

FROM PARTICIPATION TO EMPOWERMENT



Save the Children

INCLUDING FEEDBACK FROM
CHILDREN IN EVALUATING
AND IMPROVING SERVICES

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"From participation to empowerment – Including feedback from children in evaluating and improving services"

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This tool was produced within the context of the EU funded project "*No Longer Alone: Advancing Reception Standards for Unaccompanied Minors*", 2016.

This tool has been produced with the financial support of the European Commission. The contents of this report can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

Project partners: *The project was coordinated by ECRE, in partnership with Nidos in The Netherlands, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Save the Children Sweden, the Scottish Refugee Council in cooperation with the Scottish government, France Terre d'Asile in cooperation with the Directorate for Juvenile Justice Protection of the French Ministry of Justice and the Groupement d'intérêt public 'Justice Coopération Internationale' (GIP JCI).*



Acknowledgement

Save the Children Sweden would like to thank the EU and the European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) for giving us the opportunity to participate in the project *No Longer Alone* and for giving us the opportunity to develop our work on strengthening the participation of unaccompanied children and youth. We would like to thank the staff members and volunteers who have contributed to the Swedish pilot project: Aref Karami, Abdulahi Addow, Kaj Svensson, Sandra Akiwumi-Lundstedt, Rodolfo Zuniga and Save the Children Stockholm regional branches' working group on children on the move and in particular Birgit Jessen.

A special thanks to Project Manager Hanna Flood for her excellent organization of the pilot activities and the study visit that was held for EU Member State representatives. Without all the young engaged people who participated in the design of the project, in the Meeting Place in Stockholm, in the Digital Storytelling workshop in Malmö and in the youth panel that was held during the study visit in Stockholm this project would not have been possible.

We would also like to direct a thank you to all other staff members within Save the Children Sweden that have pioneered the area of participation of children and youth throughout the years. Most recently Sofia Claesson for her work on youth empowerment and coaching and Mary Douglas for her work on reaching and making visible unaccompanied children in kinship care.

Why working with participation?

CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE RARELY INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING POLICIES AND IN DECISIONMAKING PROCESSES. THIS WAS ONE OF THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS FROM A MAPPING OF THE RECEPTION AND PROTECTION OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN SWEDEN, CONDUCTED BY SAVE THE CHILDREN SWEDEN AS PART OF THE CONNECT PROJECT.

It is also an obligation of the EU Reception Conditions Directive for Member States to monitor reception conditions. The methods described in this publication can be used together with the tool previously developed.

Fulfilling the right of children to be heard and to participate can be quite a challenge for Member State actors.

According to Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and should be provided with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting them.

In this project we developed a tool¹ with the purpose of supporting actors in monitoring and improving reception conditions through cooperation. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child children should be involved in these structural processes.

Often actors lack the necessary tools to collect children's views on actual practices. Therefore as part of the project *No Longer Alone: Advancing Reception Standards for Unaccompanied Minors* we wanted to pilot some of the existing methods for participation with

the purpose of sharing this experience with the actors responsible for reception conditions.

This publication describes the purpose and benefit of involving children and youth in evaluating and improving existing practices. It also contains a set of practical tools that can be used to increase participation. Moreover, we share our learnings and best practices from our work within the project as well as from other activities carried out in our organization.

Besides transferring our knowledge on empowerment and participation in relation to reception conditions, we would like to disseminate our methods to other actors.

Hopefully you will get inspired to work with participation and can make good use of these tools for collecting children's views on reception conditions and in including children in policy and decision making processes.

*1. You can find more material here:
www.connectproject.eu/PDF/CONNECT-SWE_Tool.pdf
<http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/connect>*

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12

- States parties should encourage the child to form a free view and should provide an environment that enables the child to exercise her or his right to be heard.
- The views expressed by children may add relevant perspectives and experience and should be considered in decision making, policymaking and preparation of laws and/or measures as well as their evaluation.
- These processes are usually called participation. The exercise of the child's or children's right to be heard is a crucial element of such processes. The concept of participation emphasizes that including children should not only be a momentary act, but the starting point for an intensive exchange between children and adults on the development of policies, programmes and measures in all relevant contexts of children's lives.

Brief background: Preconditions and considerations

THE PURPOSE OF THE PILOT PROJECT, CONDUCTED AS PART OF NO LONGER ALONE, WAS TO EXPLORE DIFFERENT METHODS OF INVOLVING CHILDREN IN THE EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF RECEPTION CONDITIONS.

Another purpose was to inspire EU Member State actors to involve children in these processes to a greater extent.

Save the Children Sweden has previously used a method called Meeting Place and wanted to take the opportunity to evaluate and refine this practice.

As a result of recruiting two facilitators, who themselves had experienced being unaccompanied children in Sweden and becoming part of different participation

and empowerment initiatives by Save the Children, a decision was taken to test Digital Storytelling as a method.

In addition to the two facilitators, we also tried to involve children and young people themselves. The purpose was to involve the participants more in the actual design of the project, as well as of the methods and processes themselves. In our case this resulted in testing a different method than that originally planned.

Based on the lessons we learned from previous operations in the field, we worked towards including all the important stakeholders in the planning process – children and actors – from the start. However, due to the limited time and resources available for the pilot, we had to focus on the involvement of the children.

It has been quite challenging to reach children placed in foster or kinship care as well as younger children and girls.

But we do acknowledge the importance of involving the relevant actor/s from start in order to ensure that the results will be taken into account and to achieve results reaching beyond the activities themselves.

Usually, children and young people are reached through a collaboration with care facilities for unaccompanied children, mainly group homes. It has been quite challenging to reach children placed in foster or kinship care as well as younger children and girls.

It is important to think about how to reach groups of children who tend not to be heard in these arenas and to develop strategies for contacting and involving different groups of children.

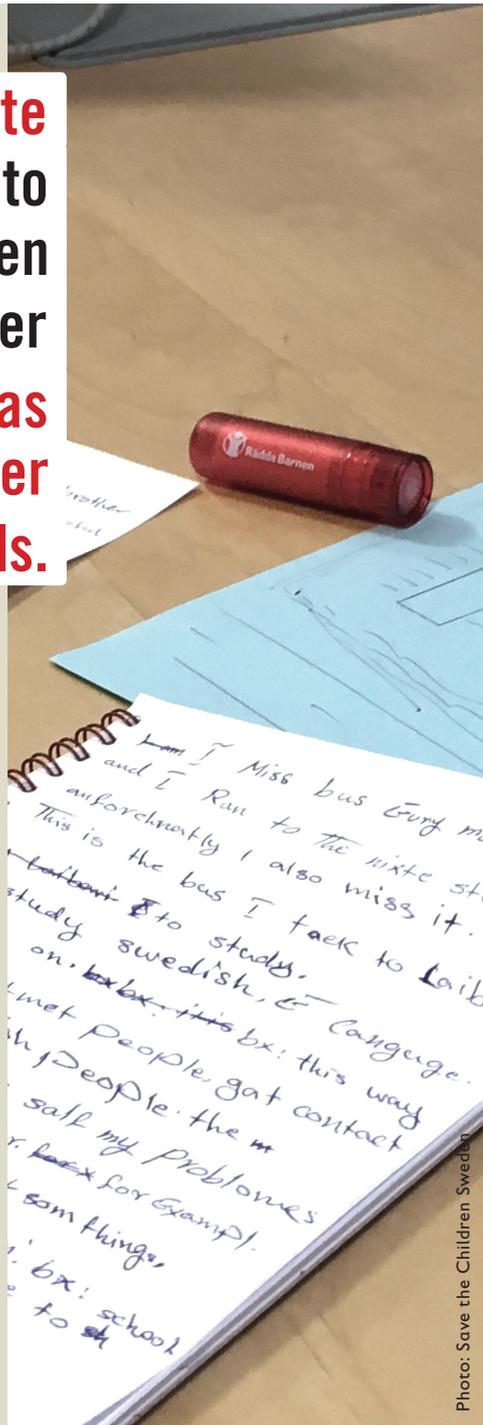


Photo: Save the Children Sweden

Methods for collecting children's views and strengthening participation

WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT *NO LONGER ALONE*, TWO PARTICIPATION WORKSHOPS WERE CARRIED OUT BY SAVE THE CHILDREN SWEDEN IN THE AUTUMN OF 2015. IN MALMÖ A WORKSHOP IN DIGITAL STORYTELLING AND IN STOCKHOLM A MEETING PLACE.

In addition, a transnational study visit was arranged with the overall aim of sharing knowledge and experience of working with the collection of children's views and participation in Sweden and to exchange ideas and practices related to the reception of unaccompanied children between representatives of the EU Member States.

In addition to presenting the experiences from the activities carried out in the participation project, a youth panel on reception practices was held during the study visit. The panel consisted of four young people with own experience of coming to Sweden as unaccompanied children. The participants shared their experiences of the reception system in Sweden. Topics addressed were accommodation and care, guardianship,

education and the right to be heard and participation in relation to these various areas.

MEETING PLACE

Meeting Place is a method developed by Save the Children in Sweden for collecting children and former unaccompanied children's views on reception practices. The aim of Meeting Place is to recognise and listen to the experiences of unaccompanied children regarding their initial stay in Sweden. It also aims at supporting children and youth to become involved in improving reception conditions together with the responsible actors.

A Meeting Place is usually arranged as a one-day workshop and the target audience is children and young people who have come to Sweden as unaccompanied children. Here they can meet others under friendly and relaxed circumstances to discuss their experiences, identify gaps and areas of improvement in the current practices as well as highlighting good practices.

It is important to define the appropriate recipient of the outcome of the discussions

Suggestions of topics to be discussed during a workshop²:

- Accommodation and care
- Guardianship
- Health and Well-being
- Education
- Leisure and Civil Rights



in order to be able to influence practices. In Sweden the Meeting Places focus on the services provided at the local level where the municipality is the main responsible actor.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Digital Storytelling is a method for creating visual stories using sound recordings, photography, drawings and film in order to express experiences and formulate messages on a certain topic. In this case focus was on how the participants experienced reception services in Sweden and what they would like to change. The result is a short film from each individual participant made by working together in a group during the entire workshop. Digital Storytelling is a flexible method

that can be used during one day or through a series of meetings and can be adapted depending on the purpose.

The method offers an opportunity for both the organizer and the participants to gain and learn from each other. The participants learn about expressing messages, to build dramaturgy and how to produce films by using new technology. The organizer on the other hand will learn from the process, which in itself is an important source of information. Through conversations around the creation of the films you will gain knowledge and a deeper understanding of how and why the issues raised by the participants are important from their perspective.

2. For inspiration on topics use the standards based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the CONNECT tool: "Local Cooperation for Unaccompanied Children: A Tool to Assess and Improve Reception Conditions".

YOUTH PANEL

Youth Panel is a method to create a space for children and young people to share key messages on reception conditions or other relevant subjects with policy makers, practitioners and service providers, in this case dealing with unaccompanied children. The purpose is to give children and youth an arena to discuss issues of importance that they themselves have identified and convey messages on solutions and how the situation may be improved. For example, challenges experienced by the young people themselves, what they consider key factors for good reception and ideas related to strengthening participation in the reception process.

A Youth Panel is appropriate in any conference, meeting or process where services or issues related to children are being discussed. Hearing from young people who have experience of services, and in this case of being a newly arrived child in a European country, usually

provides us with new insights and more information about both “real” problems and good practices.

These methods can be used to give children a voice to express their opinions on any issue that is of importance to them. Since the aim of this project was to improve participation and reception conditions for unaccompanied children, all these methods were used with the purpose of contributing to the improvement of reception conditions.

Advocacy is vital in order to achieve change. In addition, these methods are useful to bring messages forward to policy- and decision makers. By giving children the opportunity to convey their own perspectives, they can contribute to improved understanding among actors of importance. This is a good way to ensure that the needs of unaccompanied children are properly taken into account when designing reception services.



Don't forget to give feedback to the participants on what happened after the event and how their participation made a difference.



Photo: Save the Children Sweden

“Digital Storytelling is a good way of bringing up important issues”



Photo: Nadja Hallström

WHAT IS NECESSARY TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO COME TO SWEDEN? WHAT DO THEY NEED TO FEEL SAFE AND SECURE? AND WHAT IS MISSING AT PRESENT?

As part of the *No Longer Alone* Project, Save the Children wanted to check how unaccompanied children in Malmö perceived reception conditions.

Aref Karami took on the challenge, as a local project manager and facilitator, to set up a workshop that was not just about talking – but fun too.

“We came up with the idea of making short films to describe their lives”, he explains.

Information about the workshop was spread through social media, associations for unaccompanied children and personal networks.

Five young people in Malmö, aged 17-21 years who had been in Sweden for a couple of years, attended. It was the first time they had participated in such a workshop and they were a little reluctant in the beginning.

A lot of support, motivation and pep-talk was required to overcome embarrassment and the fear that they would not manage it. Aref and his colleagues reassured them that they were capable of doing it and that they would not regret trying it out.

“We told them that they were free to create their films as they wished. There is no such thing as a bad result. And if you don’t succeed what is the worst thing that could happen?” he asks rhetorically.

It is important to create common values as a framework for the work together. For example that all questions are allowed and that you don’t spread what you talk about in the workshop to others. Everyone should feel confident to share things with the group.

Five short films were produced during the workshop. The themes illustrate various aspects of coming to Sweden as an unaccompanied child. Missing your family and the worries it entails. The struggle to catch up with school when you do not know the language and have lost years of schooling. The experience of being exposed to racism. Challenges related to the asylum procedures, waiting for a decision and being denied residence permit. Age assessment and dreams for the future.

Aref finds the method interesting to work with and very useful for solving problems:

“It is a good way of bringing up important issues and letting the young people speak about whatever they feel is pertinent”.

Straight input from the young people to the politicians and authorities also prevents important information getting lost on the way.

“In the end when the films were finalised and we looked at them together, everybody was satisfied and proud of their work. They had a great time”, Aref says.

Digital Storytelling in five steps:

1. WRITE A SCRIPT

Choose your message and build your story around it. For example, write a postcard to a friend or family member about your first period in Sweden. Use the group to give feedback on each others' texts.

2. VOICE RECORDING

Read the written story and record it.

3. ADD IMAGES

Decide how you want to illustrate your story. Take photos, make your own

drawings or film clips and add sound effects. There are several easy programs available for film production.

4. PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

Edit the films and match sound and pictures.

5. COPYRIGHT AND SCREENING RIGHTS

Each participant possesses the rights to his/her creation and decides how the film may be used. Make sure that you have common terms of agreement for distribution and screening.

“We tell the children that your voice is important to improve the situation in the future”



22 YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATED IN THE MEETING PLACE THAT WAS ARRANGED IN STOCKHOLM AS PART OF THE NO LONGER ALONE PROJECT IN THE AUTUMN OF 2015. THEY WERE ALL RESIDENTS IN CARE FACILITIES AND THE MAJORITY WERE MALE.

Abdulahi Addow was the local project leader and facilitator. He also came to

Sweden as a child without his family and believes that it was an advantage that he could share the same experience.

“I am familiar with all the questions that we discussed. It was interesting to see how I could contribute based on my own background”, he says.

The workshop focused on four different themes: accommodation and care, guardianship, education and the future.

“The future is an important topic to discuss when you have been in Sweden for a while. What does the future look like? What expectations do you have? Motivation is often high and shows that there is hope and plans for the future”, Abdulahi says.

Setting up the Meeting Place was a learning process, and not always easy. To begin with it was tricky to reach out to young people. When they did manage to establish contact it took a lot of work to maintain these relationships. Many who were supposed to participate dropped out at the last minute. But finally the day came.

Revolution Poetry was invited to inspire the participants. This is a community that perform spoken word based on their own stories with the ambition of creating a scene for marginalised voices from the suburbs of Stockholm.

“They talked about how you can be in charge of your life, take space and break norms”, Abdulahi explains.

Encouragement is crucial.

“We tell them that your voice is important to help improve the situation for children in the future. Together we can make it better.”

Apart from taking part in the discussions, the participants were invited to talk about their experiences in front of a video camera, as a way to convey messages. Unfortunately many felt that their Swedish was not good enough and did not dare.

Abdulahi has arranged Meeting Places for Save the Children before. The outcome of the discussions then resulted in the publishing of opinion pieces. One of the young people also met the Minister of

Integration for an interview. He regrets that they were not able to do a follow-up with decision makers this time, since this is such an important part of the work.

Still Abdulahi is pleased with the result of the work. Much due to the fact that the young people were satisfied with their participation and perceived express their thoughts as a valuable action. He is convinced that involving unaccompanied children in decision making will not only benefit young people, but also the entire society.

“There are always things that can be improved and they know a lot about the system. That’s why it’s so important to listen to the young people, not only self-declared experts”, he concludes.

Results from the discussions

ACCOMMODATION AND CARE

Large care facilities create conflicts between the residents. In some facilities there was limited access to kitchen and bathrooms. It is difficult to build relationships when the staff is changing all the time. Care facilities for unaccompanied children should consist of no more than 5-10 young people in each home. The staff should treat everyone equally. There must be respect for each others origins and religions. The residents should be involved in decision making, for example by suggesting regular leisure activities.

GUARDIANSHIP

The quality of guardians differ and children compare among themselves. Some are satisfied and some are discontent. Language barriers pose a problem. It is difficult not being able to communicate directly with the person responsible for you. It must be possible to change guardian if you are not satisfied or feel mistreated. Guardians should be concerned with the young people's wellbeing and aware of the stress the asylum procedures can bring. The guardian should act as a mentor and assist in focusing on the future.

Therefore he/she should not be assigned too many young people at the same time.

EDUCATION

Classes must be adjusted according to the students' previous educational background and knowledge of the Swedish language. Otherwise motivation will decrease. There is a wish to be involved in the regular classes with Swedish classmates to a higher extent. Stress over the asylum process makes it difficult to concentrate in school. Better support is necessary, both in learning Swedish as well as in increased home language instruction.

FUTURE

There are several obstacles to planning for the future. Worry over whether or not you will get a permanent residence permit and worry about family members who are still in the home country are common reasons. Not having the support of a family makes it even more difficult. Information on what support society will provide after the age of 18 is essential when they are no longer entitled to a guardian and accommodation in a care facility.

Three practical steps for a successful Meeting Place:

RECRUITMENT

Schools with language introduction classes for newly arrived young migrants are a good platform for recruitment. When recruiting young people it is essential to have both male and female facilitators in the team. Girls are often reluctant to participate and it takes a lot of persuasion to get them on board. To convince them you need to focus on the importance of their voices being heard – only you know what it is like to be in your shoes – or show photos and films from previous Meeting Places to give a picture of how it will be.

PREPARATIONS

Keep in mind that it is often difficult to have a planned agenda when you are working with newly-arrived young people. People tend to forget things, so update participants via text messages on a regular basis about what is going to happen. For example “See you tomorrow. There will be breakfast when you arrive.” Be available for questions and keep the door open for friends who might want to join.

Form a working group that prepares the programme, what issues are to be discussed and so on. Divide the participants in groups of five, each focusing on a certain topic. Appoint a moderator

and a person who takes notes for each group. Organize a pre-meeting with them to clarify their roles. The moderator should, for example, distribute speaking time, listen and ask questions for clarification. Do not go into personal details and do not question what is being said.

IMPLEMENTATION

Avoid interpreters since this hampers communication. It makes the young people uncomfortable and takes a lot of time. Take advantage of the other young people and let them help each other to communicate. It is also an advantage to have moderators who speaks the participants' languages.

In order to actually achieve improvements on reception conditions it is essential to have a plan for how to use the outcome of the discussions and how this is to be disseminated and implemented by the responsible actors. One idea could be to create a working group, consisting of children and young people interested in continuing the work after the workshop, tasked to produce suggestions on how to implement the results of the discussions. Help out with realising proposed recommendations by identifying suitable recipients and ensure they commit to reading workshop production.

How to organize a Youth Panel

IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE TIME TO PREPARE WELL IN ADVANCE. ONE KEY RULE FOR A PANEL IS THAT THE PARTICIPANTS THEMSELVES DECIDE WHAT THEY WANT TO SHARE AND WHAT THEY DO NOT WANT TO SHARE. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THEY FEEL COMFORTABLE.

Carefully explain the purpose of the panel, who will be participating at a certain event and what the opportunities to influence the situation are. Another important thing to stress is that it is they are the only ones who know the real problems and solutions.

Make sure to find out if the child or the young person really wants to participate and that he or she understands the context. If someone is a minor, his/her guardian must give consent to participation. Given that many unaccompanied children are between the ages

15-17 when they arrive, we often involve former unaccompanied children who are already 18. Depending on the circumstances, we have also involved young people who we already have a relationship with and who we have involved previously.

When preparing the panel, it is preferable to design the questions together with the participants in order to make them comfortable and for them to feel ownership and to make sure that the discussion reflect the issues that the panel want to share. Work with open questions and different approaches in order to strengthen the participants. It is good to include questions that focus on the strengths and capacities of the participants as well as on positive aspects, rather than only on negative experiences. We do not want to portray the participants as victims, even if some of the experiences they might share may be painful.



HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS WE HAVE USED IN PANELS:

- Can you share a positive memory from your flight/journey to Sweden?
- If you were to choose one word to describe your journey, which word would you use?
- What have you learned from this experience?
- What would you say to someone else coming as an unaccompanied child?

Our recommendation:

In meetings with a specific topic or, for example, dialogue with politicians together with the children and young people we prepare two areas of concern and then one positive aspect of reception conditions. Starting by sharing a practice or experience that is positive usually creates a good atmosphere for exchange of information.

Photo: Lina Gustafsson

Reaching out to the less-accessible children



“THIS IS THE MOST DIFFICULT THING I HAVE EVER DONE IN TERMS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION!” MARY DOUGLAS SAYS. SHE WORKS IN A PROJECT WITH THE PURPOSE OF REACHING OUT TO UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN KINSHIP CARE.

In many of our activities it has been a challenge to reach children placed in kinship care. A specific placement form in

Sweden when the child is placed with relatives or with extended family members. As a result we are not as aware of their needs and how they experience reception conditions.

Save the Children therefore started a project with the specific purpose of gathering the views of these children and to involve them in our work. The project has gathered experience in how to work with this specific group, the less accessible children.

Nobody knows how many unaccompanied children in Sweden that live with friends or relatives from their home country. But in 2015 alone, the Swedish Migration Agency placed almost 10,000 children in kinship residences. This corresponds to nearly a third of all unaccompanied children who applied for asylum last year. They are sometimes called the invisible children. This group is neither included in research nor in participation arenas. Simply because it is often too complicated to reach and involve them.

“We have no insight into these families, we don’t know how the children are doing.

We wanted to get an image of how kinship care works, with the children in focus”, Mary explains.

It soon became clear that the authorities’ routines and structures were not adapted to this group. The goal of treating all children alike does not work because these children have needs that are different to what foster care in general is designed for.

leisure time. So we had to be flexible and adapt an activity-based approach according to needs. One girl for example wanted to learn how to ride a bicycle. This would make it easier for her to move around on her own”, she says.

Adopting an activity-based approach made responsible actors, such as the Social Services, more prone to inform children about our participation activities.

“There are no action plans for how to integrate these children into society”, Mary states.



Mary and the team had to develop a new method to be able to reach these children.

“These children are often excluded from everything. Most actors that we contacted pointed out that they need a more active

Mary and her colleagues learned a lot from the meetings with the children and young people. Her conclusion after one year is that society needs to review the entire situation to see how this group can be supported.



Photo: Zaki Zeki

Outreach is necessary to get in touch with children and families who do not attend the regular arenas. These homes also need much more support to be able to help the children they are caring for, and also to become aware of the alternatives available in case of difficulties.

Another knotty problem is how to work with

these children without stigmatising them. *“The children really found it strange that our only target group was children in kinship care. They did not understand the logic and would have preferred to be part of a broader context with all different sorts of children.”*

This is something that Mary will take with her into her future assignments.

Tips for including unaccompanied children who are in kinship care:

CLEVER PLANNING

It might require some work to get approval for the children to participate. Children might be controlled by their kinship homes and adults might perceive participation as inappropriate for various reasons. In Sweden the social worker is the key to distributing information to unaccompanied children in kinship care. Who are the key actors responsible for groups of unaccompanied children who are less accessible in your context?

TRANSLATE INFORMATION

Clear and accurate information is essential for the participation of this group of children. Many of the families do not speak Swedish or are illiterate so it is quite natural that misunderstandings may occur. Make sure that

the information is translated to relevant languages, but also transmitted verbally, face-to-face.

CONTACT DETAILS

Make applications to join activities mandatory and ask participants to submit contact details. This will make it easier for you to contact the child and the kinship home to check if they have received the information and that they understand it. Remember to notify them and remind them – over and over again.

BE AVAILABLE

Don't forget to write down your phone number and email address so the children and their kinship homes can contact you, if they have any questions. Specify the languages you speak.

“We have to invite children and young people to become co-creative actors”



SOFIA CLAESSION WORKS WITH SAVE THE CHILDREN IN MALMÖ, ONE OF THE PLACES WHERE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE BEEN PART OF THE *NO LONGER ALONE* PROJECT. SHE WORKS WITH YOUTH ORGANISATION IN SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED AREAS. IN ADDITION, SHE HAS DEVELOPED A METHOD FOR HOW TO USE A COACHING APPROACH IN MEETINGS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

It gives the opportunity to strengthen individuals through the development of their empowerment and ownership. In our work with migrant children and in this pilot specifically we have strived to include a coaching approach to enhance the empowerment of children and youth.

“It all comes down to changing our views of children and young people. Society is often focused on finding solutions for children and young people and loses the ability to see their capacities. We have to invite them to become co-creative actors instead of tailor-making projects for them as participants,” Sofia explains.

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children and young people are entitled to participate in society and influence their own situation.

“We have to become better at adapting and coming up with solutions together with children and young people, based on their preconditions. Listening in a perceptive manner and not starting out from assumptions about their situation. We have to support their

opportunities to reflect on themselves, their dreams and goals”, says Sofia.

Adults who want to involve children and young people are often focused on the results. We want to know what they think about a certain issue. If we focus too much on what we want to achieve we risk missing out on important information. We also limit children’s opportunities to influence. It is important to ask open questions, build relationships and to listen.

To develop ownership and empowerment is a learning process that demands both humility and interest. When children and young people are part of the design of a project or in evaluating services provided, their

confidence in their own ability evolves at the same time.

“To be part of a creative process, take action and participate in solving problems and developing new skills brings a feeling that you have achieved something and that you are good at it”.

Sofia is convinced that this kind of work is essential in working for a sustainable society.

“We have to support their opportunities to reflect on themselves, their dreams and goals”, says Sofia.



Tips for working with empowerment and ownership:

1. You have to be present in the locations and contexts where children and young people are present.
2. Children and young people want to know what they can get out of participating in different processes. Explain the advantages of commitment and what it can contribute to in practical terms.
3. Build relationships. Trust is a prerequisite for a sincere dialogue beyond what we think is expected from us. Let it take time. Do not underestimate informal meetings. Often conversations arise here about central issues.
4. Be perceptive. Listen to the target group in order to obtain knowledge of their reality. Otherwise you risk solving the wrong problem without even being aware of it.
5. Make sure that the issues you push for corresponds with the priorities of the target group. Find out what is important to work for right now concerning the situation for children and young people, in their opinion.
6. Ask: *What do you want to do? How would you like to do it?* Many young people are not accustomed to this way of working. Then start taking smaller decisions to practise empowerment and ownership.
7. Create joyful processes. If it is not fun or you do not feel secure you will not attract participants. Do not bore people with lecturing. Formulate objectives and sub-objectives. Celebrate when you have achieved them.
8. Strive for an equal exchange. Everybody's knowledge is as valuable. Use the meeting to learn, not to teach.
9. Use the information that you receive. It might be something completely different to what you had anticipated. But you have a responsibility to spread this information in order to impact on issues that affects your target group.
10. If it does not work – do something else! Be prepared to develop your working methods. One solution does not fit all.

“It is important to show that participation can actually lead to change”



THE ADVANTAGES OF INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUTH THEMSELVES IN MONITORING AND EVALUATING RECEPTION PRACTICES ARE CLEAR. BUT WHAT DO YOU AND YOUR ORGANISATION WANT TO ACHIEVE? THAT IS A KEY ISSUE TO THINK THROUGH AND SORT OUT BEFORE MOVING AHEAD.

Mikaela Hagan, Thematic Advisor on Children on the Move and Coordinator

for this project, possesses long experience of working with participation. She points out the importance of having a well thought-out plan for how to use the views and input from children in order for their participation in a process to have a real effect. You also need a strategy on how to improve actual practices. At the same time she admits that this is often a challenge.

“We often document what the young people have brought forward, but outcomes have far from always been used in strategic work to improve the actual reception conditions. However, this is important to show children and young people that participation can actually lead to change and is not just talk.”

It is important to dedicate sufficient time to involve children in the planning process, to establish a relationship of trust, to put the work into context, to carry out the workshops and to process and implement the results.

If you want to involve children and young people in decision-making processes there has to be a clear recipient with a sense of ownership, willing to incorporate

and make use of the outcome. This is Mikaela's experience.

As an organiser you need to think about: Which area do the children want to give input on? What are the real issues that affect children and young people?

of asylum seeking children at a certain level of society," Mikaela explains.

In Sweden most reception services for unaccompanied children is the responsibility of local and regional actors. For example accommodation and care,



To be able to achieve improvements it is an advantage if the topics addressed are related to something concrete. For example, how the reception of asylum seeking children is organized.

What are the issues that we will be able to influence? Is it possible to create ownership among the responsible actors beforehand or should it be a more open process? These are important issues to discuss with the participants when planning activities.

"In our work with participation we always try to base our activities on a child rights perspective and how you can translate the rights of the child into the context

guardianship and education is organised locally. However the systems vary between countries and this is something to bear in mind when designing monitoring and participation activities.

Together with the relevant responsible actor, you should ideally develop an action plan for how to implement the feedback and recommendations from the children. The input from the young people must be allowed to make a difference.

“It is important that the municipality or other relevant actors welcomes the results and allows the feedback from children and youth to impact and contribute to improvement”, Mikaela says.

Young people in general might not have a comprehensive picture of how society functions, the role of your organization and the responsible actors. When you work with children and young people who have recently arrived in your country, this is even more so.

The participants need to understand the context and their window of opportunity. In order to make sure that the participants have enough knowledge, you might need to allot time for training on the rights of the child in the context of protection and reception procedures, how the municipality works in the case of Sweden and what kind of issues are suitable to raise in different arenas.

“What are children’s rights? Perhaps this is not evident to everyone. What does advocacy mean and why do we work with it?”

“Discussing this is another form of empowerment that strengthens the participants,” Mikaela adds.

A final reminder

Before you start it is good to reflect on the following questions:

- What is the purpose of your work?
- What result are you aiming at?
- Why are you arranging a specific activity?
- Is it part of your advocacy?
- Or is it your chance to meet your target group and build up your knowledge about their reality?

Youth participation and youth empowerment means everybody wins. Enormous amounts of new knowledge and important additional perspectives will be gained by involving children and young people. In addition, the children and young people will benefit from the empowerment and be useful in the development of a sustainable society based on children's rights.

Good luck with your work!

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