

Participation and coproduction: what effect do they have on the outcomes of young people?

Over 2,000 young people have participated and coproduced HeadStart Kent (HSK) in a wide range of activities. The young people are supported and encouraged by staff, which has helped build their resilience. They enjoy taking part in activities and learning new skills and feel more supported by their peers. By having the opportunity to lead, they feel empowered, which has improved their confidence and is better equipping them for adult life.

Going forward, guidance, resources and training are needed to ensure participation and coproduction continues to be embedded and is sustained. However, it is viewed that there may be the need for some staff to champion this work to ensure young people, like those HSK is supporting, do not fall through the gaps and can continue to contribute.

Supporting young people to participate and coproduce HSK is one of the core approaches and ambitions of the programme. During the development of Phase 3, young people identified what was required to make this possible:

- A clear strategy for engagement at all levels with an identified pathway;
- A clear and consistent approach for the flow of information across the whole programme;
- Clear expectations and behaviours for young people, and HSK meeting the core principles of Ownership, Respect and Communication;
- Transparent evaluation approach for coproduction with an annual review of levels;
- Coproduction training for staff developed by young people.

Young people were to lead on the following:

- Young People's Shadow Board (SpeakOut);
- Social Marketing programme;
- Young people's Pay It Forward opportunity;
- Development of the local implementation of the Department of Health "You're Welcome" as a quality criteria for young people services;
- Coproduction training design and delivery;
- Young people leading services through their journey and to support other young people;
- Coproduction locally in Groupings, community groups and through peer mentoring schemes.



Young people were also to be involved in governance processes, designing training and service specifications, recruitment of staff and services and peer reviews of schools.¹

To evaluate the effect of participation and coproduction on the outcomes of young people, information has been collated from a range of sources. This includes interviews and focus groups with 13 young people, interviews with 4 HSK Participation Workers and activity and outcome data collected from participation sessions between September 2019 and March 2020. Where available, outcome data from the Wellbeing Measurement Framework (WMF) school survey have also been linked to those participating and analysed.²

¹ KCC (2016) *HeadStart Kent Phase 3: Case for Investment* p45.

² www.headstartlearning.info

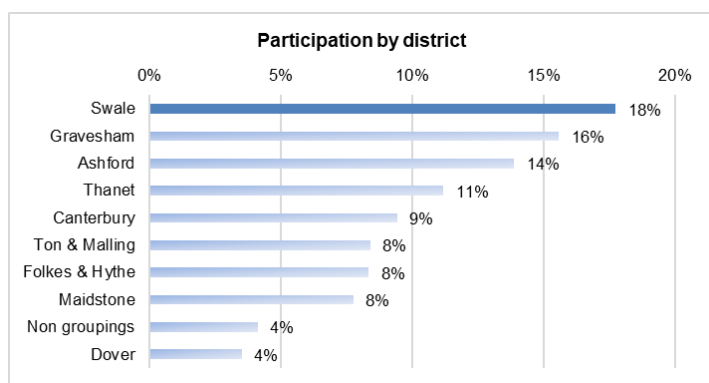
Who is participating?

The opportunity to participate in the programme is open to all young people in Kent, however there is a particular focus on 10 to 16 year olds in the HSK districts who are in some way vulnerable or from less heard groups.

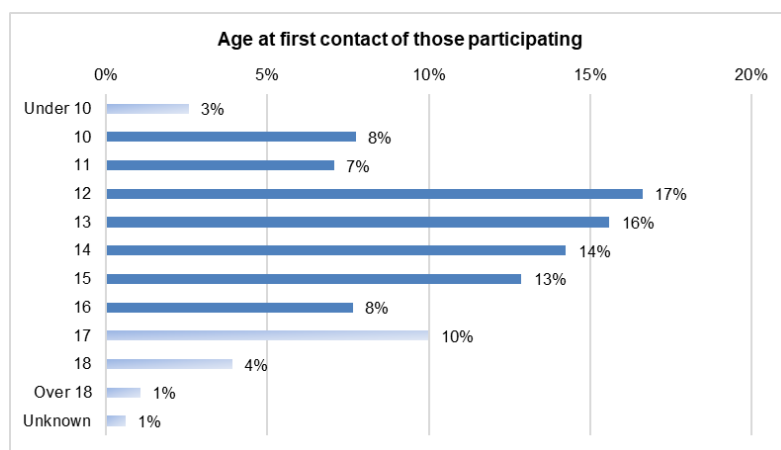
Up to the end of February 2020, **2,322 young people have participated in the programme**. Many have been encouraged to take part by the HSK Participation Workers, who have promoted and advertised the support in places frequented by young people, such as schools and community settings.

The types of young people taking part can differ depending on the type of activity offered as some young people are looking for emotional support, while others are looking for personal development opportunities or to make a difference in their community. It was widely viewed by staff that a lot of the young people may have needed support to make friends.

"I think in terms of SpeakOut groups, we are looking at those young people that require support with making friends. I think that's really valuable to them, because often they don't find friends that easily themselves."



Swale had the most young people participating and overall, **84%** of young people attended a HSK school.



The average age at first contact of young people participating is **13 years old** and **82%** of young people are aged 10 to 16.



60% are female (36% male / 4% unknown)

18% are from ethnic minority backgrounds (69% white / 13% unknown)

14% have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (73% non-SEND / 13% unknown)

15% are eligible for Free School Meals (72% non-FSM / 13% unknown)

14% have had a resilience conversation or received support from a HSK delivery partner

3% have experienced domestic abuse³

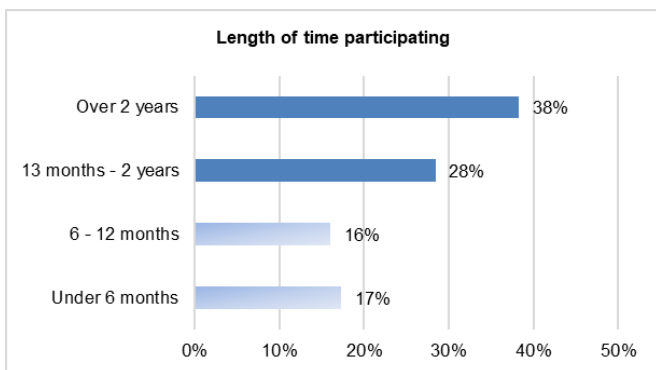
1% were known to the Youth Offending Team or have received a substantive outcome⁴

23% are classified in the Mosaic profile 'Family Basics' (families with limited resources who have to budget to make ends meet)

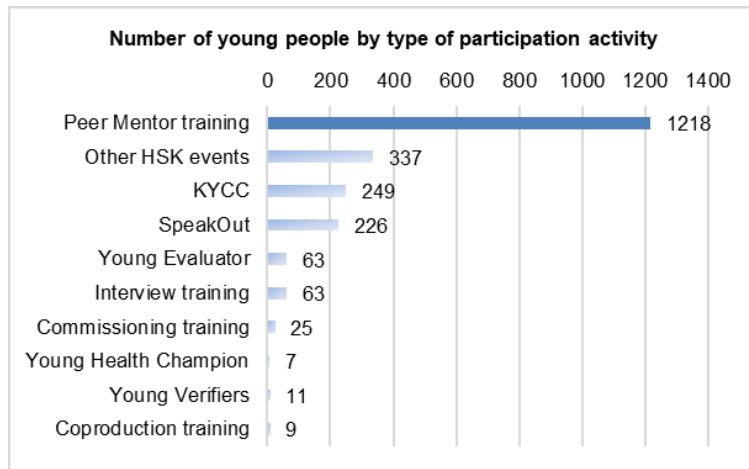
³ A domestic abuse notification has been received by HSK and sent to the school.

⁴ Between 2015 and 2018

What activities are they taking part in?



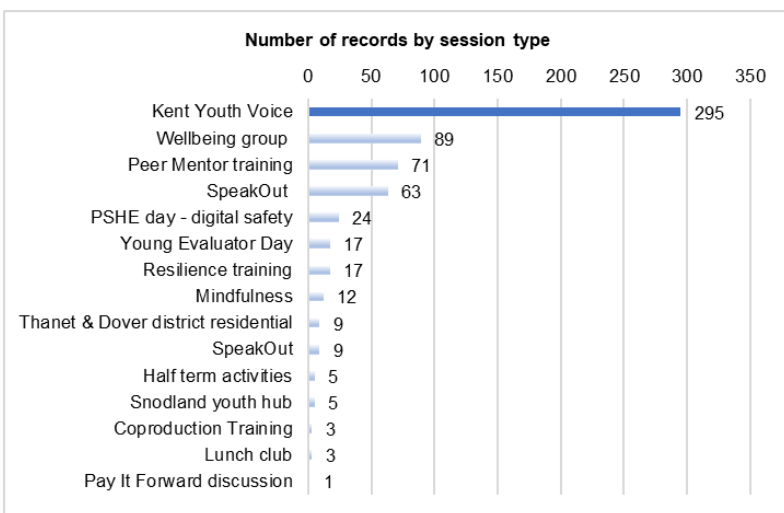
A majority of young people have participated in the programme for over a year, with **38% participating for over 2 years**.



52% of those who participated have received peer mentor training (1,218) and **8%** have participated in more than one type of activity (191).

"To be honest, at the beginning it was just something to do. I thought I may as well go and try it. But what made me want to stay was actually being part of something that mattered [...] At HeadStart the things you do actually matters and makes a difference."

Between September 2019 and March 2020, information from each participation session was collated by the HSK Participation Workers from young people participating. In total, **623 records were captured**. An individual young person could have attended one or multiple sessions.

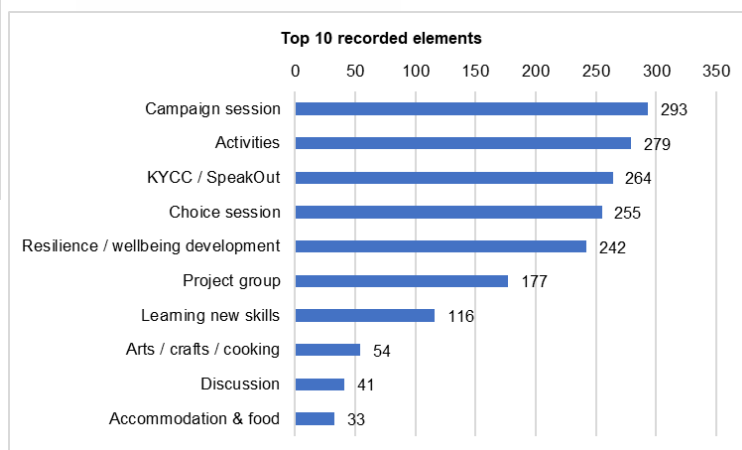


47% of records were recorded centrally for Kent Youth Voice (295).



Each session can be made up of 1 to 5 separate elements. 93 different elements were recorded in total, which have been grouped into 22 broad categories.

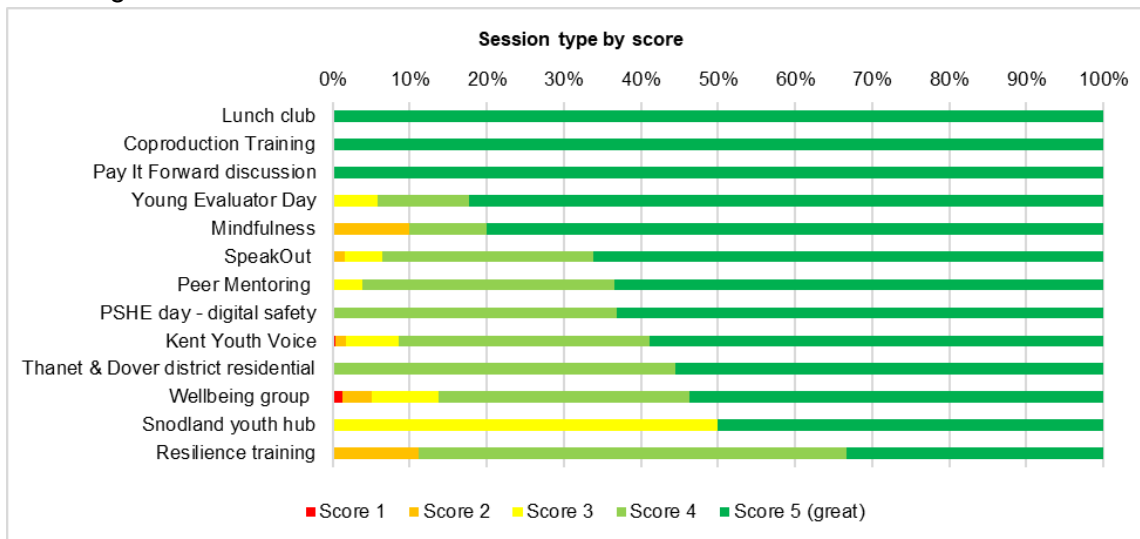
The **element with the most records was for campaign sessions**, which is part of Kent Youth Voice.



Which elements of participation are enjoyed and why?

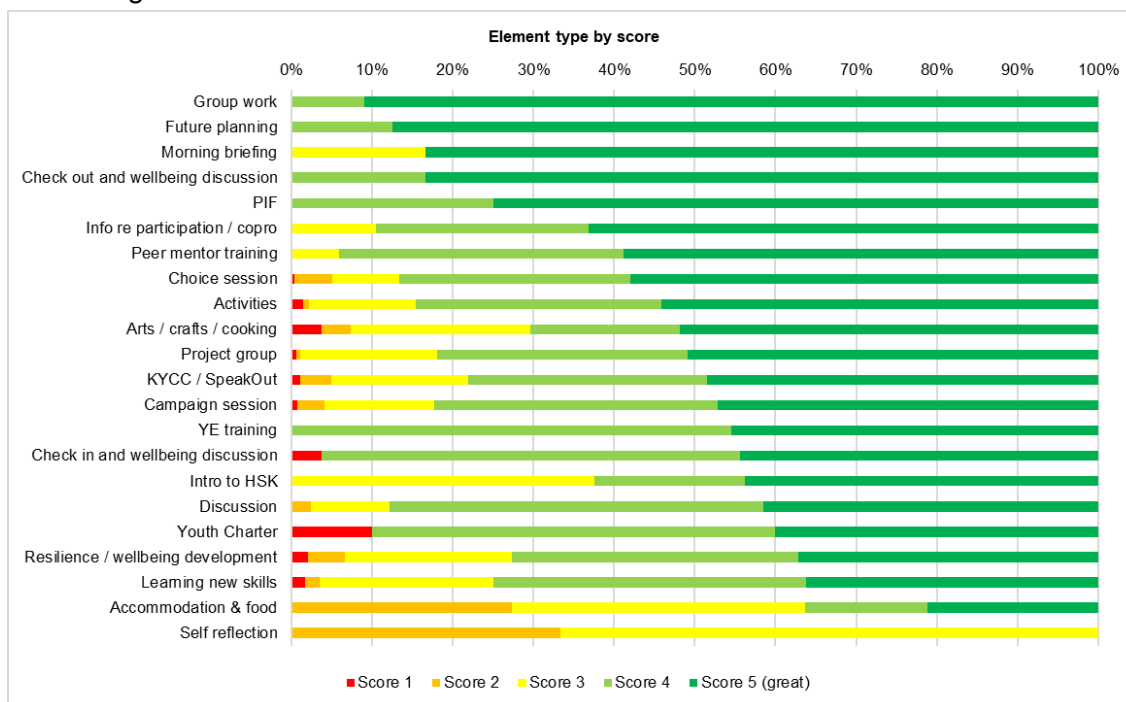
Young people were asked to score the overall session and each element of the session between 1 and 5, where 5 is 'great'. Overall, young people scored the sessions highly, with **92% of records scoring 4 or 5**.

The sessions where all young people thought they were 'great' were only attended by a small number (1 to 3 young people). This could indicate they find support in smaller groups better, however this may also indicate they are influenced by what other participants in the group feedback on their forms. Another conclusion could be that these particular sessions were well run by staff, and the young people considered the content to be good.



Looking at the scores for the elements that make up the sessions, again, they were scored highly, with **80% of records scoring 4 or 5**.

The young people scored a majority of the elements highly, with **75% scoring 4 or 5**. The elements with the highest scores were sessions with less young people (4 to 12). There was much more variance across the elements which lots of young people had taken part in over the 6 months, although generally, the scores were still high.



Which elements of participation are enjoyed and why?

When asked on the participation evaluation forms, 'what went well' and 'what was the best thing you did here today' for each session, there were similarities between the most popular responses. Other than responding that everything went well, **activities**, **socialising/making friends** and **improved knowledge/learning new skills** were most popular.



When comparing gender and Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), the **most popular response for all were the activities**.⁵ Females and non-SEND young people also enjoyed socialising and making friends, whereas males enjoyed improving their knowledge/learning new skills and SEND young people enjoyed arts/crafts/cooking.

The best thing I did here today was....

Males	Females
Activities & improved knowledge/learning new skills	Activities & socialising making friends
SEND	Non-SEND
Activities & arts/crafts/cooking	Activities & socialising making friends

When asked 'what didn't go well', a majority of records showed that young people thought **everything went well**. However, as well as responding that the activities went well, it was also the second most popular response for what didn't go well.



⁵ 160 young people had their gender and SEND status identified. 60% were female, 40% were male and 20% were SEND.

Which elements of participation are enjoyed and why?

Social networks

Young people like to build friendships and have a peer support structure around them. By participating in HSK they have the opportunity to develop these relationships, particularly if they find it difficult or daunting, as they are encouraged and supported by the staff. Some young people come from complex families and the option to have time away, to be themselves with other young people, in a safe and non-judgemental environment is beneficial.



They enjoy mixing with other young people from different backgrounds and areas, who they potentially would not usually meet. Some young people may only have a limited social network, for example, restricted to their school peers, who may be similar to them in many ways. So, for some, mixing with the diverse groups of young people participating in HSK has broadened their exposure to different views and experiences.

"I think it definitely makes you more open to new people and new experiences."

"I think for some young people, what we're doing is providing them opportunities to unlock their potential, and to see themselves as valued members of a group [...] I think the simple things that you can do to make somebody feel valued and welcome is feed them, talk to them, listen to them, have a bit of fun, and get them to take ownership."

Leading

HSK provides young people with the opportunity to lead and make decisions, which may not often happen at this stage of their young lives. When they do lead, they feel listened to and empowered, and some mentioned they felt there was mutual respect between themselves and the adults. They enjoy influencing change and feel as though they are making a positive difference to the lives of other young people. It makes them feel worthy and appreciated.



"It made me feel powerful."

"I think [the young people] like the idea of being the ones making the choices and making decisions because it gives them that power and that sense that they're making a difference."

New opportunities

The young people who are participating in the programme like developing new skills and doing things they might not usually have the opportunity to do. Although the young people participating in HSK are encouraged to take part in all that is offered, they do not feel pressured to take part in everything. It is left up to the individual to decide what to take part in and is understood and accepted by both staff and young people that there are different levels of engagement for all.

"You don't have to want to do everything. It's still accessible for the people that want to be there just for [the fun things] because a lot of people don't have anywhere else to do stuff like that."

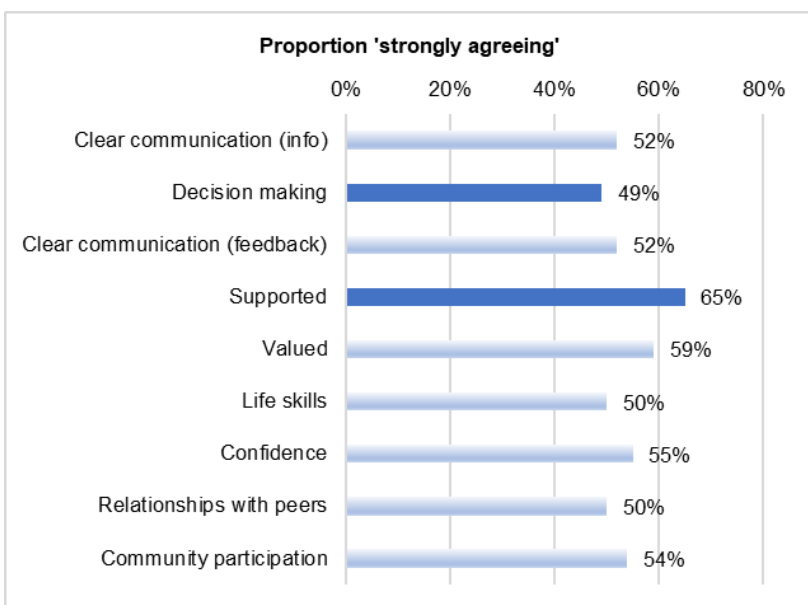
What are the outcomes of those participating?

The hypothesised outcomes for young people participating in HSK are:

Improved relationships with peers	Improved self-confidence and life skills
Improved participation in the community	Young people feel engaged, valued and supported
Young people feel respected	Young people report they have a sense of ownership
Young people report there is clear communication	Future leaders are developed

It is recognised that individual young people have different reasons for participating in HSK and their personal development and outcomes will vary depending on these reasons. However, both the young people and staff said the main outcomes achieved related to **improved confidence**, **building resilience** and **dealing with emotions**, as well as **learning new skills** and **developing friendships**.

"The HeadStart programme (SpeakOut) has been really important to me. It made me feel part of something [...] I have been able to use my own experiences and struggles with mental health, to help others. I have also learned more about myself and how to manage situations, and I know that I'm in control, developing my own resilience for difficult times."



When young people were asked on the participation evaluation forms to rate 9 statements relating to their outcomes between 1 and 5, where 5 is 'strongly agree', **all statements were rated highly** (average scores between 4.1 and 4.5).

Receiving enough support was the statement with the highest proportion of young people who 'strongly agreed' (65%), whereas being **clear which decisions they could influence** had the lowest proportion (49%), although this was still high.

When comparing gender and special educational needs, there was **no significant difference in their scores**. However, females and SEND young people scored 6 out of the 9 statements slightly higher than males or non-SEND young people.

What are the outcomes of those participating?

Of the 2,322 young people that have participated in the programme, **155 began participating up to December 2018 and completed the Wellbeing Measurement Framework (WMF) school survey** in 2017 and 2019. 81% were female and 19% were male.

There were **no significant differences** in the outcomes of young people who participated in HSK support in Year 9 (2019) compared to Year 7 (2017). **However, there was an improvement in them feeling supported by their peers.**

Change in outcomes of young people participating in HSK	No. of YP (paired scores)	2017 score (Year 7)	2019 score (Year 9)	Direction	Significant difference
Positive wellbeing	129	25.13	24.60	↓	No
Difficulties with peers	151	2.15	2.20	↑	No
Peer support	133	54.99	56.10	↑	No
Participation in the community	134	7.82	7.26	↓	No

The 155 young people who participated in HSK have been matched to 155 similar young people who have not participated in the programme. They were matched based on their gender and scores in 2017. The table below shows a comparison of the change between Year 7 (2017) and Year 9 (2019) for both cohorts.

There were **no significant differences** in the change in outcomes when comparing those who participated in the programme to those who did not. **However, the change in positive wellbeing and participation in the community showed less decline for those participating than those who did not. There was also the improvement in peer support for those participating.**

YP participating vs YP not participating	Participating change	Direction	Not participating change	Direction	Significant difference
Positive wellbeing	-0.53	↓	-2.30	↓	No
Difficulties with peers	0.05	↑	0.01	↑	No
Peer support	1.11	↑	-0.19	↓	No
Participation in the community	-0.56	↓	-0.90	↓	No

Having the chance to lead within HSK has built the confidence of some young people. They have gone on to put themselves forward for more challenging roles, such as progressing from initially attending the local SpeakOut groups to being elected to vice-chair campaign and project groups within the central Kent Youth Voice.

Exposure to different situations and a wider range of young people and adults than normal has helped to improve their communication skills and has equipped them to be better able to deal with situations in later life. Many expressed career aspirations which potentially may not have happened without the support of HSK staff. 82 young people have also had the opportunity to take part in gaining qualifications in Leadership, Youth Voice and Peer Mentoring through the programme.⁶

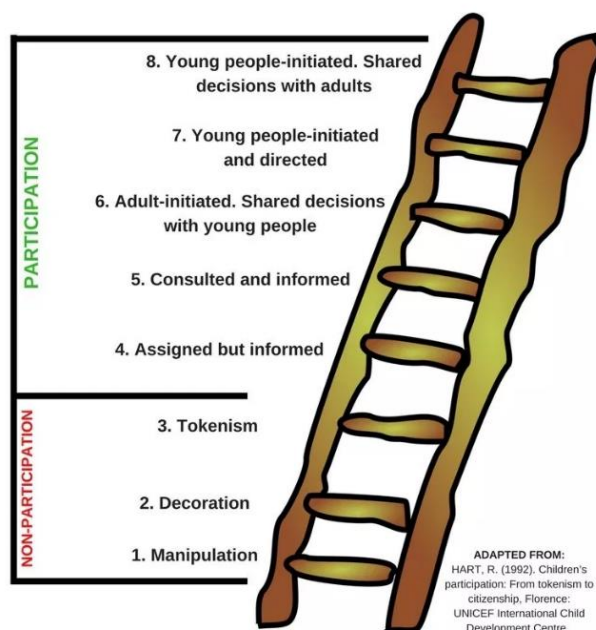
⁶ <https://www.asdan.org.uk/>

Has participation influenced the context around young people?

It was viewed by some that **levels of participation and coproduction varies across the HSK schools**, with some schools fully embracing it and others less so.

One young person commented that as a result of participating in the programme, they are now aware when 'true' coproduction is not taking place and schools are being tokenistic, which they acknowledged could be through lack of understanding of the benefits.

"If [the schools] understood that it can improve stuff they would allow it but they think it won't, so they don't".



Elements of the programme, such as 'You're Welcome', where young people are in control and challenging HSK delivery partners, has **shifted the power dynamic between adults and young people**. This has **empowered the young people involved** and wider rollout of the verification process to health contracts is being discussed. The attendance of various guests at Youth Voice who want to hear the opinions and views of the young people has also been welcomed.

"It's like they respect you. It's different to how most other people would. We're judging them, so they're trying to make themselves bigger and it's generally the other way around [...] It's generally us trying to appear better to adults, so to have adults to do that to us, it feels nice."

From the learning in Phase 2, it was considered that coproduction was not well embedded across services in Kent.⁷ As a result, young people from HSK, the Children in Care Council, the Young Adult Council and the Kent Youth County Council have **designed and delivered coproduction training to 211 adults** over 10 sessions. The range of adults trained is broad; KCC senior leads, school staff, commissioners, Kent Community Health Foundation Trust and many more.

This training has been **viewed as a success** and is **helping staff to think about how they can positively engage the young people they work with through coproduction to provide better outcomes**. Many staff have made pledges to ensure they put what they have learnt into practice. Work is continuing to train staff across the districts before the end of the programme, so knowledge around coproduction is fully embedded and can be sustained.

"Even if you've been a youth worker for 30, 40 years, you think you know what's best for young people. And actually, sometimes you are influencing things, and that's not necessarily young people's perspective, and experience of what they need or what they want [...] [coproducing] with young people just gives it a completely different fresh set of eyes to think about things."

⁷ KCC (2016) *HeadStart Kent Phase 3: Case for Investment* p60-61.

What are the benefits and barriers to participation and what could the future look like?

There are many benefits to participation and coproduction for both the organisations that support young people and young people themselves. However, there is the recognition that, at times, there may be barriers to be overcome to ensure it is carried out correctly.

Support – Staff working together in a team, sharing their ideas and best practice is more advantageous than working in isolation.

Guidance – A framework or guide for staff which can be used flexibly to carry out coproduction work with young people and monitor progress is seen as beneficial.

Networks – Levels of engagement with and understanding of coproduction can differ. Building constructive relationships and networks locally with those involved in supporting young people is valuable and enables participation and coproduction to function well.

Flexibility – Having some freedom, flexibility and enough time within the staff participation roles so they are best able to support the individual needs of young people is required and enables 'true' coproduction and meaningful participation to take place.

Future



There is general consensus that elements of **participation and coproduction is needed going forward after HSK has ended**. There is hope that by widely rolling out the coproduction training to staff in KCC and other school and community settings, this will enable it to be sustained.

However, it was viewed that although **providing resources and guidance would be beneficial, an element of additional expertise is required**. Some felt that staff are potentially needed in roles in the middle ground between youth work and Early Help work, which is usually more targeted and to support schools who may be more focussed on educational outcomes such as attainment. This would ensure that young people who could possibly fall through the gaps in provision are still supported and included in participation and coproduction opportunities.

"I wonder if we were to take this on a wider level, whether embedding [Participation Workers] into Early Help teams or Social Work teams would be valuable. Because there's a wealth of experience there. They're all working with young people, we're all working with similar young people, [...] You've got that belonging, the community, and the ideas and support. It could benefit everyone. Not just us, but them too."

Thank you to the young people and staff that contributed to this report.



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