



Primary Congress 11th February 2010

Title – Children and Young People’s Plan 2010-2013

Participants – 120 children / 34 staff from 33 schools

(Cluster 1 = 6 schools; Cluster 2 = 13 schools; Cluster 3 = 5 schools; Cluster 4 = 9 schools)

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Introduction

Primary School Congress took place on 11th February 2010 at The Bethel Centre, Leek Road, Abbey Hulton which was a different venue to usual but proved to be a real asset. 120 children from 33 schools attended along with 34 school staff. Partnership working was once again very effective, supporting the VAST Children and Families team with the delivery of the event were 14 staff from 9 further services, 3 young volunteers and 2 parent volunteers. Once again there was a great response from partner agencies to support this event, and again, many services were new to Congress. This is challenging in that they lack the experience but a credit to the services of Stoke-on-Trent in that they can be versatile and effective working in partnership around the needs of children and young people. *(Characteristics of the participants and the delivery staff are provided in the two tables below)*. Sue Thomas, Champion for Children, attended to get a feel for what young people were saying.

The three volunteers from local high schools opened the event with their presentation introducing the theme which was the **Children and Young People’s Plan summary version for young people**. They made the correlation between the plan and a cake recipe book; asking the participants what ingredients are crucial to baking a cake, where ingredients are purchased and how shop keepers know what to stock for when you want to bake. Then asking what young people need to develop and grow, where they go to address those needs i.e. which services and then, how does the City know which services to provide. Thus enabling the participants to reach the conclusion that needs are assessed and young people are consulted to assist the City in meeting their needs.

Table 1 – characteristics of the participants

Age	No	Gender	No	Ethnicity	No	Children in care	No
7	2			White British	102	Not known	120
8	4			Irish traveller	1		
9	15			African British	2		
10	55			Pakistani	1		
11	35			Asian	2		
12	1			British Museum	4		
Not known	8			Not Known	8		

Table 2 – partnership at the event

Claire Farrell – Children and Young People’s Trust	Zoe Wright – Young Carers
Elizabeth Goldstraw – Children and Young People’s Trust	Nicky Willis – Young Carers
Cindy Knight – Cluster One	Howard Drummond – Youth Pastor Elm Church
Darren Baggeley – Connexions	Jackie – Edensor High School – Young Volunteer
Chris Hill – Police Community Support Officer	Eleisha – Blurton High School – Young Volunteer
Simon Holmes - Police Community Support Officer	Zac - Edensor High School – Young Volunteer
Sarah Emery – Youth & Play Service	Deepa Mistry – Parent Volunteer
Janet Lee – Policy & Development Team	Paul Long – Parent Volunteer
Olwyn Twomey – Policy & Development Team	
Gemma Whalley – Corporate Communications	Visitors – Sue Thomas – Champion for Children
Hannah Thorpe – Corporate Communications	

Aims and methodology

There were three workshops broken up by fun activities in-between.

Workshop 1: To inform young people of the priorities identified for the Children and Young People's Plan and to ascertain what information around the priorities they wanted in the young people's version

Workshop 2: To explore what materials appealed to young people to be included in the design of their version of the plan and to identify the most effective methods of communicating with young people

Workshop 3: To explore what young people feel the content of the Engagement Toolkit should be in terms of information, activities and examples

As workshop 1 covered a lot of material it was broken down so that each table of 10 children looked at just 2 priorities from one of the ECM targets and all the actions that fell within those 2 priorities. Plus 2 further tables looked at what would show them that services were achieving the targets/priorities in the plan.

Findings

Workshop 1:

		Priority A	Priority B	Priority C	Priority D	
		Economic Wellbeing				
		Support Children to make the most of learning opportunities	Information, advice, guidance to help you get a job	Suitable housing for young people who have housing needs	Ensure CYP get the support they need so they have their basic needs met	
Actions ranked (1 = most important)	1	support and advice in times of change	careers support up to 18 years	support for young people living on their own	parents and carers learn skills to get jobs	
	2	learning on the job	quality mark, advice and guidance	support families to be happy together	support parents and carers with managing money	
	3	help children apply skills learnt in lessons		clear guide to help children move away from family if needed		
			Be Healthy			
			children and families get the help they need	get support to choose good healthy life options	children and young people to be happy and get support with any problems	families get support and care from lots of services
	1	equal access for everyone	reduce childhood obesity	right support for age	early support	
	2	workers have good knowledge to help	children's centres and targeted youth support	emotional wellbeing service	more help for children with health needs	
	3	views used for health services	healthy start scheme		more help for really poorly children	
			Positive Contribution			
			children and families have a say on decisions affecting them	skills and support helping children with life changes and challenges	help children behave and not do crime and bullying	help children take part in safe activities and make friends
	1	teach children how to take part and have their say	help children get the emotional support they need	help parents and carers be good role models	help children get past barriers that stop them taking part	
	2	use what children tell us to help services work better	extra support for children during times of change	better behaviour and anti-bullying schemes in schools	positive activities for under 11 yrs old	
	3	help children remove challenges to taking part	extra support for children who need it most	more help for children involved in crime	positive activities for 11 - 19 yrs old	
			Staying Safe			

	services working in a joined up way to keep children safe	services used by all children and make them feel safe	support and training to keep children with extra needs safe	adults elected for city make safeguarding main concern
1	adult services linked to family	training, support and checks for staff working with children	more placement choices for children in care	
2		employ and E safety lead person	stronger family support service	
	Enjoy and Achieve			
	help all children and young people be the best they can	schools as heart of the community	clean and modern schools	education plan to cover more than just lessons
1	support to include children with learning or physical difficulties	parents and carers involved in their child's learning	specialist high schools	better choice to help young people get better jobs
2	extra help for children who fall behind	home school links to help behaviour and attendance	school leaders getting food ofsted results	children's views used to change services for them
3	extra support during times of change	report cards to let parents know how child is doing	better schools and equipment	schools ready for higher leaving age (18)

In the table above, Number 1 is the action that the children ranked as being most important to them. Under staying safe, priority D, there were no actions identified as the time was spent explaining what an elected member/councillor was as this was a difficult concept to them.

Tables 11 and 12 looked at “how will you be able to tell if a service is achieving this target” for three of the ECM targets, Positive Contribution; Be Healthy and Stay Safe.

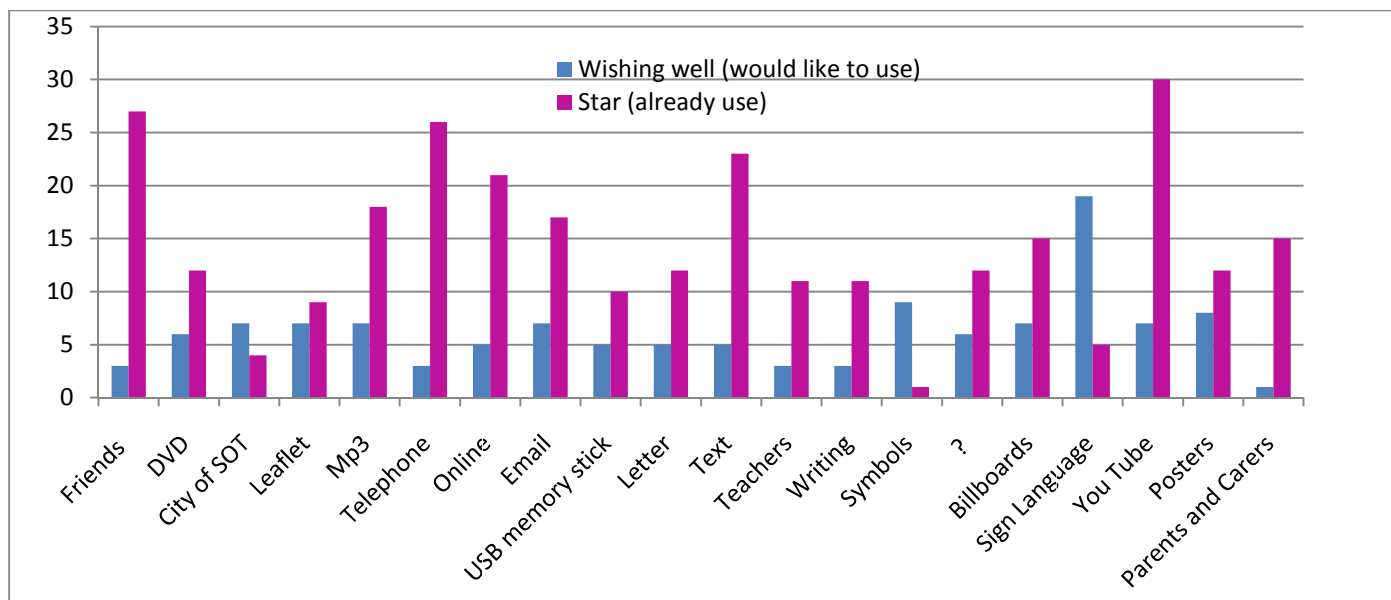
Positive Contribution	Be Healthy	Stay Safe
School councils to help school out and have a say at meetings	Services working together	Important to check and ask children
Sponsorships – raise money - Haiti	Play outside, sports activities at the park	Check its done, write it down
Ask for ideas and make sure it happens to check up on things	Treating children with respect	Mystery customer/shop to see how good they are
Have a vote – give opinions and views on things - everyone	Special teacher / friendship lessons	Phone line or somewhere for people to go when got problems

Workshop 2: Design and methods of communication

This didn't reveal any definitive answers; just that one size does not fit all. Some preferred cartoon characters, other preferred famous people. Some preferred it packed and exciting others preferred it simple and effective. Overall it had to have images and not too much writing. It had to convey clear messages and be available in a variety of formats i.e. audio and visual and interactive in some way whether that is via a word search / game or as an online question and answer approach.

In terms of receiving information/communications the young people had a couple of stars to indicate what methods they are already using and a couple of wishing wells to indicate methods they would like to use. See table below.

How do you like to get information?



Workshop 3: Engagement Toolkit for practitioners

- ▶ Learn what CYP are like, so they can work with them – by talking to them, listening to them, playing with them, watching them, doing some activities, asking them directly
- ▶ Instructions ie manual ... adults and children together so they can agree = become happy
- ▶ Worksheets to tick what we want
- ▶ Talk in a way that is understood
- ▶ Understanding what CYP are saying to them
- ▶ Sports activities to get children and teachers to work better together
- ▶ Say in life with parents at home
- ▶ Make decisions independently
- ▶ Playing games and learning at same time

There were lots of ideas for games to play and ways of engaging with children because they felt that children are more able to express what they think and feel when they are comfortable, feel safe to express their true feelings amongst the peer group, are respected by adults and children alike and understand the limitations/ boundaries in terms of their input.

Evaluation

This was the first time the congress was held at The Bethel Centre. The venue was fantastic, it was on ground level so wheelchair access was not a problem, we had the entire building to ourselves to improve security and safety. There was a separate cafe area which doubled as a break out room and somewhere to serve the lunches, but most importantly the staff were really accommodating and helpful throughout the day. The food was fabulous with plenty of tasty healthy options. There were a few minor teething troubles that can be easily rectified for future events such as putting the jugs of drinks on the tables rather than children trying to carry drinks along with their food to the tables.

In between the workshops the children were split into three groups with each group spending 10 minutes on each activity. The activities consisted of the parachute game; dancing along to videos and a networking/ chill out time. This too worked better than previous approaches as the children enjoyed the variety on offer and having the dance music gave the event a great atmosphere.

The workshop material for workshops 1 and 3 were quite challenging as the theme of the Children and Young People's Plan and the Engagement Toolkit are heavy concepts for anyone the first time they encounter them. However, breaking it down into small component parts and using symbols to help reading

and comprehension did work. Staff facilitating the workshops did notice that the young people were very communicative about what they felt was important. Going on to say that from the explanations the children gave as to why they felt it was important staff believed that the choices made were justified and that the children really did understand what was being asked of them.

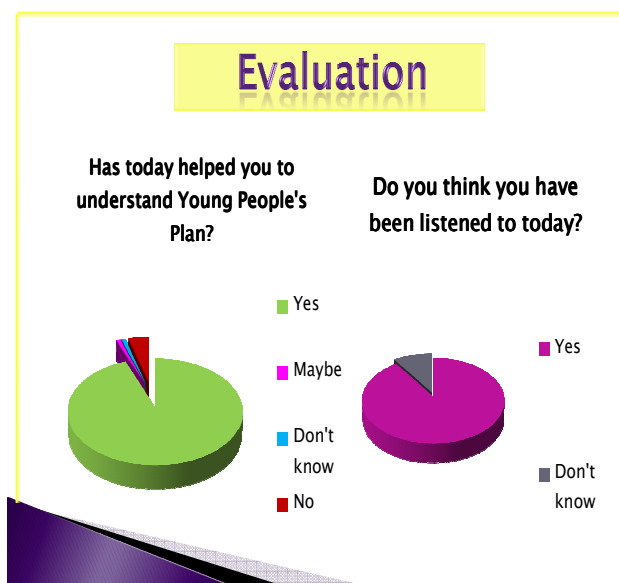
Challenges – there was a very tight time frame within which to operate this time around due to the theme for consultation. The draft of the plan was only released one week prior to the first event on 4th February and two weeks prior to this Primary Congress event. In that time we had to familiarise ourselves with the content of the plan then break it down into something manageable for children from Primary and Special Schools to comprehend.

Also the findings from the congress had to be fed to the Children and Young People’s Policy and Development team within a couple of working days. This meant that the materials were distributed amongst the team and partners to be typed up. This caused major problems overall. As many of them were not familiar with the write up process they each did it in their own way so there was no consistency across the workshops making it difficult to comprehend and analyse the data. It also made it impossible to tell what was a direct quote from children and what was the scribes’ interpretation.

One of the strengths of School Congress is that children are taken out from school settings and away from the school staff that they are so familiar with. This enables their responses to be more impartial as they are not as likely to give the answers that they feel the teacher wants to hear. The staff that do facilitate the workshops are well trained in listening to children and helping them to explore their thoughts and feelings but they are not familiar to the children. This means that the children can be less inhibited by what they say and feel safe that they will not be challenged about their choice of answer when back at school.

Whilst the children are in workshops the school staff took part in adult workshops that mirrored the themes for the children’s workshops. As for the engagement strategy one of the comments was to *clearly identify why we need to do it so we can challenge if it is not supported*. This venue didn’t work so well for the adults as they were split over a large area which wasn’t conducive to group work so some staff found it hard to feel included. For future congress it may be that we look into school staff just dropping the children off and collecting them at the end rather than staying throughout to make them more cost effective, provided we can still ensure that health and safety is not compromised by doing this.

Young People’s Evaluations:



There is a full report which captures everything the young people said or told us on the day. This will be sent to all the schools so that they can use the information in their school assemblies, school council meetings and in the classroom to ensure that all the young people are aware that they have been listened to. For a copy of the full report or further information about anything within this summary please contact us, using the details below.

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