



# TIPS FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION - A RESOURCE FOR WORKERS

CREATE Foundation (on behalf of G-Force) have been asking workers in the child protection sector to identify barriers they face in their work to engage and facilitate the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect their lives. CREATE has discussed these with young people; who provided suggestions on some good practice ideas for overcoming these barriers. The comments below are from young people, based on their experiences of what workers have done to assist them participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

## **BARRIER:**

**Children and young people don't always know that there is a chain of command and I don't make the decisions.**

- » Show young people on a piece of paper the chain and explain it to them. Maybe put the names of the people in those positions there so young people know who they can talk to
- » Use visual aids like pamphlets or a video to explain that you don't have the final say
- » Explain it to children and young people more than once
- » For big decisions that the young person isn't happy with, see if you can get the team leader to come and explain why they made that decision to the young person

## **BARRIER:**

**There's limited time to do one on one case management with young people.**

- » Ring children and young people up at home or email, it doesn't always need to be face to face
- » Take the young person for a quick drive – talking in the car is easier
- » Send young people an email – informal but still asking the questions you need to ask. But remember that not all questions can be asked in an email.
- » Make sure the conversation is all about the child or young person.
- » Ask the child or young person about their day, send them a text message, email them
- » Stop telling us that you have high workloads. It makes us feel like we're not important. We do get that you're busy, but we never asked to be in care.
- » Involve the young person in filling out the forms, and then you won't have a lot of paperwork.
- » It's not about the quantity of contact, it's about the quality of it



## **BARRIER:**

**Limited appropriate venues for engaging children and young people.**

- » Go to the park
- » Go to the young person's home.
- » McDonalds or for ice cream.
- » Ask the young people where they want to go.
- » You don't always have to see a child or young person in the office. Ask them where they would like to go. Make it a treat every 3rd visit or something, it doesn't need to be done all the time.
- » Go to a coffee shop
- » Fast food places win kids.
- » Somewhere they feel safe
- » The environment of where you meet is really important - we don't want to always be in the office.

## **BARRIER:**

**Availability of appropriate placements for children and young people.**

- » Ask the young person where they would like to go and what their ideal home would be like
- » Does the young person like animals? Is there a place with animals that they can go to?
- » Be up front and don't sugar coat it – don't raise their expectations, tell them as much information as you know about the placement.
- » Be respectful of what the child or young person has asked for in a placement
- » Be up front and try and give them another option if possible
- » Ask the young person what they want in a carer
- » Try and make it in the same area as my school and my friends. It's not fair that I have to keep changing schools.

## **BARRIER:**

**Age – being seen as 'old' by a young person.**

- » Just laugh it off – make a joke about it. The older you get the wiser you are
- » Find common ground – listen to their music, talk about shopping - sometimes young people just don't want to talk about being in care
- » Maybe it's not that young people see worker's as old, it's that they see you as a robot.
- » You need to show young people that you're human.

## **BARRIER:**

**Not being able to give young people the information that they want.**

- » Explain why you can't give them the information, be upfront about it – it actually shows young people that you don't know everything and that you're human and not always going to know the answers to everything.
- » Point young people in the direction of where to get the right information. If they're too young, maybe talk to other workers about what's worked for them about how best to provide information to young people.
- » Everything – you're never too young to understand the truth, but you also need to make sure it's age appropriate.

## **BARRIER:**

**Willingness of a young person to engage in the transition from care process**

- » Explain the importance of a transition from care plan and what's in it for them.
- » Not everyone's going to know what they want; it may take a while to figure it out. What a young person wants at 15 years isn't going to be the same at age 17 or at 21.
- » Be persistent, but not in their face. Explain the importance and what the outcomes for young people can be.
- » Don't make it all about the fact that workers have to do it, but about empowering the young person.