society. YAP Ireland has also produced a Participation Strategy (YAP Ireland, 2020b) to advance this goal in practice. This strategy has three objectives: 1. To provide participation and consultation training and services to other organisations. 2. To increase advocacy to the government and wider society using the lived experience of young people and families, and 3. To set up systems whereby children, young people and families have a direct role in the governance of YAP Ireland. This document acknowledges the participation rights of young people under Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989), stating that children have a right to express an opinion and participate in decisions that affect them, citing the Lundy model with its four interrelated factors of space (safe inclusive opportunities to form a view), voice (facilitated to express a view), audience (they must be listened to) and influence (views must be acted upon as appropriate) as a frame to ensure meaningful practice in this area.

These structural provisions for participation have implications at a practice level as the participation strategy promotes the continuous provision of environments and opportunities for participation for both young people and their families in all aspects of service delivery from planning to review and development. It is intended that this will build the capacities of young people and their parents and will keep YAP informed and connected to the relevant issues affecting young people and their families (YAP Ireland, 2020b:3).

This document further outlines the principles that should underpin these practices. This includes a strengths-based approach to participation to empower the young people and their families to set their own goals. Inclusivity is promoted through the principle of equality and diversity in this policy, which affirm that all young people and their families should have equal access to participation with a particular emphasis on including those who may be hard to reach. YAP Ireland also commits to safe practice to ensure the safety and wellbeing of participants. (YAP Ireland, 2020b).

| Source: Policy | Evidence of Participation/Support for Participation |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| YAP Ireland Strategic Plan 2020-2023 | Participation is stated to be one of the core practice values and a commitment to ensuring that the views of young people and families make an impact in YAP and in wider society is the second strategic goal. |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>YAP Ireland Participation Strategy 2020-2023</p> | <p>Frames participation using the Lundy model.</p> <p>Outlines the purpose of participation and the principles that underpin practice.</p> <p>Lists the processes of collective participation, and participation in an organisational practice that ensures voice.</p> <p>Outlines how YAP supports participation and voice in other organisations.</p> <p>Highlights how participation will be supported by training to full-time YAP employees in order to ensure rights-based participation is achieved.</p> <p>Outlines how participation should be facilitated in individual service review and evaluation.</p> |
|---|--|

Support for Voice in Practice Documents

YAP Ireland has also developed practice documents which map where and how young people in YAP Ireland are to have their voices heard and provide guidelines for practice. Guidelines and a terms of reference document are provided for group work to ensure clarity around action. There are also four documents that aid practitioners to include the voice and choice of the young person during the planning stage of their ISP, and an additional document that frames feedback on their experiences.

| Source: Practice Guidelines | Evidence of Participation/Support for Participation |
|--|---|
| <p>YAP Ireland Guidelines for Group Work</p> | <p>Provides guidelines for group work processes that may ensure quality in practice.</p> |
| <p>YAP Ireland Youth Forum Terms of Reference</p> | <p>YF are an opportunity to input into the wider YAP programme. Includes focus on skills development. Outlines inputs possible and measures taken to support participation. Specifies who will support this work (National Participation working group). Advocates and young people will set the agenda (is this an issue if the advocates do not view participation in terms of full attainment of rights)</p> |
| <p>YAP Ireland Individual Service Plan Worksheet</p> | <p>Space for the young person to set their overlying goals and tasks as well as specific ones in education, training or employment, offending behaviour or emotional /social task.</p> |
| <p>YAP Ireland Needs Assessment</p> | <p>A mind map covering ten thematic areas in which young people are supported to reflect on their needs, the ways they think YAP can help and how they can work together in partnership.</p> |
| <p>YAP Ireland Matching criteria</p> | <p>Although YAP adheres to the matching criteria in all cases, the young person and family will make the final decision on whether the match chosen by YAP on their behalf is suitable for them.</p> |
| <p>YAP Advocacy Service Feedback Form</p> | <p>Feedback on services is regularly requested. This includes questions regarding the safe environments for engaging with staff, receiving information and support, and reflection on benefits of participation or changes to service delivery.</p> |

Quality and Monitoring Processes

YAP Ireland captures data relating to participation in the course of reviewing the experience of their programme by service users as evidenced in the Quality Monitoring Report 2021. Further data relating to participation emerged in the commissioned report reviewing the Strengths and Challenges in Practice where participation emerged as a key aspect of YAP Ireland processes. In this report, participation perceived as being involved and informed is evident in the accounts of the parents sampled, while examples were given that suggest that group participation may be a positive experience for young people. Reviews of participation can be found in the YAP Ireland CEO report which provides a case example of participation and its outcomes in practice, and a review of participation goals achieved demonstrate the breadth of practice from local to national level. The Participation Goals Achieved 2021 maps the extent of engagement within participatory practices in YAP Ireland, showing that 44% of service users overall engaged in group participation processes, although regional participation varied. YAP has also been evaluated by the Investing in Children’s Award, which speaks directly to young people to ascertain their perception of having a voice in YAP processes. They have successfully retained this award after each review. YAP also tracks their participation plan and monitors their progress by group and by area. These documents represent an ongoing commitment to reflecting on and developing participatory practice, and it is important to note that the voice of service users is captured within these processes.

| Source: Monitoring Documents | Evidence of Participation/Support for Participation |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Quality Monitoring 2021 | 2.2: What is liked most about programme (parents) One out of 42 liked participation. 2.4: 95% of parents felt involved and informed 3.1: Positive feedback from one young person (n-27) is the ability to express themselves and improved confidence. 3.3: One young person valued the social aspect of participation and wanted more group activities |
| YAP Ireland CEO Report 2019 | Provides a case example of participatory practice including: Processes and Outcomes |
| Participation Goals Achieved 2021 | Table 1. Client participation in planned events of 201 goals achieved reports 44% of cases had participated in planned events-within this cohort, 57% participated in one event, 43% participated in more than one event, two clients participated in six events. Table 2. Frequency of modes of participation - most frequent local participation group-less frequent CEO group. |

| | |
|---|--|
| | Table 3. Rates of Participation: There were more clients who participated in YAP events than did not in five counties (Cork, Dublin, Laois, Longford, Tipperary). In the remaining 13 counties, more clients did not participate in YAP events than did. |
| Reevaluation Investing in Children Award 2019 South/Mid-West region | <p>Evaluation of Participation in Practice:</p> <p>Opportunities for Dialogue - evidence of voice and choice in interactions with advocates.</p> <p>Group Activities: Valued for social aspects - opportunities to participate at a national level for one young person, they felt heard and that action was taken from their feedback.</p> <p>Logistics affect participation - consideration needs to be given to more localised opportunities to participate in groups like the young CEO group.</p> <p>The young people would like to be involved in recruitment.</p> <p>All young people felt that their engagement with the programme had brought about positive changes in themselves and their relationships with others.</p> |
| Reevaluation Investing in Children Award 2019 Western region | <p>Evaluation of Participation in Practice</p> <p>Opportunities for Dialogue and choice in Individual service plan</p> <p>Opportunities to have a say on the types of activities and projects they did at group work-but expressed a wish to meet CEO at one.</p> <p>Opportunities for change - personal benefits and opportunities to improve relationships.</p> <p>Recommendations relating to participation: not all young people aware of CEO groups.</p> <p>Difficult to evaluate how voice has brought about change in the organisation.</p> |
| Reevaluation Investing in Children Award 2020 Dublin North | <p>Evaluation of Participation in Practice</p> <p>Opportunities for Dialogue and choice in Individual service plan</p> <p>Group work-evidence of voluntary engagement-socialising and involvement in projects that help the community.</p> <p>CEO group - projects on issues that concern them and access to the CEO</p> <p>Participation in organisational processes - interview panel training</p> <p>Opportunities for change - advocates help young people make a personal change</p> <p>Recommendations by young people - young people should sit on the board</p> |
| YAP Ireland Strengths and Challenges Report 2020 | Source of secondary data: Qualitative interviews, focus groups, and staff questionnaire mined for mentions of participation. |
| National Participation Plan Report Jan 2020 | Review of participatory practice with eight groups across seven different areas |

Culture

In the previous section the structural indicators for participation were clearly present as the aims, and requirements of practice in YAP Ireland are well integrated into policy and practice guidelines. Respondent accounts illustrate that participation is a part of the organisation's culture, embedded in

practice from an individual young person's ISP, through to collective participatory groups where they can raise their voices on matters that affect them, through to input into organisational processes.

"Participation is the ribbon that runs through the programme in YAP so from the very beginning of any kind of work that we undertake participation is key, it is at the forefront. It is the voice, it is the engagement, it is ensuring that the work that we do with the young people is guided by them. They lead it, they participate, and they engage." (Respondent 4).

"It is not an afterthought in YAP, participation is part of the culture, it is an expectation. I mean even if you look at it from our job descriptions from induction training, participation is highlighted as part of everyone's role, so it is everyone's responsibility." (Respondent 5)

Respondents felt that the motivation of staff and their commitment to participation is part of this culture, as the orientation of practitioners towards listening to the voice of the young people and their parents is seen to be integral to their role as advocates. Practitioners ensure that they actively promote participation, finding different ways to support voice, and build trust with the young people to assure the young people of their rights in order to create a sense of safety in the expression of their views.

"I am really passionate about participation, about young people having a voice but doing it while they are having fun, it is not all really boring, that we are finding different and creative ways of capturing that voice all the time and making the most of it." (Respondent 7)

"Because as well, a 15-year-old from a compromised background, they are afraid to have an opinion because they are afraid somebody else will tell them they are an eejit, or worse, so they are quiet. But once they realise that any idea is a good idea, say it, we write them all down, everybody is valuable, then they start coming out with... And that is YAP's really strong point, every idea is a good idea, every idea is valuable, every voice is valuable." (Respondent 9)

Translation of Principle to Practice

The translation of policy into participatory group practices are supported by well-developed communication and oversight structures within the organisation. A steering group provides oversight and accountability through monitoring and review, identifying staff at a local level who have the skills and capacity to drive collective participation forward providing motivation and support to their activities.

"We have a steering group and that is the kind of team leaders from across the country who kind of drive it forward. And one of the service managers chairs that I sit on it as well and that is really to try and drive it as much as we can within the organisation but also for them within their own team meetings

and their own regions to be promoting it, answering queries, sharing good practice, sharing great things that have happened or lessons that we learned.” (Respondent 6)

In addition to oversight structures, targeted training is provided to Lead Advocates at a local level to ensure that they have a clear understanding of participation and can lead participation groups in their area. This training is run cyclically as needed but is not yet part of core training for advocates.

“We would run participation training, that would be done locally within areas own teams, it would be done at team meetings and different things like that where maybe lead advocates would be identified. They then would be [a] lead advocate, one in participation for that area and they would be trained up then in do they understand the concepts of participation and understand their role in it.” (Respondent 10)

Findings 2: Participation in Practice

Individual Opportunities for Participation

There are multiple opportunities for participation within YAP Irelands individual programme of supports at multiple points as it is integral to the service that they receive. This is because the programme of supports cannot be planned without input from the young person as to what their needs are, what strengths they bring to the programme, and their assessment as to how the programme is working.

“It would be impossible to not get a young person's voice because it is woven into how the six months works, it is woven into the needs assessment, the ISP, the three reviews and the final meeting.”
(Respondent 5)

Supporting the young person's participation in programme decisions was seen by advocates to promote their engagement with the helping relationship. One respondent felt that this was particularly important for families in crises engaged in welfare services. It is seen to foster trust in the advocate as an ally that is there to support them, while enhancing the relevancy of activities for the young person involved.

“Children, young people and families deciding on what they want to work on, their goals and the plan is set up around that helps to build trust and belief. Flexibility is essential when dealing with YAP and families with often chaotic situations and who have reached crisis point. They have to believe that we are on their side and there to help them, so all plans are tailored to their needs and goals.” (Staff Survey Response)

The commitment to voice and choice in the ISP programme described by practitioners is affirmed in the experiences of young respondents. All participants in Youth Focus Group B felt that they had a say in planning their ISP and setting goals with their advocate. One young person reflected on how choosing their ISP activities was important as it enabled them to pick activities that they would enjoy doing in order to build a relationship with their advocate. Another young person's description of goal setting outlines how this opportunity activity included elements of capacity building through planning.

“I think we have a say in the activities that we choose because that is kind of really important for being with our advocate, that we get connected through doing certain activities like if it is going for a walk, even going to the shop, just being out and doing something that we enjoy or that they can at least relate to [...]My advocate likes to make me choose what goals to pick that I have and then we discuss

on how we are going to achieve certain goals and the way we can go about it and we look at different ways of doing so” (Young People Group B).

Some parents also reflected on how the participation of their young people could be particularly beneficial for young people and their parents who are in contact with social services. This parent felt that it supported the buy in of the young person into the programme.

“People in [social services have] authority over them, they would feel they would have no voice but when they are heard or when they are asked for their opinion or they are asked what they would like to do they feel they are included in the decision making which I think is very important.[...] Ah yeah because if you are being told what to do all the time you kind of half listen, okay you might be made do it, but if you are the one who is deciding what to do you will do it willingly.” (Parent Group A)

Staff also support the voice of the parent in the YAP programme, although this is structured in such a way as to keep practice youth focused and strengths based. Practitioners achieved this aim by redirecting conversations towards examples of positive engagement with programme goals, or by refocusing the conversation on the young person at the centre of the YAP Ireland programme.

“I would always ask the parent to be part of the process and I would always ask for their input into the meeting. If it was negative all the time, I would ask them to stop and I would remind them of the positives. Okay so Danny didn't go to school for two weeks, but he did an hour in school this week, that is amazing. So, we are reinforcing what is working well for them all the time.” (Respondent 3)

As well as being involved in decision making and planning throughout the ISP, the young people are included in the review process. This is seen to be key to the success of the programme ensuring that any activities or supports remain relevant to the needs and aspirations of the young person over time. One practitioner gave an example of how they affirmed the young person's right to voice their opinion in practice in an effort to promote open communication through reassurance and support.

“I am asking them, okay so what is working, what are you enjoying about the programme? How are you getting on with [advocate] are there any bumps? What kind of stuff are you doing? [...] and that is a discussion then with the advocate around how can they incorporate what the young person wants into the weekly plans.” (Respondent 3)

“I would always say to my young people, you are the boss, you tell me what is working, you tell me what is not working. And I am giving you permission to tell me if something is not going right for you and I want you to be really brave and if something is not working for you, I want you to ring me or I

want you to be really brave and say it to me when I am out the next time. And once they have that permission, I think it is nearly like a little green light for them that they are more open to the process.” (Respondent 3)

In addition to these feedback opportunities with Team Leaders attached to their cases, a person in the internal support team who is unconnected to their programme of supports offers an opportunity to feedback by telephone, in order to promote an environment where the young person and their family can be open about their experience without worrying about the repercussions to their relationships with practitioners.

“It does create a space then where if they do have a criticism or a suggestion of change that they are comfortable saying that because they don't know this person at the end of the phone, it is not going to come back on them.” (Respondent 7)

Support for Raising Voice to Wider Contexts.

Within respondent accounts, there were examples of YAP practitioners actively supporting and amplifying the voices of young people, and their parents, beyond the ISP to services relevant to their circumstances. Examples included providing feedback to organisations on the young person's behalf or supporting the young person to advocate for themselves in other institutional contexts. These also included supporting a young person to contact the department of education for support and information, and supporting young people in an institutional setting to query policy that they found unfair. The advocate supported the group to come up with suggestions and acted as intermediary between young people, and staff helped facilitate compromise and changes to policy.

“Yeah, now if they didn't want, the likes of the Department of Education, we could help them write an email, we could give them the tools, the proper wording.” (Respondent 8)

“There was rules around access to a gaming console. Just because one person breaks the rules why are we all punished by getting this console removed? [...]. And the advocate said, okay what are the issues here? How can we work with the staff around having a happy medium? Could they create some terms and conditions around usage? So, they were like, okay let's do that. So, they worked with the advocate around what they felt was reasonable and asked the advocate would she be able to present that to the staff team, so they did. The staff team reviewed it, came back with a few of their suggestions for change and a compromise was reached where they felt that was fair.” (Respondent 7)

Participation in Organisational Processes.

YAP also supports young people to have input into organisational processes. Young people in YAP are provided with the training, opportunity, and support to participate in interview panels for staff at all levels of the organisation. This is not a symbolic form of participation as the staff reported that the young person's input is sought in terms of the wording of questions that are asked, and the scoring of the young person is given equal weight to other members of the interview panel.

"They do the training, and they get it. We meet beforehand and do a prep, like you would, you go through the questions. So, they decide what questions they would be most comfortable asking or they read through a question that could be a bit clunky and words that are probably unnecessary and sometimes." (Respondent 2)

"They have a panel of three, you have two staff members and a young person, sometimes you would have four, you might have a Tusla representative as well [...] So everybody agrees on the final mark, everybody signs off on that including the young person." (Respondent 10)

Another respondent described opportunities that young people were given to feedback on organisational policy and the strategic plan review. This resulted in a leaflet where the important aspects of the child protection policy were translated into a digestible format for use in practice with young people and their families. While this has since come in, it had to be amended because of policy changes in Tusla, YAP further supported young people to convert the new policy to a more child friendly format while facilitating feedback on this policy to Tulsa.

"We have obviously like 100-page child protection policy which no doubt you have as well. And we now have the child safeguarding statement that we have to do for Tusla, and they change every, you know, templates change and whatever. So, we have always brought groups of young people together and said this is this policy, which is like 100 pages long, what is important about child protection to kids? What do you need to know? What are the important things that you need to know from this policy when you are coming on YAP, when young people are coming on YAP and when they are on the programme?" (Respondent 6)

"So the strategic plan review I have already met with the youth forum. We had thirty young people in for that and I just did a short exercise with them about you know? What does YAP actually do? How would describe us? What would they think makes us different and then also what do they think we should do more of." (Key Informant 1)

There is also an example of a young person having an influence on policy when it emerged during their case work that their gender identity was not recognised in official documents. This is evidence of organisational openness and responsiveness to youth concerns as they arise, enabling a change to organisational documents that would have been particularly meaningful to this young person.

“And at the top of the questionnaires is the child's name, the young person's name, their date of birth and then it says male or female. And she wanted that to be changed to non-gender or non-binary. She wanted that changed to other as well. And we brought that up with my supervisor and they said absolutely they would bring that back to the powers that be. So, there is a channel for them.”
(Respondent 9)

Support for Other Agencies

As well as implementing participation within their own service, YAP Ireland assess participation in other organisations and assist them in developing their own practice. This is achieved by acting as assessors for the investing in children awards, and as consultants who provide participation training for other organisations. This is an area of practice that one key informant identified as meaningful, and so appropriate for further development.

“We go out to organisations, not an absolutely massive amount of organisations but we're going to 7, 10 organisations a year but they're asking us to do that assessment or evaluation on them because they recognise that these guys know what they're talking about when they're coming to do; when we're talking about participation and voice. Like it's dialogue and change, it's participation voice. We've done it for schools, national schools, secondary schools, counselling services, mental health in-patient units, residential care, gateway services [...] If Tusla were to say every funded organisation that gets funding from Tusla needs to have the investing in children award; I think that would be reasonable to ask at this stage. They've invested a huge amount of money in bringing in investing in children and training up people to say to organisations if you're getting money from us you need to go through the award. They might not have the capacity to do that but YAP do. We've got trained assessors; we have everybody ready to go; we could take on that work.” (Key Informant 2)

Collective Opportunities for Participation

At a local level, participatory activities provide an opportunity to socialise for the young people, and their parents, and so activities are a key part of this experience. Participants get to choose what activities they would like to do in collaboration with practitioners, who would research and suggest activities for the group's consideration based on an evaluation of their interests and their strengths, and subsequently help them structure their experience.

“We do need to give the kids an option of what we are going to do. So TikTok karaoke could be one, quiz could be another, art competition. We identify their strengths from where they have come before and we let them then say what does this art competition look like, how should it be judged, which way?” (Respondent 10)

“So we ask the parents what is it that you would like. So we try and do a bit of a road map of events say for a few months even or a few weeks, depending [...] So we have a very open consultation with our parents all the time and are very open to listening to their concerns, their worries, their fears, what it is that they would like, what the parents' group is for them. And always I suppose trying to encourage and grow it within the realm of what participation is.” (Respondent 3)

In addition to providing a social outlet, the development of skills and personal capacities was also an important aspect of participation for the parents' local groups. A practitioner described planning group activities for parents around needs for support they might have. These activities could include the development of links to other supportive agencies, and enhancing the knowledge of parents regarding supports, or pathways of education available to them. This was seen to be advantageous as that would enable them to identify and access support after the scaffolding of YAP support had ended.

“I would always network and make links with external organisations, so for the parents' group we would have linked in with [organisation] and we would have ran a personal development course called Steps. And then from that then I suppose information sessions around social welfare, getting back to work, just looking at all of those kinds of entitlements or grants for parents who might want to change their circumstance or their lives. We have also made connections with the VEC where they did their floral arrangement course, and they are just about to undertake a restorative parenting course with National College Ireland [...] We try and make sure that they have that access to different services, or they are even aware of different services within their areas because we feel that we are empowering them to do that piece. And they can grow then long after their engagement with YAP.” (Respondent 3)

Supporting Views on Matters that Affect Them

Beyond the social and educational aspect, a primary aim for YAP Ireland is to provide opportunities for young people and their parents to express a view on issues that may affect them as a group. As part of group activities, a yearly theme is identified, and this is responded to in a variety of different ways by the local and national groups. This theme may be chosen directly by young people in the national level groups through consultation with practitioners, or local groups may provide options from which one theme is identified. At other times themes may be chosen as a result of practitioners

reflecting on the discussions or emerging issues within their own groups to identify an actionable issue.

“Every year since then, often what we have done is chosen a topic, sometimes it is through the youth forum with the young people or just from what are picking up from the cases. And we have then sort of had participation groups and individual young people and parents across the country work towards that theme or present some of their views or work, artwork, film, dramas, we have had poetry, songs.”
(Respondent 6)

“We usually keep the theme quite broad so that they can take ownership of it and come up with a really unique project and it is their interpretation of that theme and how it affects them and what messages they want to get across to the broader audience.” (Respondent 7)

Practitioners discussed the importance of flexibility in practice in order to better support the engagement of parents, and young people with diverse needs engage in participatory groups, adjusting activities, and drawing on the expertise of other organisations if necessary, to make the programme a success. For example, if young people have social anxiety, they may be gently introduced to group activities and provided with opportunities to disengage in order to support a sense of safety, or if this is not feasible, they could be offered the opportunity to contribute to the collective project through an individual activity with their advocate, which can then be submitted to YAP for dissemination and recognition.

“The fundamentals is you have to be flexible; we are very adaptable; we have to look at meeting the parents where they are at too. We are really resourceful; we have a great bunch of advocates who think outside the box. If we have a parent who has a physical disability, you know actually we will include them virtually so they don't have to go for a walk, they can just be part of the process. We are really creative in how we engage our parents.” (Respondent 3)

“It might be people either with social anxiety or whatever it might be, so how do we overcome those barriers. So, it is looking at ways of doing that whether it be doing an activity that is maybe outside where people can escape for a minute if they find the group too overpowering or too overwhelming”
(Respondent 4).

YAP also provides the structure and the guidance needed in practice for collective participation to result in tangible outputs regarding the thematic area of interest that the young people have identified. This practice entails supporting participation groups to identify and structure a project in the moment of participation, but also co-ordinating the projects on a national scale through sharing ideas and collaboration between areas. This scaffolding is important as practitioners draw on project

management skills to support the emerging capacity of the groups, while providing the young people with the information and guidance that they need to set feasible goals and drive a project forward.

“I suppose to give them support in what they want to do. Sometimes it could be just tapering in, you know, focusing down a piece of work [...] okay brilliant let's accept one in trying to, you know that would be the ultimate goal but how do we get there? What are the stepping stones in order to make that happen? And what would be the timescale? And just kind of setting realistic expectations as well.” (Respondent 7)

“So, we sort of give them the information and let them do it, so just to give them as much empowerment to be able to go I can do this myself and then we are there if they need any help with any of the information, we will sort of guide them, we know you can do this, just give them the encouragement.” (Respondent 8)

Examples of Collective Projects

A wide variety of group projects have been developed as a result of collective participation, enabling young people and their parents to respond to social issues of relevance to the group in a way that captured their own interests and concerns. For example, young people and their parents responded to the same theme of social media in different ways. Young people were more concerned with the emotional impact of engaging with social media, which led to advocates helping them make sense of the online environment and consider how to navigate challenges. However, parents identified an unaddressed need for support surrounding internet safety and digital education, which led to the group bringing in an external source of expertise in order to address this gap. This resulted in the production of a guide to internet safety produced by the parents for other parents.

“The main one is social ineptness and embarrassment through social media has a lot to do with it. Social media gives us these perfect people, perfect figures, and the young people are sort of striving to replicate this [...] It is that sort of social media for us, it can have huge positives, like participation last year was how do we survive in the digital age? And we would have really got young people then to open up about the challenges, the positives, the online bullying, everything like that and that was all youth led as well.” (Respondent 13)

“Last year on our parents' participation programme there was a need identified where some parents were maybe struggling to keep up to date with some of the technology, some of the apps, some of the social media that their young people were using. And I suppose this disconnection caused maybe arguments at home and this lack of understanding. So off the back of that then, we would put together a programme where they were educated on social media and technology to try and fill that gap and

they were given opportunities to explore things that they were unsure about and our job was to try and fill the gap in learning.” (Respondent 5)

Some of the thematic areas addressed through group participation entail activities that extend beyond the confines of YAP Ireland’s practice into the broader social milieu, thus amplifying youth voices on issues that affect them. An example of this is the Youth CEO Groups action on the theme of homelessness where they produced a report that centred young people’s perspectives on the issue to address a gap in knowledge, which was followed by a youth directed programme of philanthropy.

“So, 2019 the Youth CEO group did a piece of work around homelessness, that is what they wanted to do. So, they collected care packages and we donated [unclear 00:08:12] to the homeless and then they also launched a report alongside the last NUIG research report actually. And it was obviously submitted to government and to other policy makers around young people's views of some of the things that should be done to end homelessness. (Respondent 6)

The CEO group has also produced a report on the experience of social work support, based on research they conducted with the nationwide network of service users involved in YAP groups, along with input from social work professionals. This report was disseminated to Tusla, along with decision makers in the governance sphere including the Ombudsman for Children. Their suggested recommendations were accepted by Tusla which suggests a level of influence was attained as a result of their efforts.

“And similarly with the Youth CEO group, the piece of work that they done around young people's experience of social work and the care system, and they put together a questionnaire and had learned how to do agenda days and they ran their own agenda days within some of the existing young people's participation group [...] And they spoke to social workers and the compiled the report and that was launched in the Mansion House, again with Niall Muldoon was there, who else was there? A couple of people from Tusla were there and it had been agreed that Tusla were going to take this research on board and implement it.” (Respondent 7)

Localised interagency collaborative responses could also be influenced by participatory projects at a national level. One respondent noted how the learning from the national Youth CEO Group research project on relationships with social workers, was of particular interest to Tusla in their area and that this translated that into a group action project for that specific area.

“For children in child protection because they don't tend to see their social worker unless there was an issue or a problem was how they felt about it. And they didn't feel that that worked for them because then they just didn't know this person, this person only ever turned up if there was an issue, they didn't

just turn up and go for a cup of coffee or something and get to know them. So yeah, that was a lovely joint piece of work between the two agencies.” (Respondent 6)

Parents’ voices have also been supported to conduct research with other parents regarding their experiences of social work support, and to present their findings to the CEO of Tusla, a key decision maker with the power to respond the concerns.

“So, one of the years they did, because they had a questionnaire that they did out for each table at the national event and asked people to fill it in, and then they asked people what their experiences were of social work. Then they had a meeting with Fred McBride who was the Tusla CEO at the time, he came into the YAP office [...] and it was a question-and-answer thing. And I think he had made a [promise] to them that they could either come into his office or he would look at a piece of work that they had done.” (Respondent 7)

Other participatory projects might have a more practical focus. In one area, the young people were invited to take action on the issue of inadequate facilities for family access in Tusla’s local offices, working with staff to transform a place into an area more suitable for social meetings with families. Within this project the young people incorporated issues that was important to them, recycling materials to achieve the goal of creating a sensory garden.

“it was identified by Tusla that there wasn't an appropriate place for family access in the new Tusla building. So, the young people decided they would like to create a project around that and make somewhere nice for families to come in and hang out and spend time together that didn't feel like a clinical environment or just a social worker office. So they created a sensory garden. It was amazing [...] So they looked at what they could use, because there was a lot of discussion around the environment and global warming and upcycling essentially, so they actually used materials like they used old CDs, picked up different items they could use and transform [...] It was really nice, it was really colourful, there was hop-scotch painted on the ground, murals by different young people.” (Respondent 7)

During the Covid 19 pandemic implementing participatory work has been a challenge. YAP Ireland has had to adjust its strategies to engage youth in participatory projects during the pandemic. This involved young people adapting a theme into an individual project with their advocates. One case demonstrated how this form of participation could result in recognition from a relevant audience which had the potential to be experienced as meaningful by the young people.

“Well the individual groups, it is interesting because with lockdown some of the young people have

been just working with their advocate on a project [...] in one of my cases with my young person we wrote a poem about lockdown which we ended up, it was printed by YAP and sent out as a Christmas card to all of the participants in YAP and it was also sent to the President and he wrote back to us. So that was amazing [...] And then there are loads of other advocates that have just done one on one projects that have been amazingly successful. Another young person in another area did a rap and did a video and played it to all of us and we all got to see it. So there has been small ones that have been fantastic, really highlighting their skills.” (Respondent 9)

During this period YAP Ireland has also collaborated with a YAP programme in the USA to operate collaborative transnational participatory activities, reflecting on the experiences of young people throughout this pandemic through art, while socialising and reflecting on cultural experiences. This experience was valued by all the young people who took part, so it is expected to be continued in the form of a resilience programme run by a facilitator from the US and the development of an international theme.

“We have established now, it's very early days, a forum with our international colleagues in the US so we are going to form an international youth cafe where young people from the YAP programme in Ireland can go and hang out virtually with their US counterparts on the programme in the US. And it is facilitated by a YAP Ireland team leader. They had one before Christmas around, there was an international project around capturing the Covid times through artwork. Some people from Ireland did a piece of artwork and loads of people from the US did bits and pieces of artwork and they posted it online on the gallery [...] If you saw something you liked, you were able to send a little comment and message to the artist just saying how great it was [...] There is one facilitator from LA who is going to facilitate a little session on resilience and reflection [...] And then we are opening it up then for the year to get themes from the young people and the staff and I suppose try and make it as accessible for as many people as possible and just see where it takes us.” (Respondent 7)

Access to a Relevant Audience

As part of collective participatory practices, YAP provides opportunities for young people and their parents to access a wider audience of relevant decision-makers which has the potential to make participation meaningful for them, given their circumstances. For example, they can access an audience of welfare professionals and decision makers, as well as decision makers from a governance level, all of whom have potential authority to make decisions that can impact their lives. This is achieved through a national event at which the young people and their parents showcase their participatory projects. Practitioners discussed the importance of disseminating the voices of young

people to the relevant audience who may have an interest, investment, or relation to the circumstances in which young people and their families find themselves.

“It is all well and good for the young person to spend months doing work and for us as an organisation to be aware of their voice but if we are not going to amplify that and put that out to a wider audience then really, we are doing young people a disservice. So by having a national event, by inviting the right people to create the audience with power and decision making, I think then we are giving the best opportunity for the young people's voices to have the most impact.” (Respondent 5)

Outside of the National Conference YAP frequently supports the views of young people to and their parents to be communicated to Tusla at local events in order to address concerns that they might have with aspects of service. An example of this is a targeted local project intended to inform social workers of the importance of their relationship with the young people they support, which included the dissemination of visual prompts around communication. A respondent felt that Tusla staff responded positively to these expressions of views regarding experience with social work processes.

“So, they gave each little table had a bag per person, a little goody bag with the flyers which showed what their findings were and an outline of the work that they had done and basically their key takeaways. So, you got a pen and then a big sticker that you put in your diary for example, and it was a picture of a smiley face with a clock on it and it said 'be on time.' Like a reminder to the social worker and that was so well received by the social work teams in [area] The social workers are actually taking on board and receiving some hard to hear messages from young people who they work with specific to their area. And receive that and have acknowledge that their voice is really valid, their points are valid, that we don't always do the right thing by young people all the time. And that is not necessarily intentional, obviously, but just remember the impact of you running late or you not being as organised as you could be or should has such a devastating impact on a young person.” (Respondent 7)

YAP also disseminate the projects on their website and in newsletters which they publish on a regular basis to further support the accessibility of young people and their parents' views on matters that affect them to a wider audience on an ongoing basis. This also affords YAP Ireland the opportunity to recognise and appreciate the contributions and skills of their young service users.

“We have a biweekly newsletter, and if a young person makes a nice t-shirt or makes some posters or does football keepy-uppies, whatever that moment is, their advocate will video it, take a photograph of it, send it in and it will go in the newsletter and there will be a little shout out to them [...] They are just noticing and congratulating them on those tiny win makes a huge difference because for them it is actually not a tiny win.” (Respondent 9)

A vital aspect of participatory practice to avoid tokenism is feedback and response from the audience which is valued by the young people. One young person argued that it is important that the service and staff are responsive as this is evidence that they are heard and the focus group was in unanimous agreement that this was an important aspect of participation.

“I think being heard is very important for participation because there is no point engaging in a conversation or participating if your opinion isn't going to be heard or discussed in more detail. Even if it is not something that is like, like if it was out of things to pick, even if you gave your opinion on something and if it was discussed a bit that would be fine, at least you were heard about it.” (Young Person Group B)

However, this aspect of participation might not always be attained at the level of collective practice. A respondent reflected on the importance of recognition and feedback for the parents' groups noting that this was the aspect of experience that would make participation meaningful. However, it is not clear that the parents received feedback from this process, despite recognition of their views.

“They are actually good about asking our opinion about things, what do you think? That is quite nice as well. Now whether they act on it or not I don't know but everything we have done has been either for self-improvement or how to manage things better, which is great. Because we have no manuals, even experience doesn't equip you for everything.” (Parent Group)

Outcomes of Collective Participation

One of the important aspects of scaffolding practices in YAP Ireland is that practitioners strive to remain solution focused when groups are responding to social issues in the moment of participation. This focus on solutions supports the production of outputs, such as practice prompts for social workers, reports on social issues from the national forums and practical guides such as tips for parenting and managing behaviour, as well as a cookbook. These outputs potentially benefit both service providers, and fellow service users.

“Like there is documents done from YAP, you should request it, it is a small one, and it is a parent sort of guide from a parenting group that they developed participation on how to deal with behaviour and what to do. So one of these things would be pick your battles, you know, with the young people. I have that document around there somewhere. But that was the advice that a parent participation group had, and it was so good it was put in as a sort of guide for new parents coming onto the YAP programme.” (Respondent 13)

“I think it makes a huge difference to the service and to the outcomes so even though a lot of work goes into it at the end of the day it makes the service better and therefore that is better for the staff as well, better for all of us. And it keeps us a little bit more solution focused as well because we want the kids to have solutions that work for them and that hopefulness that they bring is really important.”
(Participant K.I. Focus Group)

Reflection on the Depth of Participation Achieved in YAP Ireland Processes

A secondary round of focus groups conducted with decision-makers and advocates using Lansdown and O’Kane’s (2014) reflective tool to explore the scope (at which point of practice did participation take place) and depth (to what degree did the young people lead) of participation. The scope of participation was found to be extensive. However, the depth of participation tended to vary at each point where participation is possible ranging from consultative (young people asked for views), to collaborative (young people working with adults) to child led (young people making decisions). The reason for this variation in the depth of participation attained is related to the capacities and interests of the young people themselves, and the scaffolding practices of practitioners required to drive group practices forward or support the capacity of the young person to engage in goal setting and planning in the ISP. This meant that the depth of participation attained at any particular point can be fluid and dynamic depending on the participant’s needs regarding participation. An example of this is seen in practitioner’s reflection on participation in planning and decision making within the ISP.

“It was kind of a mix of consultative and child led because he is quite mature so he kind of knows what his goals were, and he was telling us. But it was done in a way where we were sitting down and asking him what can we do for you. So, it was a mixture of the two” ... “The two I have done would be a mixture of the child led and collaborative in so much as we ask the young person what they would like to work towards and then I would say to them we could try and achieve this by giving them a range of ways of doing that and then asking them which they want to do.” (Participants ADV. Focus Group).

“In some cases, you are almost two weeks into it and you are like okay we need the goal here, we need to do your ISP. But in other cases, you could be looking at six or eight weeks before they are ready and it is really about investing that, I always say like the first four weeks just have a bit of fun, get to know your advocate because that is then where you are getting [work done] [...] I think when you invest the time in that you can have the child led space.” (Participants K.I. Focus Group).

In group participation, the depth of participation attained is also variable dependent on the needs and interests of the group. Furthermore, the depth of participation attained is not necessarily increasing in depth moving from consultation to child led. One respondent gave an example of how the young

people led first with the request for social activities, the programme for their activities was developed in collaboration with the adults, and the ongoing consultation made sure that the activities were meeting the needs of individual group members.

“I think it is safe to say that we often have like needs led groups which are absolutely child led [...] So there would be a collaborative piece there that is accessible then to the young people. And then consultations, like I always check in, how was that for you?” (Participant K.I. Focus Group).

It is clear from another respondent’s reflection that scaffolding and consultative practices are necessities in participatory practice, as agenda setting and planning are skills that must be developed by the young person and reflected on the importance of practitioner reflexivity to ensure participatory principles were being maintained. This affirms that participation in particular contexts, and projects require sensitivity to the capacities of the young people in order to ensure that they participate in a way that is meaningful for them.

“When you hold agenda days that are led by young people, the beginning, the middle and the end, however I suppose they just need some support in explaining what is going to happen and the planning around that maybe. But you wonder do people kind of input a little bit more than what they could or should or maybe could we have held back a little bit. But there would definitely be efforts to push for completely child led or youth led days. But more so we would use a combination of the three, consultative, collaborative and youth led.” (Participant K.I. Focus Group).

Findings 3: Benefits of Participation

For the Organisation

Participation in the ISP planning and decision-making processes support YAP Ireland to achieve positive outcomes for the young people who engage with the programme. For example, getting the young person to set their own goals in their ISP increases the likelihood that these goals will be met as they will be more realistic and relevant to their needs.

“We can't do a review meeting without the young person being there or the family being there otherwise it is just professionals giving their opinion on how things are and how things have progressed. So really the young person's voice is central to everything they do. At the end of the day it is their six-month programme, it is our job to just support them to get the most out of that.” (Respondent 5)

“Without this how could YAP ensure it was meeting the needs of the service users?” ... “To understand what the user needs are.” ... “You will see what a young person views are and what best approach is best in working with the young person.” (Staff Survey Responses)

Collective participation is also of value for YAP as an organisation as it provides feedback on services, and a window into young people's lives and their current concerns which allows for a more targeted approach to meeting young people's needs. The youth-centred, fun activities that form the basis of participation groups are held to be key to supporting this benefit as it promotes the young people's engagement with the group.

“If it is fun based, we get incredible feedback from these young people, how we can improve the service at these days. What do young people want? What are young people interested in? What is the vibe with young people these days? We talk about anything from bullying and... It is very cleverly done, it is always kept fun, yeah, and we always listen and everyone's point is taken on board. We would encourage people to, if they don't want to speak loudly give out pieces of paper, write down their... But it wouldn't be blank pieces, there would be little props on what to do and all. The feedback we can get so we can improve our service, as service providers, is invaluable, completely invaluable.” (Respondent 13).

One respondent noted that involving young people in recruitment can ensure that any hiring done is a good fit for the organisation as the young person can relate to them and this helps YAP Ireland find staff that can work best with the young people it supports.

“It works so well, and they are so intuitive, if you as a professional, you are kind of getting the sense for somebody, I don't know, maybe not a right fit for the organisation, we are not sure. And at the end of the interview the young person is like, no, no. They know straight away and you are like, oh my God I was thinking the same thing. It is really, really good, they are really, really good at getting a good sense of people. And I love they are able to see, okay that person may not relate to me but I could see them with maybe Mary down the road or whatever, they are so, so good to give their opinion on the recruitment panel, it is great.” (Respondent 4)

Participation projects that are disseminated to external agencies can also promote practitioner reflection as an aid to improved practice through exposure to views and experiences of service users regarding their experience of welfare services. A practitioner reflected on the capacity of young people to come up with actions to issues in service, giving the example of their response to the problem of communication from social work practitioners. The respondent found that this particular project was received positively by the supporting organisation and that as a result young people benefitted from the perception that they were making services better.

“Often they are proposing solutions that we just haven't thought about and they are really simple and straight forward [...] And often communication is a huge issue with services, and it is an area that we work really hard on because we know that for our families not being contacted and not being able to get in touch with people is really degrading, it makes them feel very upset and angry and therefore they are not going to cooperate very well with services when they do finally get in touch with them. So, when we did the piece of work with Tusla what they developed was a sticker to put on every social worker's computer or on their desk saying 'don't forget me, you must ring me,' [...] Don't just ring me when there is a problem, ring me anyway. And it was just really interesting, and the social workers accepted it and were delighted, and they printed off loads of them and distributed them across the whole of the organisation. And again, for the young people involved in that project it was such a great thing to think you are making a change or you are making a difference to how professionals are going to do their job.” (Respondent 6)

For Young People

Respondents feel that a particular value of participation for the young cohort who engage with their services is that they are being listened too in the context of a support service, where this might not be the usual experience for them. This means that the goals set as part of their ISP are meaningful for them, and also that they experience being contributors to their own welfare which can be very positive for them, particularly as the young people in the focus group felt that it was important that they felt heard in their ISP.

“The majority of the young people that I have been signed up to, they have come from very troubled backgrounds, so they are not listened to at home, even the Guards on the street, the social workers coming in, they don't listen. They might say we are listening, but I have been told you are the first person that has actually listened to me and took note of what I am saying.” (Respondent 8)

The young people in a focus group felt that participation in their ISP planning and decision making had benefits. One young person who was involved in planning and goal setting said it was building up their confidence. Another said that it would ensure that they enjoyed their programme activities, and one young person reflected on how it developed a sense of personal independence.

“Yeah, it is building up my confidence as well” ... “I think we will enjoy it more” ... “I think it is good as well because it is our own independence.” (Young People Group B).

Practitioners also felt that young people also had a chance to experience personal development as a result of participation in organisational processes. According to practitioners, this opportunity allowed the young people to gain experience that would be beneficial in terms of their self-confidence and understanding of employment processes that could extend into their own future experience.

“We would put a young person on the interview board, which I find gives them the belief, the confidence to be able to ask a complete stranger a question, which I find is amazing with the young people. When I joined YAP, I think he was eleven... It was strange walking in because it was like, oh there is a young person. But there was no bother on him asking the questions.” (Respondent 8)

Participation in collective opportunities also provided young people with an opportunity to develop both interpersonal skills and personal benefits such as self-confidence. A respondent reflected on how valuable the experience of participating in group processes was to the particular cohort of young people in YAP as the interpersonal skills can translate back into their own lives and help them overcome challenges that they may be facing.

“I have seen changes in some of my cases where a young person, when you push them a little bit out of their comfort zone and you encourage them to go to participation, where they might just be that little bit slow to engage socially or they actually may have social anxiety, you are saying to them, go, see what it is like, tell me what you don't like about it and let's have a conversation to see how we can help you. This is a really good safe space for you to grow and to push yourself in different environments. Particularly if they are struggling maybe with school and that group piece in school, to be able to come into participation, to do that in a very supportive way to gain skills, negotiation skills, conflict resolution, communication, they are all things that they take back into their everyday life within school and have

the confidence to do that without the support of the handholding of an advocate.” (Respondent 3)

According to practitioners, this is an experience that is also empowering for the young people as it supported them to recognise their own innate ability to problem solve through engagement in the supported practices and safe space of the group. The young people also felt that participation in group processes promoted a sense of confidence as a result of the opportunity to contribute to group projects, and enhanced wellbeing as they developed social skills.

“They are the experts in their own lives, and they know the answers, they know the solutions, they just need the help and support and tools to be able to do that. And I think, you know, there is a lot of benefit to having the young person speak up and their voice to be heard because it leads the way, it leads the way for others and it is so empowering for them, it builds their confidence, it builds their self-esteem. It is like the foundations for life skills in life, you know, it is building them up to prepare them for the bigger world, that you matter, your voice matters.” (Respondent 4)

“So they let you speak, not like most adults; they go on with what other adults say. You won’t be able to get to speak. But at YAP you will, you’re able to say your good ideas and all. You’re able to show you’re artistic work and it’s in a small group so it doesn’t have to be around everyone. So then you can send letters to a lot of different places; you can have fun in a lot of different places and basically it gives your imagination a boost and your confidence a boost.” (Young Person FG 1 May)

“My anxiety really; they helped me with this whole group thing that they’re doing now, the participation thing and talking to people is easier.” (CS Young Person 8)

One stakeholder put forward the idea that participation that resulted in outputs could reinforce a sense of agency as the outputs may make a difference to social issues that affect those young people and parents. In this account this aspect of participation was seen to be empowering, repositioning the service user as collaborator rather than a passive recipient of services, with the implications that this might have for self-esteem. This was considered all the more important given the potential impact of structurally generated difficulties in the lives of service users. This sense of agency is evident in the account of one young person.

“There is their own individual agency and that feeling of having your voice heard both in your own life but also then that you have a contribution to make the wider society which is really important and really important that people feel they listened to me at least and they published something that I was involved in. And it might make a difference, it may make a difference and I think most young people and parents who were on the receiving end of services have a lot of great insights into actually how

those services could make very small changes that could really improve the situation. So I suppose that is where that, giving back agency I think to people who often think they are being done to all the time, there is something wrong with me so I have been referred here or there is something wrong with me so that is why I have to go there. Whereas in actual fact a lot of the issues that are affecting them are structural issues and as a broader society we have a responsibility to say something about that and then also to hopefully do something about it and that they have agency and that their voices are included in trying to make positive change, not just for themselves but for others which is really important.”
(Respondent 6)

“Well we try to change something, think the team is like a community so we’re trying to change something within the community at the moment.” (CS Young Person 10)

Young people’s capacity to present at the national conference was held to be evidence of the development of confidence and capacity by practitioners. This was significant because the young people engaged with YAP experience challenges within their individual circumstances, yet group participation has supported their capacity to speak to that experience in front of large numbers of people in order to raise awareness about social issues that may affect them. In this way, potentially disempowering circumstances are channelled into meaningful projects, that are then recognised by practitioners with implications for the young person’s esteem.

“At Croke Park and we would have 200 or 300 people attending that from all over the country, different organisations, different speakers and the young people quite often will get up and showcase the work that they have been doing. And for a young person to get up at a place like Croke Park in front of 200 or 300 people and actually speak, can you imagine how massive that actually is for them? I mean I have spoken myself and my knees were trembling behind the thing. But for a young person to actually get up and speak in front of all those people and talk about the work that they have been doing or even their own personal journey. I had a young person who wrote a poem about being bipolar and actually stood up in front of everybody and read this poem out which was a massive thing for her to do.”
(Respondent 14)

In addition to the opportunity for personal development, collective participation was particularly valued for its social aspect by the young participants. Young respondents felt that the group was a place to make friends and access social support. A practitioner noted that group participation can be especially valuable for young people who don’t have a well-developed social network of their own. In one conversation between young people at a focus group they discussed how participation groups were often planned in advance and expressed ideas about activities that would ensure that the social aspect of participation could be better catered for.

“Well, it just gives everyone a chance to just talk to other people and make other friends and whatnot.”
(CS Young Person 9)

“You have a good time; they help you coping and dealing with different situations. You make friends at group and at CEO. They help cheer you up when you’re sad.” (Young Person CEO FG).

“My other young person lives in a different area but can't go out because it is too dangerous [...]. So, my previous cases, one of them had loads of friends, didn't need any social engagement, need more educational support. So, it really is a case-by-case basis but in my experience really young people benefit from being with other people their own age.” (Respondent 9)

This social aspect of participation for the cohort of young people engaged in YAP Ireland was considered valuable by some respondents as these young people may feel isolated in terms of their circumstances and because of challenges that they may be facing. Through meeting others experiencing challenges that require the intervention of welfare services, the young people had a chance to depersonalise and destigmatise their own experience to a certain extent in the context of group support while being able to give voice to experience in a safe space amongst peers they could relate to.

“We have found when we bring them together and they realise, I am not the only one going through this, I am not the only one in foster care, I am not the only one who lives with some stranger. It, not normalises it, because it is not normal, it is normal for them I suppose, but it just makes it more bearable, that is a way of putting it. They are part of something bigger than themselves, there are other people going through that. So participation is so valuable for that.” (Respondent 9)

Furthermore, the participatory space also offers a place where practitioners could role model healthy pro-social behaviours to support personal development, which a practitioner claimed is valuable for this cohort.

“When we work in participation with the young people, the advocates and the young people attend together and all the advocates who are training, it is always coming from a place of positivity, that is the real message, look at the positives, find the positives, always work with the positives. We don't really dwell on negatives, we leave that. So, you are in a group of adults who are all thinking along the same, and we support each other, so the young people feel that support [...] So it is just so beneficial. Not alone are they interacting with young people their age they are also interacting with a group of adults and it is positive, none of it is negative.” (Respondent 9)

For Parents

Collective participation in YAP is more than an opportunity to have a say in matters that affect them for the parents who engage with the groups. Through this form of participation parents can access peer support and support around issues that affect them as advocates respond to their needs through supportive activity programming. One advocate discussed a localised example of this where a programme of mental and physical fitness activities was planned to support parents throughout the stresses of lockdown, and provide access to social support and peer support around parenting issues.

“I mean kids don't come with instruction manuals; we all have to learn from each other. [...] I think the groups are a very good addition to the YAP service for the parents so we can all get together and say, yes this happened to me and this is what I did. So it is an exchange of ideas.” (Parent Group)

“The logic behind that really was January and lockdown is going to have such a mental impact on everybody but our parents in particular because a lot of parents are home schooling, a lot of parents might be out of work, a lot of parents are dealing with the behaviours of young people that are struggling with the space that they are in. So we decided to be really creative and think how can we support the parent without being condescending, without being judgemental. And one of the parents had said before they wanted to try and get healthy in 2021, that was their goal, so as a result we said we would do the operation transformation.” (Respondent 3)

The combination of supportive programming and a space for parents to take time for themselves was perceived to be valuable as they meet other people who were also experiencing similar challenges. So it gave them a forum where they could discuss their challenges without fear of judgment, which was perceived to be a great relief as some parents felt that they had no other options for support. Sharing challenges and offering support to each other allowed parents to gain a bit of perspective on their own situations which was beneficial for their sense of self.

“Well I think they are great, as much for anything else they are a safety valve, you know, like the pressure cooker, you get it off your chest and it helps, believe it or not, just to get rid of it out, it is like confession, passing it on [...] it is just support and you know you could say anything, and you'd be listened to and you wouldn't feel, as [parent] said, embarrassed.” (Parent Group)

“I have to say it changed me now not to judge myself too hard, you know, not to be judging myself, that I am not a bad parent” ... “Yeah, and it is not all your fault” ... “Exactly” ... “I feel that too, as in it is all my fault, I was taking all the blame and what is happening is an adult choosing to do certain things, you know, and picking up the slack a bit. Okay, I get blamed too but I am not a totally innocent bystander

either, but I just feel it helped me to put a little bit of balance [...] Yeah perspective, that is it, yes.”
(Parents Focus Group A).

Participation can also alleviate the sense of isolation for some parents giving them ‘peace of mind’ as they felt that they were not alone, and they could access help if they need it. Reflecting on the supportive aspect of group participation, one parent considered the nature of modern parenting and noting the weakness of community ties and the isolation of the modern family unit, felt that the community of parents that YAP facilitated through the participatory group was of particular value as a remedy to this particular challenge. Furthermore, this parent felt that it added dimension to their identity as more than a caregiver in their young person’s lives.

“Peace of mind and just to know I am not alone, there is some support out there or people willing to help. And I like the interaction as well because at the moment with the lockdown and the way things are the only actual human interaction, I have is with the YAP worker when she comes, you know. And that kind of keeps me I suppose grounded, it keeps me grounded as well, I am not left to my own, well I wouldn’t say left to my own devices, but you know.” (Parents Group A)

“Yeah, nowadays we are all so separate, years ago when I was small, now that is a long time ago, but as a child you didn’t dare do anything wrong because you knew that would go home before you, somebody would tell your parents. Nowadays nobody is interested, and the family has become fairly isolated [...] And I think YAP is great in that regard, that you become part of a unit even. Like I felt I was part of a group and I had an identity other than the granny and looking after the grandchildren or whatever.” (Parent Group A)

One practitioner felt that these benefits arising from parents’ participation in group work processes is a strength of practice, as supporting the wellbeing and development of parents through forms of social support can translate into benefits for the young person.

“For our parent group at the moment, we have parents who may have not got a young person in the programme, they may have finished say over six months ago, but the parent will still access the support because it is the emotional support. And by doing that piece it is nearly helping still the young person who would have been on the programme because the parent is getting the additional support.”
(Respondent 3)

Findings 4: Challenges to Participation

The Attainment of Participation

Some respondents expressed a concern that the principles of participation may not be understood by all the advocates who supported participation, and that this could be addressed by integrating rights-based participation into the core training module for all advocates.

“It's ensuring that the advocates have an understanding of participation as well and making sure that they are not leading the group and they are allowing the young people to lead the group, I think that is really important that they have an understanding of that. And maybe we could include a little bit more about participation in our training [...] so I make it very clear that this is the young person's group, you are there to empower them and not to do for them. For example, in the cooking group I would have had advocates coming in going, right I will chop the onion and... And I was like, no this is not the advocates cooking for the young person's group, this is the young person's cooking group and so you are there to empower them [...] I think sometimes people have a tendency to go in and do for rather than let do.” (Respondent 14).

However, other respondents involved in participation groups felt that sometimes there was a disconnect between the themes generated at a national level and the interests of their group regarding young people. They also noted that sometimes the theme was so broad that it was hard for the young people to identify an actionable project. This meant that sometimes respondents led in decision-making around the development of group projects. While this approach to group practice may not be in line with the concept of voice in terms of rights-based practice, it may in some instances be rights respecting as not all participants may want to lead on a group project. In these cases, a focus on social activities as a good in itself may be more important in order to respect the principle of voluntarism in participation. As one respondent noted, despite the challenge in translating a theme into an actionable item, there was still a benefit in bringing the themes to the young person's attention as it could support awareness and education around social issues.

“It is nearly down to the advocates to plan the project, to get all your young people together and to play what little project you are going to do.” (Participant ADV. Focus Group)

“The theme can sometimes be a bit abstract, and you have to almost translate it to make it mean something and it can be, so the mindfulness one I was aware of but not just in YAP, that happens everywhere, there is hip and trendy, let's go all out on whatever the current issue is, whether it is gender identity, whether it is online bullying or whatever it is. It is a great way to bring those things to the focus and to the consciousness of young people.” (Participant ADV. Focus Group)

Other respondents felt that attaining influence on matters that affect them at the level of group participation was not easily achieved, and there was room to further reflect on the notion of audience and influence with the young people in order to make participation more meaningful to the young people in terms of their rights.

“Are we really fulfilling those final two pieces influence and audience, you know, and are we coming back to the young people with that? They develop a project, or they develop an idea and are they aware of who their audience is and are they aware of what influence do they want and change they want out of it. So I suppose just to move it forward and to, you know, for the kids themselves, the young people, that they know of their project, they know the influence, well the hoped influence it is going to have on the audience that they are going to be presenting to.” (Respondent 10)

However, the reflection of another respondent illustrates that attaining influence is complicated by variables that are beyond the reach of YAP Ireland’s control, and that it was important to be mindful of this in practice providing feedback to young people as to why this is in line with a rights-based approach.

“As much as we say to let us know, any suggestions, it is not guaranteeing that everything will change. It is the validation that we will respond I as well suppose. If we can't deliver on a suggestion, we try to let people know these are the reasons why.” (Respondent 7)

Group Dynamics

Balancing the different needs of different age cohorts was perceived to be a challenge by one respondent, as their needs and behaviour in groups varied widely. This was not held to be an inherently negative experience.

“I know in [...] before the group actually became really, really big and there was a lot more younger children on the programme at the time as well so we kind of had to look at maybe it is better that we have an older group and a slightly younger group. So kind of managing that and then the questions that came out, I should be in that group, my mate is in that group. Working around those kinds of things can be a challenge. Nothing that the staff aren't used to but again it just takes a little bit more thinking and consideration and planning.” (Respondent 7)

Managing group participation and dynamics in parents’ groups can also be challenging given the often fraught histories that parents have, and the potential impact of disclosure on other parents in the group. This is managed by the development of a group contract.

“Well, I know the challenges we would often have, and we would continue to have with the parent group is possibly their boundaries. And when I say their boundaries, it is because they see this as such a safe space they are inclined to over disclose. And as a group, that is not always the safest space to be making these disclosures because there are so many different individuals with their own stories, and we don't necessarily know what the impact that may have.” (Respondent 3)

Engagement

Sometimes the personal attributes or challenges facing a young person could present a barrier to their participation. Some young people may not be interested or have enough trust in their advocate to engage in group work with them early on in the programme. Parents can be particularly hard to engage due to an internalised sense of stigma. The importance of time to build relationships and trust with service users is important here.

“Depending on the young person or the parent, the idea of maybe speaking their truth or giving feedback might not interest them. And that might be a lack of confidence, a lack of self-esteem, they may not have ever felt heard before, they may not feel that they have much to say, and that depends on the place they are at. So sometimes young people or families, there might be barriers to them wanting to engage but it can be for various different reasons. Sometimes you overcome those barriers and sometimes once they get comfortable with the programme and their advocate and they have built a relationship we can encourage and support them to overcome that.” (Respondent 5)

“There is always much more of a challenge around getting parents to get involved and that would be through all levels of group work, everything, social activities even. And I think again it is partly because parents blame themselves so much and see themselves as being bad, and they are much less willing to be with other parents initially because they think they will all be looking at me and they will all blame me and they will all know that I am really bad and they are all right.” (Respondent 6)

Logistics

Participation is costly in terms of human resources and funding, and managing its demands on budgets can be challenging as it is such an integral part of the work.

“And then the hours cost, there are staffing costs that are big and obviously all the planning that goes into it for it to work and to be safe and to be supportive to the kids rather than something that we are just doing because we want to do it. Team leaders and advocates have to plan what is going to happen, we have to have the resources available, a lot of art work and stuff like that or whatever it might be. And we have to have food, because that is very important, it is the key ingredient with young people, and parents actually, but particularly with the young people and they will debate every single week

what they are having the next week and they will vote for the food choice and all of that sort of stuff.”
(Respondent 6)

The advocates are a vital human resource in terms of support for participation. However, their capacity to promote participation or provide logistical support for the attendance at groups is sometimes challenged. Here, geographical location emerges as a barrier as the logistics of supporting young people and their parents to participate when they are from rural areas and distanced from the location of the groups, and from their advocates, can be difficult to resolve when advocates who work part-time may have other jobs, and responsibilities. This is exacerbated in the context of the current ongoing pandemic. The schedules of the young people could also affect their capacity to participate in group activities.

“Challenges are where maybe the advocates [...] don't have that flexibility to incorporate participation into the young person's weekly plan because they might have other jobs, they might have other cases, with restrictions they may not be able to bring two or three people in a car at the moment. Not that we can meet up with big groups.” (Respondent 3)

“Some of the feedback was around getting into the offices, we used to have an office in Dublin so like getting into the office at times was at times a bit of a challenge [...] But I know for some of the areas, transport and geographical location could and has been a challenge at times.” (Respondent 7)

“We were restricted in time. One of the participation groups was at 6:00, it was just awkward because it was just an awkward time and you were trying to feed the young people on the way over. And then another participation football group, it just didn't suit me actually, was 4:00 and my young person wasn't out of school so we never made that group. It was just the timing.” (Respondent 8)

Logistical challenges also present barriers to the engagement of parents who require additional practical support such as childcare in addition to transport, which poses an additional challenge in rural areas.

“It is less tricky with young people as it is for parents because then you have childcare, especially for the more rural parts like in [...] spread quite widely [...] that can be a challenge to get groups going and to give up their time. It is a lot easier with the young people because you have the afternoons, the advocate comes and collects them and off they go.” (Respondent 7)

Findings 5: Opportunities for Further Development

Quality Monitoring

Of relevance to concerns around the attainment of participation, as underpinned by a rights-based understanding of practice, some stakeholders reflected on the need for social care organisations to provide evidence that their work is achieving their aims and objectives and they noted that measuring or capturing these results can be difficult. Other respondents said that the ability to measure the outcomes of participation would be valuable in order to drive the continued development of practice.

“It is becoming more and more apparent within the social care sector to be able to evidence your work and evidence in a robust and meaningful way. So not that it is necessarily something that is an ongoing challenge, but I think it potentially could pose a challenge and I think it could potentially be a gap or an area that we could strengthen to provide evidence that goes beyond say discussion or observation. And again, I suppose it is something that we already do to a certain extent but maybe not for all aspect of participation.” (Respondent 5)

Efforts to better evaluate the involvement of young people at various points throughout the group work process are already underway as one practitioner is reflecting on how this can be.

“I am just in the process now as well of just finishing I suppose a one pager form on just a bit of planning around participation and just ensuring that young people are included from the get-go of it. Have they been involved in the conversations to develop this project? And just setting up the objectives there. And part of that then the last piece will be going back and evaluating have these objectives been met, yes, no, did they go in a different direction? So that is something hopefully we will hope to move forward this year as well.” (Respondent 10)

Decentralization of Formal Opportunities

One respondent felt that decentralising participatory forums could enrich the work by ensuring more diverse representation of young people and their parents in different areas.

“I suppose communication and some voices in the organisation would be louder than the others. So I suppose for me it is about actually practice what you preach and that can be a challenge. And in the organisation because we streamline communication, particularly around the national event, we streamline the communication into one funnel of the communications parcel whereas, I mean I understand but I think it needs to still stay a little bit more in the areas. I think we could break it down

into different roles across the organisation rather than streamlining it into one focus. I think we might lose some colour to our events and that. Does that make sense?" (Respondent 2)

Increased Opportunity for Involvement in Organisational Processes

Other respondents spoke of plans to encourage the participation of young people or their parents on board structures and at participation planning meetings which would deepen participation in organisational processes. This respondent reflected on the amount of support that this would need in practice in order to ensure that their participation was meaningful.

"I know there is talks to put a young person, or a parent, onto the board of management at some point. I think a lot of work would have to be done, a lot of support would be needed, and I just wouldn't like to see that as being a tokenistic piece. I would like to see that as having more meaning. I would like it to be thought through to see how it would look. I have often thought as well that a young person, or a parent, might need to be involved in the participation planning meetings that we would have with the advocates because, you know, maybe we would have lead, young people and lead parents, that side of it." (Respondent 3)

Another staff member felt that there was potential to involve young people in the induction of advocates. This could result in increased practitioner awareness of young people's and parents' hopes and wishes for their experience of support from YAP Ireland advocates.

"I would have spoken even with another colleague this morning and we spoke about maybe developing a bit of a project where we can get young people's feedback in the induction of new staff and develop that piece then as well, that they then would be part of that process as well. So, we would move it forward from the interview panel but actually inducting training the advocates as well." (Respondent 10)

Another respondent spoke of training up parents to be champions for participation in their community and so take more of a lead in this area of practice. This was seen as potentially enabling forms of peer support to be available to parents who may not wish to take part in group processes, as well as devolving more responsibility for group processes which would upskill the parent and give them valuable leadership experience that could translate into other opportunities.

"I know I have looked at over the last year doing a champion parent mentor programme so that we would have a consistent couple of parents, it would be a job spec, like a volunteer role, they would apply for it and we would train them. They would have to go through all of our child protection. Be part of that peer mentorship for some parents within the wider community, that they could link in with

hard-to-reach parents who may necessarily don't want to be part of the group but still might want the additional support [...] And it is something then that they could use as a skill or if they were ever going to go and work somewhere that they have got 12 months experience on the programme that is relevant." (Respondent 3)

6: Discussion

This case study will be discussed with reference to the literature in order to examine the strengths and weaknesses of participation in YAP Ireland and support organisational learning. This will include a reflection on YAP Ireland's culture of participation, the organisational structures that support it and the participatory practices within it.

Culture

In terms of culture, participation is viewed as a 'ribbon' that runs through YAP Ireland's programme, derived in part from the essential role of staff as mediators and supporters of young people's voices. It is evident from respondent's accounts that it is occurring at multiple points on both an individual and collective level. In individual opportunities, the young person's voice is central to all aspects of practice from situational analysis, to goal setting and review, while individuals and groups also have an opportunity to participate in organisational processes. In addition to individual opportunities to exercise voice and choice, collective participation is embedded in practice with ongoing local participation groups, national fora contributing to cyclically occurring national events where projects that are produced are showcased to an audience of relevant decision-makers.

The organisational culture and philosophy of YAP Ireland around participation is an important supportive factor of practice (Havelick et al., 2016; Ramey et al., 2017). The culture of participation is underpinned by strategic documents which position participation within YAP Ireland as a key goal for practice. These strategic documents promote the voice of young people and their parents as integral to YAP Ireland processes and frame participation with a rights-orientated model for practice to ensure genuine participation (Muench et al., 2017). This model requires that young people are given the space, the support for voice, and access to an audience of decision-makers in order to exert influence in matters that affect them, avoiding tokenistic participation (Lundy, 2007).

Furthermore, the policy and planning documents indicate that participation is well supported as they contain provisions for practice that aim to support the voices of young people in their ISP processes, and both young people and their parents in group work. When analysed for quality across nine standards for quality practices (see Appendix 1), it is clear that these documents support participation in a manner that is congruent with quality practice as outlined in the UN General Comment on Article 12 (2009). These include provisions for accountable, transparent practice, that is relevant to the strengths and interests and respectful of the young people's views. Child friendly methods and inclusive supports are indicated, as is the training of staff to support the attainment of the organisation's participatory goals. There is also significant attention paid to safety and risk in group

work processes and solutions to the barriers of participation. These documents indicate that there is a commitment to quality participation (O’Kane & Lansdown, 2014; UN General Comment, 2009).

It has been argued that the effectiveness of participation is contingent on professionals having a shared understanding of what it entails, at both the management and practitioner level this point is worth returning to (Kennan et al., 2016). Some respondents felt that there was a need to formally embed participation training in the core training, as some supporting advocates were not as attuned to the strategic intention of participation as they could be. However, in other cases, practitioners described difficulties in supporting the ideals of participation in group activities as they perceived that the themes were sometimes not relevant to the young people they worked with. It is important to note that this does not necessarily mean that participation is not meaningful for the young people, it could be that their reasons for participation were to avail of social activities rather than to lead on a group project. In these cases their participation can still promote personal development and wellbeing (Bruyere, 2010; Lansdown, 2019).

YAP Ireland’s communication structures provide access to audiences of relevant decision-makers, as both part of the ISP and the collective processes. Some of these audiences are internal, others offer access to a wider arena of decision-makers including those in outside organisational and the political contexts. These efforts to ensure that the concerns of the young people and their parents reach the relevant audience enhance the likelihood that their participation will have a meaningful impact (Carr, 2004; Gazit & Perry Hazan, 2020; Schoenfeld et al., 2019). Advocates within ISP will support parents and young people to communicate with child welfare services or the education system if needed (Kennan et al., 2016; Kirby & Laws, 2009). Access to relevant audiences within collective processes of decision-makers is attained through publication of projects and activities, invited attendance at the national conference and consultation or action projects with Tusla while internally the CEO convenes a Youth CEO group to assist them in the development of policy, and collaborate on projects relating to social issues (Larkins et al., 2014; Thomas & Percy-Smith, 2012). The value of the young person’s and their parent’s contribution to group processes is then acknowledged in conferences showcasing projects, or the publication of contributions online and in print. This is important as many youths involved in public decisions aspire to make a difference, and recognition of their contribution can avoid the perception of tokenism (Gal, 2017).

It is notable that YAP Ireland also strives to amplify the voice of their young person in wider organisational and governance levels (Mannay et al., 2018). Targeting an audience of decision-makers is warranted according to one respondent who notes that some of the challenges faced by families may be structurally generated, providing a rationale for service user voice to be amplified throughout the organisations and beyond (Bunting et al., 2017; Ginwright & James, 2007). This demonstrates a

contextual awareness of the factors that influence the circumstances of young people's lives and the relevance of ensuring access to relevant audiences who have the power to affect change (Larkins et al., 2014; Manney et al., 2018; Slettebø, 2013; Warming, 2006). Whether real influence is always leveraged at higher levels of decision making at a governance level a result of this practice is unknown, however organisations such as Tusla have responded positively to feedback, and actively seek out the engagement of young people and their parents engaged in YAP Ireland's programme indicating a level of responsiveness to their concerns.

These communication structures also function as systems of accountability (Carr, 2007; Forbes Hodge, 2005). Within the ISP, both the advocate and team leader seek ongoing feedback, and this is bolstered by formal review processes with a member of staff not attached to the team via telephone. The intention to ensure quality in practice is supported by the training given to team leaders and lead advocates, ensuring that a rights-based understanding of participatory practice is percolated from a structural level to a process level. Collective participatory practices are monitored and reviewed at decision-maker level through a steering group that includes the CEO, Director of Services and regional Service Managers within the organisation, as well as group leads. External review processes such as the Investing in Children Award further ensure accountability through the assessment of young people's engagement in dialogue within the organisation.

Furthermore, there is a high level of responsiveness to the voices and concerns of service users within YAP Ireland. Responsive structures of communication to key decision-makers support influence on outcomes characterised as changes in practices or policies (Larkins et al., 2014; Ramey et al., 2017). Evidence of this responsiveness to the views of young people includes changes to documents in order to ensure that they are more inclusive and relevant, and the inclusion of views in strategic planning. There may be room for reflection on feedback processes, as one parent affirmed that they felt heard through group processes but wasn't sure that it exerted any influence or was translated into practice, and this concern was echoed by a stakeholder who felt that more work needed to be done to raise young people's awareness of their audience in order to make practice more meaningful.

It is important to note that YAP Ireland does not exclude any voice from participation unless there are concerns about wellbeing, demonstrating an organisational openness to the voice of their young service users regardless of their disposition towards practice or policy (Forbes Hodge, 2005). Taking a positive strengths-based approach to participation meant that the competency or capacity of the young person to contribute at an individual level or a group level never emerged as an issue (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018; Hill et al., 2004; Hinton, 2008). However, in line with the voluntary principle underpinning participation, it is important to note that participation in both the ISP and collective forms of participation are voluntary, young people do not have to take up the YAP programme if they

do not wish to do so. However if they do engage with YAP, they are encouraged to join participatory groups (Lundy, 2007).

The following chart captures the landscape of participation in YAP Ireland as framed by the provisions of the Lundy (2007) model in order to illustrate the aspects of practice that create space, and support voice and the resulting benefits for the young people and their parents. The targeted audience and the types of influence are also outlined and linked to the benefits accrued to YAP Ireland and other relevant organisations.

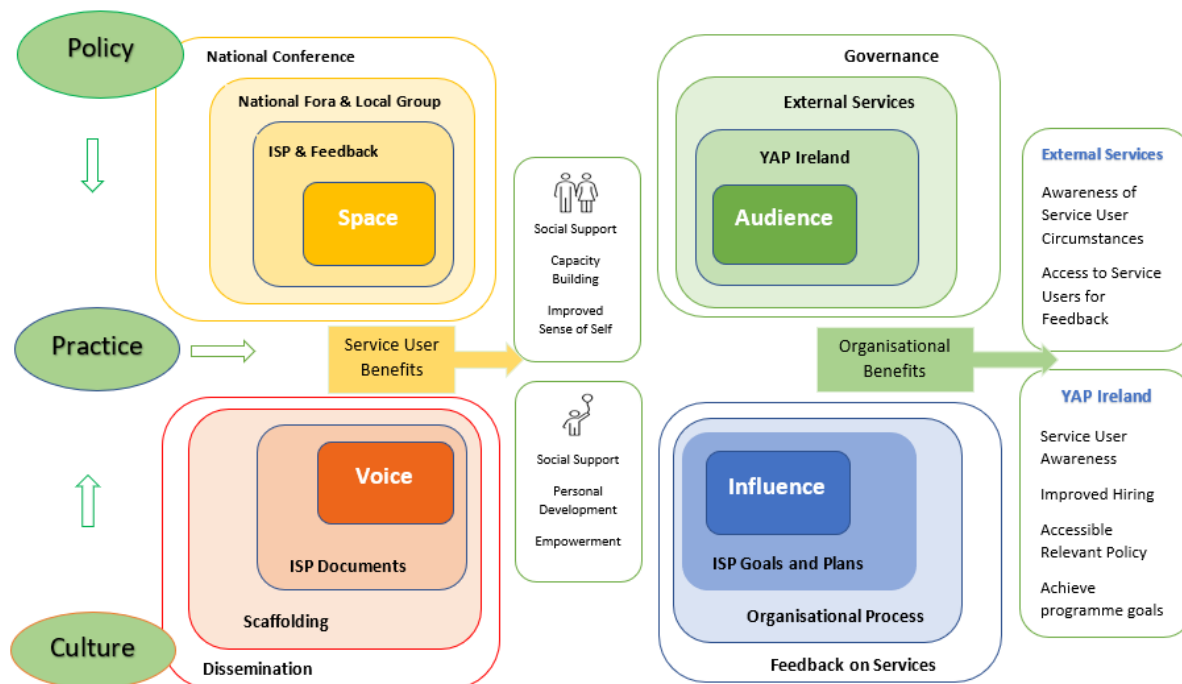


Figure 1 Conceptual Map of Participation

Key Learning from Practice

The following are the key messages emerging from this case study of participation in YAP Ireland:

Relationships Matter

The first is that relationships are important. Practitioners who have noted that participation is often a ‘trust piece’ and this takes time to develop as staff and the advocates work to ensure that young people and their parents know that they respect them and will take their views seriously (e.g., Archard & Skiveness, 2009; Devaney and Dolan, 2017; Devaney, 2017; Gal, 2017; Gallagher et al., 2012; Hedberg et al., 2017). This is an important aspect of participation given the position of dependency the young service users and their families on professionals who support them, where there is a potential that they have prior experiences of disempowerment in welfare related decision making. This is evidenced in the accounts of respondents who highlighted the disparity between how young

people and professionals may frame the goals of their ISP (Connelly & Devaney, 2017; Cossar et al., 2016; Nybell, 2013).

The format of collective participation that YAP Ireland provides is also an informal, relaxed environment, particularly at a local level, and is valued as a space for socialising and making friendships for the young people and their parents (Havelick et al, 2016:2; Lundy, 2007 & 2011; Muench et al., 2017:50; Rytönen et al. 2017:730). The parents valued the non-judgmental space where they could give voice to experience amongst peers and supportive advocates, which could then facilitate the identification of needs for support, as well as the production of participatory projects (Carr, 2004; Hedburg et al., 2017; Moriarty et al., 2007: 27). Practitioners had observed that parental ambivalence regarding participation is often overcome after experiencing participation in this format (Moriarty et al., 2007). The space given to the development of social relationships and the informal format of the local participatory groups also facilitated the engagement of young people, who appreciated the social aspect of the groups and access to peer support (Forde & Martin, 2016; Thomas & Percy Smith, 2012). Some of the young respondents in the initial evaluation of practice felt that more time should be devoted to the social aspect of participation.

Scaffolding is Important

The second key learning is that marginalised young people and their families need significant support on a personal, and practical level if they are to participate successfully in collective formats (Gal, 2017; Gazit & Perry Hazan, 2020; Goosen & Austin, 2017; Needham et al., 2012; Schoenfeld et al., 2019). In this study, practitioners were understanding of the personal variables that may affect young people's participation, such as low confidence and self-esteem, and in some cases, adapted to the needs of the young person by supporting participation in the larger thematic projects through individual contributions. YAP Ireland also demonstrates a strategic awareness of the potential need for practical support in its practice documents and devotes significant resources through the provision of logistical support, transporting young people and their parents to participatory opportunities, providing babysitting supports for parents and covering cost of the activities.. Without the capacity to deploy these resources the participation of marginalised or disadvantaged young people and their families in group processes may not have been feasible due to the personal cost to the families (Goosen & Austin, 2017; Moriarty et al., 2007).

Capacity building is important, as project planning and implementation are acquired skill sets which young people, and disempowered or marginalised service users, may lack. These skills must be developed through the support of facilitators who can assist them with the information and practices needed to contribute to group decision making and projects (Brady et al., 2018; Gunn, 2008: 254; Ney et al., 2013; van Bijleveld et al., 2014). An example of this scaffolding in practice is the Young CEO

Group, where following a consultation on matters that affected them, young people decided to focus on the issue of homelessness. YAP Ireland supported this project by ensuring access to key decision-makers in the field as part of a consultative process, and helped young people to conduct their own research in this area in a process of collaboration where planning skills were shared with the young people. It would not have been possible for the young people to undertake this project without this form of support, nor would they have had the capacity to self-organise without the initial consultation process or the participatory space. However, the young people also demonstrated that they had the capacity to lead on action in this project through the provision of care packages for homeless people. In this example the depth of participation increased through the young people's continual engagement with the project

It is important to note that the individual capacities of young people and their parents to identify projects and take action on them can be variable depending on their interests and reasons for participation, so the depth of participation achieved in this format can vary. This means that there are times in which participation could be initiated and framed by practitioners as evident in some of the accounts of practitioners, for example themes and activities could be generated from practitioner reflection on group dialogues or collated at a national level through response to issues emerging within ISP practice (Nir & Perry-Hazan, 2016). However, even if the theme is set by practitioners at a local and individual level, the young people and their parents get to choose how they respond to it, restoring the trajectory towards youth or service users led practice. Regardless of the depth of participation achieved, the scaffolding allowed the development of service user capacities and skills, which had the potential to promote future beneficial outcomes for service users (Lansdown, 2019). This included supporting employment seeking, seeking further supports, and making better decisions in terms of social media and healthy living. The benefits of participation in terms of personal development supports the idea that group participation is particularly valuable for people in contact with welfare services (Muurinen, 2019; Slettebø, 2013).

Benefits of Participation for the Organisation

The third key learning is that supporting the participation of service users is beneficial on an organisational level (Goosen and Austin, 2017). It has supported the hiring of suitable staff, organisational planning and has helped to make organisational policies accessible to YAP Ireland service users. Participation in YAP Ireland has also supported the production of outputs based on service user experience that have the potential to improve practices such as communication prompts for Tusla social workers, and research-based reports from the national forums on social service provision. They have also produced outputs that can be of use to other service users in YAP Ireland

such as practical guides for parenting and managing behaviour, as well as a cookbook aimed at young people and their families.

Supporting young people and their families to participate as experts by experience can also serve to make practice more ethical by avoiding structurally generated harm as a result of services and policies that fail to meet the needs of the service users they target (Cavet & Sloper, 2004; Connolly & Devaney, 2016; Forde & Martin, 2016; Lansdown, 2020). In this study, there are instances of young people affecting an influence at an organisational level that may result in the reduction of harm for young people, for example one young person had her views transmitted throughout the organisation and this resulted in a review of official forms. Other young people exerted an influence on policy in an institutional setting where a perceived sanction was held to be unjust, and so they were supported to advocate for change.

Finally, supporting the voice and choice of service users helps YAP Ireland achieve its goals of achieving improved outcomes for young people at risk and their families, enhancing their engagement with the programme and supporting activities and responses that best meet their needs (Carr, 2004; Champine et al., 2018; Silva et al., 2019).

Benefits of Participation for Participants

The personal benefits experienced by young people and their families as a result of participation have a particular relevance for the cohort that are supported by YAP Ireland as they experience multiple chronic stressors, including poverty, marginality, family problems, housing instability and social isolation (Slettebø, 2013:580; YAP, 2020). The group projects, and the ISP draws upon, the skills and strengths of the young people, and work with both young people and their parents is channelled into solution focused action, which has implications for the empowerment of this cohort of service users in a welfare context (Cockburn, 2005). It is argued that participation in YAP Ireland programmes and groups builds capacities by working alongside the supportive practitioners in order to address both personal and social issues, building life skills that will be of use to the service users when the programme of support ends (e.g. Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007; Slettebø, 2013; Tisdall, 2017).

This experience of empowerment through action can be particularly beneficial for young people in YAP Irelands programmes of support as Schoenfeld et al. (2019: 113) stated this may offset some of the effects of their prior negative experiences. Within the discussion in the parent group, respondents reflected on the experience of participation in the ISP and affirmed that it had a particular value for young people involved in welfare services, as their involvement with services could be disempowering when they are subject to the decision-making of so many professionals. However, in YAP processes, rather than being the passive recipients of services, they have an opportunity to be contributors to

solutions for issues within this service which has been linked to greater self-efficacy, agency and resiliency for youth (Muench et al., 201; Ramey et al., 2017; Schoenfeld et al., 2019).

In the literature, access to the supportive relationships that meet individual and collective needs in group formats can play a central role in supporting personal development and wellbeing (Cockburn, 2005; Cashmore, 2002; Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007; Forde & Martin, 2016; Ramey et al., 2017). Practitioners discuss the importance of peer support from others in similar circumstances to the experience, offering a kind of validation to their experience and identity as a young person in contact with welfare services. In addition to this, some young people were often shy, lacked confidence or did not have adequate social networks. For these young people, participation in the groups allowed them to develop social competencies and self-confidence while engaged with the group projects. This can be an important benefit of practice as positive relationships in social settings can have beneficial outcomes for a young person's sense of self and development (Bruyere, 2010). Youth/adult partnerships in particular have a beneficial role to play in the personal development of young people (Cockburn, 2005; Ramey et al., 2017). Some practitioners reflected on the fact that positive relationships which adults in the fora provide an opportunity for young people to have role models for social behaviours and positive recognition for contributions which may not always be accessible in a young person's life.

Parents in the YAP Ireland participation groups also particularly valued the friendships and the sense of belonging that participation in the group afforded them (Muurinen, 2019; Slettebø, 2013:579). For some parents it offered a social space where they could develop social networks of support that may be lacking in their lives. This can be seen in the accounts of parents, one of whom described it as a 'pressure valve', serving to alleviate some of the pressure they felt in their parenting role when supporting young people who were experiencing challenges, while giving them a new perspective on some of their challenges. These parents had the opportunity to develop a positive sense of self in relation to others and become positioned as 'experts by experience' as they developed learning materials for other parents and supported each other by giving tips and support around parenting issues. This is in line with the findings in other contexts where participation in group formats helped parents manage the challenges and struggles of their lives, while improving self-esteem through contributing to the group (Muurinen, 2019; Slettebø, 2013).

Parents also had the opportunity to take part in educational activities within participation groups designed to promote their wellbeing and parenting skills, as well as develop a sense of personal capacity. YAP Ireland supported this in practice by linking in with partner organisations in the local community to design programmes specific to the needs of parents, such as mindfulness or restorative

parenting courses. The introduction to other support services, can bolster parents' capacity to seek help from appropriate services after the YAP Ireland programme of support ends.

Some practitioners perceived that the opportunity to develop social skills and self confidence in the group processes within participatory groups, laid the foundation to greater integration and engagement in community life for the young people (Ramey et al., 2017). In the literature, participation also has benefits for the community within which the young person lives, particularly when personal development and empowerment is supported in positive relationships and experiences, enhancing prosocial behaviours, lessening the likelihood of risky behaviours in the future and buffering young people against depression or behavioural challenges (Brady et al., 2020; Bruyere, 2010; Ho et al. 2015; Wyness, 2018:56). While evidence of community benefits is missing from this report, evidence from longitudinal research with YAP participants shows improvements in risky behaviour, personal development, education, and family circumstances, which are all relevant to the community benefits of positive youth development within social programmes (Devlin et al., 2014 in Brady et al., 2020)

For parents in one group, the cultivation of social capital as part of participation led to one group becoming self-sufficient and moving into a community setting (Bovaird et al., 2016:51). Through participation groups in YAP this cohort of parents had built sufficient social capital to continue their support of each other in the community. Needham (2012:13) maintains that the sorts of capital created by this form of participation can benefit service providers and the broader community as well as the people who use services themselves. This is because the participation of marginalised groups can provide social value through the reduction of harmful behaviours, whilst providing a sense of community (Birchall & Simmons, 2004; Bovaird et al., 2016). The potential for this to hold true can be seen in the accounts of parents sharing tips, accessing emotional and social support from within their peer group and gaining respite from challenging family circumstances.

Challenges

It is important to note that this evaluation process took pace during the Covid-19 pandemic, in a period of lockdown, which posed a challenge to YAP Ireland's programme of group participation, and to a lesser extent on the provision of individual supports. During this time, the commitment to participation was evident from the steering group response through engagement in creative and adaptive planning, and in the adoption of online activities and adaptation of social media tools to engage youth. An example of this was the collaborative efforts between YAP Ireland and YAP in the USA. There was practitioner recognition that the social aspect of participation for young people had particular benefits that were even more pertinent to pursue in a context of increased social isolation. There are challenges arising in participatory practice that are integral to the context of participation

and requires ongoing management due to the nature of the programme and the cohort of service users supported. Sometimes the personal attributes or challenges facing a young person could present a barrier to their participation. In this case, scaffolding practices by staff were very important to support their participation. This challenge can be true of the parents who may also be reluctant to participate in group activities for the same reason. Managing group participation and dynamics can be challenging given the often fraught histories that parents and young people have, and the potential impact of disclosure on other members of the group (Muurinen, 2019). However, YAP Ireland devotes significant attention to the wellbeing of participants in group work guidance documents which highlight the need to be prepared to respond to disclosures or needs for supports and intervention, and also in practice by being flexible and supportive regarding the needs of participants. Finally, the staff and advocates' capacity to promote participation or provide logistical support for the attendance at groups can be challenging as it is dependent on advocate support, and the opportunity may not be local to the young person's area. This is harder to remedy as it would require additional resourcing of advocate time which may not be achievable within current funding parameters and the level of advocate support present within a given area.

Even though group participation often provides an opportunity for young people and their parents to be heard on matters that affect them, one respondent spoke of having to manage expectations of what participation can achieve, suggesting limits to influence in practice. This is an important consideration as there are many variables that affect service users' circumstances, and experience of services that are beyond the reach of YAP's influence, while other service user suggestions may not be practical. Furthermore, as the accounts of some practitioners involved at a local level, sometimes the translation of participation principle into group practice was difficult to achieve leading to 'framed participation' in practice. It is not an inherently negative finding, given the potential of participation to promote positive development, skills acquisitions and a sense of self-efficacy, and the varying priorities of participants. So, while this might be somewhat remedied by the extension of training, flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of the group discussed may mean that the full attainment of idealised rights-based practice is unnecessary. There is also the issue of adequate feedback and recognition for contributions to group processes, as one parent discussed how they did not receive any feedback that would have been evidence of a responsive audience.

This related to a final challenge identified in practitioner accounts, namely that social care organisations often need to provide evidence that their work is achieving their aims and objectives, and measuring or capturing these results can be difficult. This is evident in reflection on the longitudinal outcomes of YAP, or consideration of the benefits that it has for the greater community. However, it is possible to have greater reflection on participation within YAP Ireland.

7: Conclusion and Recommendations

Participation as a principle is intrinsic to advocacy practice, which is concerned with promoting the interests of the young person, and so this principle is evident across a wide range of policies and processes in YAP Ireland. There are numerous advantages to this approach. On an individual level it supports the engagement of young people in their ISP, ensuring improved outcomes as a result of service that better meets their needs. On a collective level it provides access to forms of social support that are highly valued by the young people and their families, and it provides opportunities to feedback to service providers, and to have a say on social issues that affect them at a wider societal level. It also supports service users to build the skills, confidence and sense of self-efficacy supporting improved outcomes that are in line with YAP's goal to improve the circumstances of young people and their families. This is in line with Slettebø's (2013) assertion that participation in group processes can be a vital supplement to individual service provision.

Group participatory practice within YAP Ireland is understood in terms of rights, and so practice is framed by the Lundy (2007) model. It is evident that, within the participatory space, efforts are made to support the emergence of voice on social issues through scaffolding practices, and that the group projects are presented to an audience of both internal and external decision-makers. While much of the group projects result in awareness raising, or feedback processes, there is evidence that where possible young people have been supported to influence policy change and hiring decisions. The individual service programme can also be framed as a rights respecting participatory space, where young people, and to a lesser extent their parents, are involved in decision-making around their welfare, including goal setting, and activity planning. The advocates and team leaders are a responsive audience that support voice and choice throughout this process. Within this programme of supports, advocates will also help raise the voice of the young person to external agencies involved in their welfare. Giving young people the space to participate in, or contribute to, organisational processes is also rights respecting as it involves young people giving an opinion on matters that affect them, such as the suitability of staff that will work with them, or the policy that will govern the organisation's processes.

Some practitioners felt that greater breadth of participation in organisational processes could be achieved if young people and their parents were trained and supported to sit on the Board of Directors, and also at group planning meetings. This would ensure that the young people, and their parents could express an opinion on matters that affect them at more influential level, ensuring access to decision-makers who would have the power to respond directly to their views while building planning and decision-making skill set. The feasibility of the extension of participatory practice at this

level should include consideration of the risks and benefits to the young people and their parents, as well as the organisation, to ensure that any opportunities would be meaningful rather than tokenistic. Within YAP Ireland it is evident that participation is rights respecting, but reflexivity to the needs and capacities of service users means that depth of participation achieved can be variable. In some respondent accounts, the translation of participation as a principle into practice was queried, with some stakeholders suggesting an extension of rights-based training was needed to avoid practitioner led practice. Other respondents suggested that general collective aims weren't always relevant or convertible to the needs and interests of the group, and so participation could sometimes be 'framed' and led by adults. It is important to note that participation groups may be valued for different reasons by different young people, and so sometimes it may unavoidable if young people prefer to focus on the social aspect, rather than the participatory aspect. In this case, higher levels of adult scaffolding may be needed. Moreover, whether young people perceive themselves to be involved in group decision-making may differ from adults' perspectives on this issue. For example, having an opinion taken seriously in group processes, and the opportunity to make friends and gain skills might be more valuable for a young person than setting the agenda, or deciding on processes. For this reason, it might be appropriate to reflect on participation both in terms of rights, but also in terms of young people's perspectives on the most important aspect of participation.

Reflecting on Participation Tools for Consideration

Option 1: Children’s Participation Rights Questionnaire.

Emerson and Lloyd (2017) developed a questionnaire to examine the attainment of participation rights in collaboration with a school advisory group. This tool is useful for testing the experience of rights as described by the Lundy (2007) model across both individual and group instances of participation. As this tool has been tested and adapted for use in other contexts, such as in the legal arena, it has proven reliable as an indicator of how successful young people find participation to be. As it uses a Likert scale, it is amenable to simple frequency analysis in Microsoft excel using the ‘count if’ function and so is suitable for use in an organisational context. This questionnaire could be used after the service has been working with young people for long enough to ensure that the questions are meaningful to the young person.

| Question | Likert Scale | | | |
|--|--------------|-----------|-------|--------|
| | Never | Sometimes | Often | Always |
| My Advocate Listens to what I have to say about my goals | | | | |
| My Advocate listens when I say how to make my programme better | | | | |
| In my YAP Participation Group the adults ask me for my views | | | | |
| In my YAP Participation Group the adults make it easy for me to express a view | | | | |
| In my YAP Participation Group I can give my opinions freely | | | | |
| In my YAP Participation Group the adults take my views seriously | | | | |
| In my YAP Participation Group the adults give me information to help with our activities | | | | |
| In my YAP Participation Group the adults talk to me about how decisions are made | | | | |

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| In my YAP Participation Group I am asked how happy I am about the activities | | | | |
| Open-ended question: Is there anything that could be done in YAP Ireland to make sure children's views are taken seriously? | | | | |

Option 2: Group Participation Instrument

Participation within YAP Ireland fulfils more than just a rights-based function, it supports positive youth development and empowerment within group processes. There are a number of studies that have measured this function through measurement tools. The tools selected here also use Likert scales to capture data relating to the attainment of variables of positive youth development, and so are amenable to a simple analysis in excel. Tiffany et al., (2012) used a measure of participation for application in afterschool programmes known as the 20-item Tiffany-Eckenrode Program Participation Scale (TEPPS) in recognition of the fact that participation is more than rights and can have an influence on positive youth development. This measurement tool contains four subscales of relevance to group participation in YAP Ireland. These are Personal Development (PD), Voice/Influence (VI), Safety/Support (SS) and Community Engagement (CE). The higher on the scale the response is (very true), the higher the quality of participation is held to be.

| Subscale | Question | Not true at all | Somewhat True | Neutral | True for me | Very true for me |
|----------|---|-----------------|---------------|---------|-------------|------------------|
| PD | Adults in the program listen to what I have to say. | | | | | |
| VI | I help decide things like participation group activities or rules | | | | | |
| VI | I feel I have a lot of voice/power to influence decisions about the participation group | | | | | |
| VI | I am very involved in participation group activities | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| PD | The participation group activities are challenging and interesting | | | | | |
| PD | I learn a lot from participating in the participation group | | | | | |
| PD | I think that participating in the group will help me to get a job | | | | | |
| PD | I think that participating in the group will help me to continue my education. | | | | | |
| PD | Adults in the participation group respect me | | | | | |
| PD | Staff in the participation group pay attention to what's going on in my life. | | | | | |
| VI | It was easy for me to get involved in the participation group | | | | | |
| SS | I feel close to at least one staff member in the participation group | | | | | |
| SS | There's at least one staff member that I can go to for support or help with a problem | | | | | |
| SS* | I have made friends in the participation group | | | | | |
| CE | The participation group finds ways to involve my family. | | | | | |
| CE | The participation group has had a positive influence on how people in my community treat me. | | | | | |
| CE | The participation group has had a positive influence on how I treat people from my community . | | | | | |
| PD** | The participation group has positively changed how I see myself | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| SS | I usually feel safe when I am involved in participation group activities | | | | | |
| CE | I plan to work on community issues after I stop participating in the participation group | | | | | |
| CE/VI ** | Young people can make difference at participation group. | | | | | |

** Added by author

* Adapted by author from original to be relevant to the findings

Option 3: Youth Led Outcomes Reflection

A weakness of quantitative instruments is that the variables of interest are often defined by adults and may not have any relevance to the issues that are important to the young person themselves. For this reason, it may be worthwhile considering a more open qualitative reflection on the outcomes of group participation in either a group workshop format, or as a one-to-one reflection supported by their advocate. The reflective tool suggested for use here is an adaption of the Most Significant Change (MSC) evaluation tool which involves the collection and interpretation of stories about change (Cooper, 2018). This differs from other strategies intended to capture the outcomes of YAP support such as the SDQ instrument, as the young person’s own unique perspective is sought through a story-based evaluation format to uncover a narrative of change that is relevant to the young person’s interests and experiences. In the course of this reflection the young person would be asked, **“Looking back, what do you think has been the most significant change that occurred for you as a result of taking part in YAP Ireland Participation Group?”**. Once the young person has identified a change they should be supported to reflect on **“When and how that change came about”**. This is followed by a short reflection on the significance of this change for the young person **“Why is this change significant or important to you?”** This reflection can be captured in a number of formats, as a written story, as poetry, art or song that can be recorded which should help this reflection be meaningful to the young person, as a reflection on positive outcomes, and a memento of participation if it results in a creative output although this is not necessary.

Option 4: Reflection on Practice

Lansdown and O’Kane’s (2014) reflection tool, intended to explore the depth and scope of participation in an organisational context, is also of potential utility as an aid to deeper reflection on participatory practice as it can be repurposed to support reflection on scaffolding practices. This is enhanced when synthesised with the components of a logic model that prompt consideration of the

reason for practice and its intended outcomes (Brady et al., 2011). Further consideration on the types of outcomes that can emerge from participatory practice can round out the description of what happens within these participatory groups and what the outcomes are while providing a record of practice (Lansdown, 2019). This tool for reflection can be used at a local level or national level, but it begins with a consideration of the emergence of the national theme and its relevance to the young people who participate in YAP Ireland. Next, the intended outcomes will be outlined and this can include personal benefits for the young people, benefits for the organisation, or influence on matters occurring in the wider context. This would be of utility to practitioners at a local level as they are introduced to the aims and objectives of practice prior to the introduction of the theme to group. There is then room for reflection at each stage of the group process, from theme setting or response to the theme set, to planning and implementing activities and evaluation or feedback processes to consider the depth of participation achieved and describe the scaffolding activities that support the level of participation achieved. It is envisaged that this reflection would be very different for different groups, whether more socially orientated or more formal participation at a national level, as well as the unique characteristics and group dynamics in particular locations. There is then room to consider the actual rather than intended outcomes at a personal, organisational level or in the wider context. This aspect of practice could be bolstered with the inclusion of findings from Most Significant Change reflections if completed. If this was feasible to complete, along with planning and reflection on group participation, it could enhance transparency regarding the level of participation it is possible to achieve in practice, along with quality monitoring and review.

| Local Participation Group Reflection Tool | |
|--|---|
| Situation | Reflection on the emergence of the National Theme and a description of why it is relevant to the young people who take part in YAP Ireland. |
| Priorities | Reflection on the hoped-for outcomes as visualised at a decision making. Can include personal benefits for the young people, benefits for the organisation, or influence on matters occurring in the wider context. |

| | Consultative | Collaborative | Child Led | Outcomes |
|--------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Setting the Local Theme | <i>Young People are asked to give their views on what the theme should be</i> | <i>Children are asked to contribute to the process of finding out what problems they face in life</i> <i>Planning</i> | <i>Children undertake their own research with other children to identify issues of concern</i> <i>children</i> | <p><i>Reflection on the outcomes achieved because of participation:</i></p> <p><i>Can include personal benefits for group members including skills, confidence and empowerment.</i></p> <p><i>Can also include influence on internal policy or practices in YAP Ireland.</i></p> <p><i>Can include awareness raising or influence at a wider context?</i></p> |
| What Happened & Why? | | | | |
| Planning Activities | <i>Planning takes account of the issues raised by children</i> | <i>Children are involved in deciding what programmes to prioritise and develop</i> | <i>Children decide for themselves what issues they want to work on</i> | |
| What Happened & Why? | | | | |
| Implementation | <i>Children are invited to take part in the programme</i> | <i>Children work with adults to design and implement the programme</i> <i>children</i> | <i>Children organise and manage the programme and have full responsibility for its implementation</i> | |
| What Happened & Why? | | | | |
| Evaluation | <i>Children are consulted on whether they think the programme achieved what it planned to do</i> | <i>Children work with adults to decide how to evaluate the programme</i> | <i>Children determine what should be evaluated and, with adult support, undertake the evaluation of the programme</i> | |
| What Happened & Why? | | | | |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Dissemination and Feedback | <i>Children are invited to make suggestions as to how to respond on the basis of the findings</i> | <i>Adults involve children in a joint discussion about the implications of the findings and explore how they should influence future programming</i> | <i>Children reflect on the findings and come up with proposals for the implications, which are then shared with adults</i> | |
| What Happened & Why? | | | | |

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Appendix 1 Quality Evaluation of Policy Provisions and Guidelines for Participation (UN, 2009)

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Appendix 6 Parents Focus Groups

Appendix 7 Young People Focus Groups

Appendix 8 Key Informant Focus Group Schedule

Appendix 9 Key Informant Focus Group Online Reflection Tool

Appendix 1: Quality Evaluation of Policy Provisions and Guidelines for Participation

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| 1.Transparent & Informative | Roles and responsibilities are clear and understood by everyone. The limits of influence is known and processes are transparent. |
| At a structural level | <p><i>In the Group Work Guidelines:</i> it recommends that the aims and objectives are set out for each group and that the purpose and proposed outcomes are discussed with the participants and information given to the parent/guardian if applicable. Terms of reference will be established including where the group will meet, who it is for, the target age range and any other necessary information. Information about participation in welcome packs to explain what is available to people and someone goes through this with them at needs assessment, including signposting them to access information and videos explaining what participation is on the YAP Website and Social Media Platforms.</p> <p><i>In the Youth Forum Terms of Reference:</i> It explicitly states that this is an opportunity to input into the wider YAP programme and outlines the potential contributions that young people can make.</p> |
| 2.Voluntary | Children are given time to consider their involvement and are able to provide informed consent. They are aware of their right to withdraw and are able to do so at any time. |
| Structural Indicators | <i>In the Group Work Guidelines:</i> Consent protocols and recruitment practice at needs assessment is outlined. The right to withdraw at any time is clearly stated. Prior to any public or media event, information will be given to the parents/carers and the young people involved which will include the purpose of the event, the full timetable and format. Media consent will be obtained. Any young person or parent can withdraw from this event at any stage. |
| 3.Respectful | Children are able to freely express their views and are treated with respect. Ways of working build self-esteem and confidence, which enables children to feel that they have valid experience and views to contribute. |
| Structural Indicators | <p><i>In the Group Work Guidelines:</i> It is recommended that practitioners assign roles and tasks to participants during the group that appeal to their individual strengths where possible on order to support their contribution to group processes.</p> <p><i>In the Youth Forum Terms of Reference:</i> It is stated that young people and advocates will set the agenda together and that these groups can nominate Youth CEO's.</p> |
| 4.Relevant | Activities that children are involved in are of real relevance to their experiences, knowledge and abilities so that children are involved in ways that are appropriate to their capacities and interests, and at the appropriate levels and pace. |
| Structural Indicators | <p><i>In the Group Work Guidelines:</i> It is recommended that practitioners ask participants which types of activities they are interested in ensuring that they have agreement and understanding of the group on the reason for the activity. Practitioners should also check if the objectives for the session have been met and give feedback at the end of the session from of all the positives and strengths seen during the session. Young people should be asked if they wish to place an item on the agenda for the next meeting.</p> <p><i>In the Youth Forum Terms of Reference:</i> It is stated that the capacity of young people to participate will be developed through Skills development and training will be part of the fora's activities.</p> |

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| | <p><i>In the Individual Service Plan Work sheet:</i> There is space for the young person to set their overlying goals and tasks, as well as specific ones in education, training or employment, offending behaviour or emotional /social task.</p> <p><i>In the YAP Ireland Needs Assessment:</i> Young people are supported to reflect on their needs, the ways they think YAP can help and how they can work together in partnership using a mind map tool.</p> |
| 5.Child Friendly | <p>Time and resources are made available for quality participation, and children are properly supported. ***Methods of involvement are developed in partnership or in consultation with children. Adults have the capacity to support and deliver child-friendly approaches and ways of working. Children are given accessible information in child-friendly formats. Be imaginative regarding feedback mechanisms and use different methods to make giving feedback fun. For example, using smiley faces, wall stickers. Be aware of literacy issues and ensure that all participants can give feedback, irrespective of their reading and writing skills.</p> |
| Structural Indicators | <p><i>In the Group Work Guidelines:</i> The group facilitators are encouraged to know their group and take into consideration their age range when considering the appropriate activities. Planning in terms of adequate and necessary resources and logistical support is recommended e.g., transport of the young person. Consideration needs to be given to the recruitment of and communication to families as one type may not fit all.</p> <p><i>In the Youth Forum Terms of Reference:</i> Consideration of the timing of such groups is recommended and for example the school holidays and skills development should be supported.</p> |
| 6.Inclusive | <p>Children are not discriminated against because of age, race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. Participation activities are flexible enough to respond to the needs, expectations and situations of different groups of children the age range, gender, and abilities of children as well as other diversity factors are taken into account. Participation activities challenge existing patterns of discrimination.</p> |
| Structural Indicators | <p><i>In the Group Work Guidelines:</i> This document promotes inclusivity stating that all young people and parent/carers will have the opportunity to get involved in the participation programme. Staff are advised not to make assumptions on people's wish or capacity to participate on the basis of situation or ability. They are further advised to ensure that the venue is inviting and relaxing and suitable for hosting your group. Where relevant ensure the building has access for those with mobility issues. Practical support in areas such as childcare for parents or transport is also mandated within this document in acknowledgement that some families may not be able to participate without it. The induction of new members is an important part of participation to support engagement with the group given the open nature of membership.</p> <p><i>In the Youth Forum Terms of Reference:</i> It states that the membership will not be set and that the costs of participation and transport are covered by YAP.</p> |
| 7.Supported by Training | <p>All staff and managers are sensitised to children's participation, understand its importance and understand the organisation's commitment to it. Staff are provided with appropriate training, tools and other opportunities to learn how to use participatory practices. Specific technical skills or expertise</p> |

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| | is built up through a combination of recruitment, selection, staff development and learning from the good practice of others. |
| Structural Indicators | <p><i>In the Group Work Guidelines:</i> **** All YAP staff and Advocates will receive training on the principles and purpose of group work and the relevant good practice guidelines contained in this document. Team leaders will keep participation on the agenda for supervision so that you are reminding all advocates that the opportunity needs to be open to all young people and parent/carers on the YAP programmes.</p> <p>Participation Strategy: All full-time staff will receive training on participation with particular attention to the Lundy model to ensure that the participatory principles ascribed to in YAP are transferred to practice.</p> |
| 8. Safe and Sensitive to Risk | Children involved in participation activities are aware of their right to be safe from abuse and know where to go for help if needed - skilled, knowledgeable staff are delegated to address and coordinate child protection issues during participatory processes. Safeguards are in place to minimise risks and prevent abuse. Staff organising a participatory process have a child protection strategy that is specific to each process. A formal complaints procedure is set up to allow children involved in participatory activities to make complaints in confidence. |
| Structural Indicators | <p><i>In the Group Work Guidelines:</i> YAP Ireland seeks the input of the referrer and the young person's parent as to the suitability of participation in group processes for the young person and are mindful of any concerns raised regarding same. The group facilitators are advised to have a plan for handling sensitive or negative feelings in the group or a disclosure by a participant that is in line with YAP's Child Safeguarding Policy. This document also highlights strategies for dealing with conflict in groups, establishing and returning to group rules periodically and providing support for participants.</p> <p>Facilitators are instructed to ensure that participants leave the session feeling positive and that they have been supported to be heard and to follow up in case of negative experiences. They must also inform the Team Leader should also be informed if any concerns arose for a participant while in the group</p> |
| 9. Accountable | Children are involved in participation activities at the earliest possible stage and staff are accountable to children for their commitments. Children are supported to participate in follow-up and evaluation processes and to share their experiences of participation. Children are given rapid and clear feedback on the impact and outcomes of their involvement, and any next steps. Children are asked about their satisfaction with participatory processes and their views on how they could be improved, and the organisation is committed to applying learning from reviews of practice. |
| Structural Indicators | <p><i>In the Group Work Guidelines:</i> After all group activities and events facilitators should encourage feedback from participants for the purposes of continuous improvement in a fun inclusive way making sure the questions you are asking address the two principles a) what works well? & b) how can we do better? Facilitators are instructed to make clear that YAP Ireland welcomes feedback; even negative feedback can be constructive. They must also ensure that all feedback or recommendations go to the relevant people and are recorded on CRM.</p> |

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| | <p>Youth Forum Terms of Reference: Youth CEOs will feed back plans and work achieved to the main youth forums.</p> <p>YAP Feedback form: Feedback on services is regularly requested. This includes questions regarding the safe environments for engaging with advocates, receiving information and support, and reflection on benefits of participation or changes to service delivery.</p> <p>Quality and Monitoring Documents: Track the implementation of participation groups, and the participation of service users within these groups. Engages with external evaluators who include the voice of the child in their assessment of youth engagement in dialogue.</p> |
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Appendix 2 Key Informant Information and Consent Packs



Dear Participant,

As you are aware, the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, at NUI Galway and the Youth Advocate Programme Ireland (YAP) recently undertook research to understand if having an advocate through the YAP Programme is of benefit to young people and their families. Arising from this study, we are now doing a short follow up study to examine the views of young people, parents, advocates and staff with regard to participation in the organisation.

What are you being asked to do?

You are being asked to take part in a focus group during which we will reflect on emerging themes on YAP's work in the area of participation. The interview will be conducted online using Zoom.

Do you have to take part?

Taking part is voluntary. You can decide to take part or not. You can say 'No' at any time and opt out during the process if you wish. Your role in YAP will not be affected if you decide not to participate. You do not have to take part and you do not have to talk about anything you do not want to.

Are there any risks involved?

No risks are foreseen however if you experience distress at any time, please inform a member of the research team who will ask you if you wish to continue with the process or not. There will not be any negative consequences for you if you do this.

How shall the information be collected and stored?

The interview will also be recorded. Due to your role in the organisation, we cannot guarantee that you will not be identifiable, however the interview will be focused on the participation work only, no sensitive information will be asked. Data containing personal information such as names on consent forms will be kept in a special locked facility in the NUI Galway. All anonymised audio files and transcripts will be kept in password encrypted University Cloud Storage, and computers. Principal researchers are the only ones which will have access to these. This data will be stored for seven years in line with NUI Galway's policy.

What will the Data be used for?

The Data collected will be used to write a report and academic papers on YAP participation.

Who are the researchers?

The project researchers are Rebecca Jackson, Dr Bernadine Brady and Dr Carmel Devaney. The team have a lot of experience researching with young people and families and work at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway. If you wish to ask any questions or to discuss any concerns about the research, please contact Rebecca Jackson at Rebecca.jackson@nuigalway.ie

Yours sincerely
Rebecca Jackson



Please read the Participant Information Sheet before you agree/do not agree to take part in the research. If you agree, researchers will coordinate an interview with you to talk about your experience of youth & parental participation in the programme.

This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the National University of Ireland Galway. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of Vice President for Research, NUI Galway. You can also e-mail them at ethics@nuigalway.ie

If you wish to ask any questions or to discuss any concerns about the research, please contact Rebecca Jackson at Rebecca.jackson@nuigalway.ie

Please tick the boxes below if you agree

| | |
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| I have read the Participant Information Sheet for the study | |
| I have had the opportunity to ask questions | |
| My participation in this study is voluntary | |
| I agree to take part in the Focus Groups | |
| I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time | |
| I understand the interview will be audio taped for analysis | |

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|---|--|
| I understand that due to the nature of my post, it may not be possible to fully protect my identity. | |
| I consent to the researcher holding my data in the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre for seven years. | |

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Email for Invite:

Appendix 3 Parents Focus Groups Information and Consent Packs



Dear Participant,

As you are aware, the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, at NUI Galway and the Youth Advocate Programme Ireland (YAP) recently undertook research to understand if having an advocate through the YAP Programme is of benefit to young people and their families. Arising from this study, we are now doing a short follow up study to examine the views of young people, parents, advocates and staff with regard to participation in the organisation.

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You are being asked to take part in a focus group during which we will reflect on emerging themes on YAP's work in the area of participation. The interview will be conducted online using Zoom.

Do you have to take part?

Taking part is voluntary. You can decide to take part or not. You can say 'No' at any time and opt out during the process if you wish. Your role in YAP will not be affected if you decide not to participate. You do not have to take part and you do not have to talk about anything you do not want to.

Are there any risks involved?

No risks are foreseen however if you experience distress at any time, please inform a member of the research team who will ask you if you wish to continue with the process or not. There will not be any negative consequences for you if you do this.

How shall the information be collected and stored?

The interview will also be recorded. Due to your role in the organisation, we cannot guarantee that you will not be identifiable, however the interview will be focused on the participation work only, no sensitive information will be asked. Data containing personal information such as names on consent forms will be kept in a special locked facility in the NUI Galway. All anonymised audio files and transcripts will be kept in password encrypted University Cloud Storage, and computers. Principal researchers are the only ones which will have access to these. This data will be stored for seven years in line with NUI Galway's policy.

What will the Data be used for?

The Data collected will be used to write a report and academic papers on YAP participation.

Who are the researchers?

The project researchers are Rebecca Jackson, Dr Bernadine Brady and Dr Carmel Devaney. The team have a lot of experience researching with young people and families and work at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway. If you wish to ask any questions or to discuss any concerns about the research, please contact Rebecca Jackson at Rebecca.jackson@nuigalway.ie

Yours sincerely,
Rebecca Jackson



Please read the Participant Information Sheet before you agree/do not agree to take part in the research. If you agree, researchers will coordinate an interview with you to talk about your experience of youth & parental participation in the programme.

This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the National University of Ireland Galway. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of Vice President for Research, NUI Galway. You can also e-mail them at ethics@nuigalway.ie

If you wish to ask any questions or to discuss any concerns about the research, please contact Rebecca Jackson at Rebecca.jackson@nuigalway.ie

Please tick the boxes below if you agree

| | |
|--|--|
| I have read the Participant Information Sheet for the study | |
| I have had the opportunity to ask questions | |
| My participation in this study is voluntary | |
| I agree to take part in the Focus Groups | |
| I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time | |
| I understand the interview will be audio taped for analysis | |
| I understand that due to the nature of my post, it may not be possible to fully protect my identity. | |

| | |
|---|--|
| I consent to the researcher holding my data in the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre for seven years. | |
|---|--|

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Email for Invite:

Appendix 4 Young People Focus Groups Information and Consent Packs



Dear Participant,

As you are aware, the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, at NUI Galway and the Youth Advocate Programme Ireland (YAP) recently undertook research to understand if having an advocate through the YAP Programme is of benefit to young people and their families. Arising from this study, we are now doing a short follow up study to examine the views of young people, parents, advocates and staff with regard to participation in the organisation.

What are you being asked to do?

You are being asked to take part in a focus group during which we will reflect on emerging themes on YAP's work in the area of participation. The interview will be conducted online using Zoom.

Do you have to take part?

Taking part is voluntary. You can decide to take part or not. You can say 'No' at any time and opt out during the process if you wish. Your role in YAP will not be affected if you decide not to participate. You do not have to take part and you do not have to talk about anything you do not want to.

Are there any risks involved?

No risks are foreseen however if you experience distress at any time, please inform a member of the research team who will ask you if you wish to continue with the process or not. There will not be any negative consequences for you if you do this.

How shall the information be collected and stored?

The interview will also be recorded. Due to your role in the organisation, we cannot guarantee that you will not be identifiable, however the interview will be focused on the participation work only, no sensitive information will be asked. Data containing personal information such as names on consent forms will be kept in a special locked facility in the NUI Galway. All anonymised audio files and transcripts will be kept in password encrypted University Cloud Storage, and computers. Principal researchers are the only ones which will have access to these. This data will be stored for seven years in line with NUI Galway's policy.

What will the Data be used for?

The Data collected will be used to write a report and academic papers on YAP participation.

Who are the researchers?

The project researchers are Rebecca Jackson, Dr Bernadine Brady and Dr Carmel Devaney. The team have a lot of experience researching with young people and families and work at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway. If you wish to ask any questions or to discuss any concerns about the research, please contact Rebecca Jackson at Rebecca.jackson@nuigalway.ie

Yours sincerely,
Rebecca Jackson



Please read the Participant Information Sheet before you agree/do not agree to take part in the research. If you agree, researchers will coordinate an interview with you to talk about your experience of youth & parental participation in the programme.

This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the National University of Ireland Galway. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of Vice President for Research, NUI Galway. You can also e-mail them at ethics@nuigalway.ie

If you wish to ask any questions or to discuss any concerns about the research, please contact Rebecca Jackson at Rebecca.jackson@nuigalway.ie

Please tick the boxes below if you agree

| | |
|---|--|
| I have read the Participant Information Sheet for the study | |
| I have had the opportunity to ask questions | |
| My participation in this study is voluntary | |
| I agree to take part in the Focus Groups | |
| I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time | |
| I understand the interview will be audio taped for analysis | |
| I understand that due to the nature of my post, it may not be possible to fully protect my identity. | |
| I consent to the researcher holding my data in the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre for seven years. | |

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Email for Invite:

Appendix 5 Key Informant Interview Schedule

Thank you for participating in this study today, as you know we are evaluating participation within YAP, so we would like to discuss your experiences in supporting practice in this area. Just so you know this conversation will be recorded, transcribed and anonymised, your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. And if you have any questions after the interview is over, please feel free to contact one of the research team for further information.

| | |
|--|--|
| Could you tell us a bit about your role in YAP? | Establishing role in relation to participation |
| What is your understanding of participation? | Structural Indicators of Participation, Quality Indicators |
| Has your participation work been guided by any particular theoretical framework or model (e.g. Lundy, Treseder)? | Structural Indicators of Participation |
| Can you tell me about the specific actions taken by YAP to encourage the participation of young people? Note: prompt to include the following <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Case planning & review b. Daily interactions with advocates c. Participation groups d. Management (including recruitment, planning, training for staff etc.) | Structural and Process Indicators of Participation. Scope (Point of, and Degree of Participation). |
| What are the strengths of participation practice in YAP? What are the things that are done that ensure quality participation? | Quality Indicators, Structural and Process Indicators of Participation. Scope (Point of, and Degree of Participation/ Level of Involvement). |
| What kind of outcomes has participation achieved? (For the Organisation? For the Young People? Their Parents?) | Outcomes, Quality Indicators (6 & 3) |
| Has there been any additional benefits associated with participation? (For the Organisation? For the Young People? Their Parents?) | Outcomes, Quality Indicators (6 & 3) |
| What kind of challenges arise in participatory practice? (For the Organisation? For the Young People? Their Parents?) | Structural and Process Indicators of Participation. Scope (Point of, and Degree of Participation), Quality Indicators, Outcomes |
| What changes or improvements are needed to improve the participation work of the organisation? | Structural and Process Indicators of Participation. Scope (Point of, |

| | |
|---|--|
| | and Degree of Participation), Quality Indicators |
| Is there anything else you would like to add? | Structural and Process Indicators of Participation. Scope (Point of, and Degree of Participation), Quality Indicators, Outcomes |

Appendix 6 Parents Focus Groups

| Parents Focus Group Interview Schedule | |
|--|--|
| Introduction- name and favourite food- it helps me remember who I'm talking to! | Introduction to participants |
| This research is to find out what people think about participation in YAP and turning that into messages for YAP. Explain consent, dissent and withdrawal. Explain the limits of confidentiality. | Introduction to the parameters of research |
| Overall, what has been your experience of being involved with YAP? | Perception of Organisation. |
| So, what we're really interested in is how YAP supports participation. We were wondering what is your understanding of participation? (Can explain if needed- Participation is about being included, having a voice, being heard and being taken seriously when you are involved in decisions, or activity programmes, or groups.) | Quality Indicators, Process Indicators |
| Can you tell me a little bit about your experiences of participating in YAP? Prompts could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel you have a voice? • Are listened too? • Are taken seriously? • Are involved in making decisions or finding solutions? • What about your young person? | Level of Involvement, Process and Quality Indicators. Scope and point of participation, Quality Indicators |
| Is it important to be involved and have a voice in the YAP programme? Is it important if you are a young person who takes part in the YAP programme? Do you think being involved etc makes a difference? | Quality Indicators, Outcomes |
| Have any of you had a chance take part in parent participation groups? | Level of Involvement, Process Indicators, Scope and Point of participation, Quality Indicators |
| Is there anything that could be done better in YAP to make sure young people and their parents are involved, included and have a voice? | Process and Quality Indicators, Outcomes |
| Is there anything else you would like to add | Level of Involvement, Process Indicators, Scope and Point of participation, Quality Indicators, Outcomes |

Thank you for taking part in this focus group. Just to let ye know, if ye have any questions about the research you can get in contact with me, on the details provided in the information pack. If you don't have that still, your advocate will be able to help you get in touch. We really appreciate your help with this project.

Exit

Appendix 7 Young People Focus Groups

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction Icebreaker: a truth and a lie about themselves. | Introduction to participants-reminder to keep positive! |
| Do you know what research is? – work with answers (I am interested in finding out what people think about things and changing those into messages for Yap. Explain consent, dissent and withdrawal. Explain the limits of confidentiality. Explain that young people don't have to share personal stories, we are only interested in how they take part in YAP. | Set the parameter of the research. |
| Check in: How are we all feeling about taking part in research? Use poll number 1/or reactions and emojis...practice for feedback throughout. | Welfare check-in to establish a baseline to help reflection on research participation. Opportunity to explore worries. |
| I am interested in how YAP supports participation-do you know what that is? What do you think it is? (Can explain if needed- Participation is about being included, having a voice, being heard and being taken seriously when you are involved in decisions, or activity programmes, or groups.) Invite young people to pick what they think is the most important thing about participation in the poll-if they don't want to-they can say what they think is most important. Prompts: Ask them why they picked their answer. | Supports capacity to participate-allows researcher to help them come to an understanding as well as revealing how they experience participation in YAP. |
| Is it important to be involved and have a voice if you are a young person who takes part in the YAP programme? Is it important to have a say? | Outcomes |
| Have any of you had a chance to take part in youth participation groups, what are they for, what was that like? | Process and Quality Indicators. Scope and point of participation |
| Can you tell me a little bit about your experiences of being involved in YAP? (Need to ask do they want advocate present) Prompts could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a voice? • Being listened too? • Being taken seriously? • Making decisions or finding solutions? • Do you think being involved etc makes a difference? | Process and Quality Indicators. Scope and point of participation |
| Is there anything that could be done better in YAP to make sure young people are involved, included and have a voice? | Process and Quality Indicators. Scope and point of participation, Outcomes |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Check out: How is everyone feeling after research today</p> <p>You can use poll number 3, or emojis and reactions.</p> <p>Has anyone any feedback they would like to share with us?</p> | <p>Welfare check-in to evaluate and reflect on research participation and identify if any participants have any need for additional support.</p> |
| <p>Thanks, and Exit: Make sure to talk to your advocate if you need support, or feel free to contact us if you have any questions about today's research. If you haven't kept our emails, your advocate can help you get in contact with us!</p> | <p>Exit</p> |

Appendix 8 Key Informant Focus Group Schedule: Reflection on Findings

General Purpose: To feedback on emergent findings and close gaps in understanding regarding the nature of participatory practice in YAP Ireland.

Key Stakeholders Focus Group

Purpose: Reflect on the nature of participatory practice. In the findings the concept of youth led services and participatory groups were discussed.

This focus group will explore this concept in more depth in order to situate YAP's practice on a continuum and reflect on the learnings from practice that would aid other organisations in implementing this form of practice while supporting internal learning.

There is a continuum of participation involvement ranging from consultation to collaboration to youth initiated and led. This can occur at five different points of service delivery (Lansdown and O'Kane, 2014). These degrees of participation are neutral in value, and different forms may be more appropriate in different settings dependent on the cohort of young people and their needs.

We will sort the different participatory practices into their relevant categories.

Questions:

Degree of Participation

- Which degree of participation do young people attain in setting the goals of their ISP and why would you say this is so? How do adults support this degree of participation to be attained?
- Which degree of participation do young people attain in deciding on the activities of their ISP and why would you say this is so? How do adults support this degree of participation to be attained?
- ** Which degree of participation do young people attain in deciding on the activities of their participatory group and why would you say this is so? How do adults support this degree of participation to be attained? (*Prompts based on findings: Do they decide on the themes passively through adults responding to issues that interest them, or do they respond directly to requests for information. Does this differ at the level of the local group, and the national forums, is one group more involved in decision-making than the other*)
- *Which degree of participation do young people attain in deciding how the projects of their participation group will be developed, and would you say this is so? How do adults support this degree of participation to be attained? (*Prompts: Does this differ at a local level or a national level*)
- Which degree of participation do young people attain in Dissemination and Feedback from the projects and would you say this is so? How do adults support this degree of participation to be attained?

Influence: There are opportunities for influence on internal organisational processes, but YAP Ireland seeks to amplify the voices of young people throughout wider social structures.

Do you think influence is achieved at this level and if so, how?

If you do not think influence is achieved, what do you think are the main barriers to this aspect of practice being achieved, and how would you address this?

Appendix 9 Key Informant Focus Group Online Reflection Tool

| Degree of Participation | Consultative | Collaborative | Child Led |
|--|--|---|---|
| Point of Participation | | | |
| Situational Analysis, Planning and Goal setting in ISP's | Adults ask young people to give their views | Adults ask young people to contribute to the process of finding out what problems they face in life, goal setting and planning. | Young People identify their own issues of concern and set the plan for action |
| Themes in Participation Groups. | Adult planning takes account of the issues raised by young people | Adults involve young people in deciding what the themes is and how the programme is developed. | Young People decide for themselves what issues they want to work on and what activities they would like to do. |
| Implementation of Group Plans and Processes. | Young people are invited by adults to take part in the programme | Young people work with adults to design and implement the programme | Young people organise and manage the programme and have full responsibility for its implementation |
| Evaluation of Programmes and Processes. | Young people are consulted on whether they think the programme achieved what it planned to do | Young people work with adults to decide how to evaluate the programme | Young people determine what should be evaluated and, with adult support, undertake the evaluation of the programme |
| Dissemination | Young people are invited to make suggestions as to how to respond on the basis of the findings | Adults involve Young people in a joint discussion about the implications of the findings and explore how they should influence future programming | Young people reflect on the findings and come up with proposals for the implications, which are then shared with adults |



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An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

