



# Implementing Youth Voice

A guide made by young people for professionals



Proudly supporting  
youth social action



Department  
for Culture,  
Media & Sport



COMMUNITY  
FUND



YOUTH  
ENDOWMENT  
FUND

# About our toolkit



## Purpose:

As young people, we've seen both the successes and the shortcomings when it comes to youth voice in practice. We understand its power — and the lasting impact it can have on individuals, services, and communities when it's done well.

This toolkit was created to showcase what good youth voice looks like and to provide a practical framework that supports professionals in empowering young people in meaningful, authentic ways.

The idea to produce this toolkit stemmed from our two-year research and social action project that we, a group of young people, led on. Young people told us they want to feel empowered, listened to and understood and that more can be done to give them an active voice in change - so we thought who is better positioned to design a framework for professionals than young people? Throughout its development, we have worked collaboratively with professionals and peers to ensure this resource is useful, realistic, and rooted in lived experience — bridging the gap between intention and action.

## What You'll Find in This Toolkit

- **A summary and examples of what good youth voice looks like**
- **Engaging young people sensitively on sensitive topics - reflections from our work on PAC.**
- **Principles that underpin good youth voice**
- **Moving from consultation to co-production - principles and exercises that can support.**

# What is PAC?

The Peer Action Collective is a £11.4 million peer research and social action programme which aims to give young people the chance to make their communities safer, fairer places to live. Since 2021 it has received funding from the Youth Endowment Fund, the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the Coop Group.

PAC is a network driven by and for young people across England and Wales to conduct peer research and act on the drivers of violence affecting young people. More than 70 young people, employed by local delivery partners and supported by The Young Foundation, drive the network forward and demonstrate the power of youth voice.

The project is youth-led, where young people are employed as peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers to research the root causes of violence against young people and transform their findings into social action projects -creating safer and fairer communities where young people can thrive and flourish.

- Peer researchers use their lived experience of violence against young people to guide research.
- Social action leads transform our research findings into social action projects.
- Changemakers support our social action leads to create meaningful social change in their communities.

PAC has influenced school practices, improved local mental health services, co-produced violence reduction strategies, and supported more young people in employment. Together, they ensure that young voices respond to issues that directly affect them.

Between 2023 and 2025, across England and Wales, PAC has worked with over 5,000 individual young people. In the North East alone, we have supported and worked with over 900 young people.



# Who are we?

We are the North East Peer Action Collective (PAC) team, made up of eight peer researchers and two social action leads.

We have four peer researchers and one social action lead based in Gateshead, and the same in Middlesbrough. For two years we have been employed and supported by regional youth work charities **NE Youth** and **Youth Focus: North East**.

We all joined PAC for similar reasons - we have witnessed or experienced serious youth violence and school exclusion and we want to see change!

PAC has been so important to us as it's allowed us to **“be the change we wish we had”** and give a voice to young people that are often misunderstood, unseen or unheard by professionals.

More than anything **“young people don’t want to be seen as a problem, they want to be part of the solution”**.



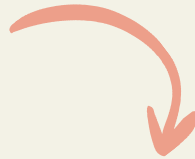


# What did we do?

As a team, we developed two research projects exploring topics around violence and decided to focus on the role of school in prevention. Our first project was our proof of concept, and our second project focused on the 'what' and 'why' so we had concrete answers from young people on what needs to change.

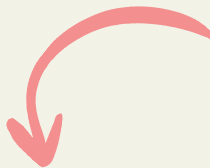
To achieve this, we had to work closely as a team. Peer research was key in opening doors and giving our peers a chance to express their needs, and our social action was taken directly from our findings and co-developed with young people in various ways. Below is an outline of our roles.

Our Peer researchers engaged **157 young people** in interviews and focus groups across the North East, working in youth clubs, alternative provisions and schools.



## Peer Research

- Design research questions
- Explore different research methods
- Conduct peer research
- Review transcripts
- Summarise findings and write reports



Based on our research, we created several social action projects that involved over **600 young people**. To further amplify youth voices, we recruited **80 changemakers** to develop their own social action projects



### Social Action

- Take findings and turn into solutions
- Work with key stakeholders
- Develop projects with young people
- Match evidence to outcomes
- Create opportunities for young people



Shared our project with MPs in parliament



Co-designed a directory with Gateshead council



Shared our findings with the Department for Education



Worked closely with Violence Reduction Unit



Throughout this programme, we have had incredible opportunities and amplified the voices of over **900 young people** across the North East. This toolkit has been written **from us as young people to you as professionals**, sharing our own insights on actively and effectively applying youth voice in practice.

We hope this toolkit gives you the knowledge, skills, understanding and qualities needed to engage youth voice in practice, and improve working relationships between you and the young people you want to engage.

# Why did PAC work?

PAC isn't a model we think is difficult to replicate, and all professionals have the capability of giving young people the opportunities to have an active voice and role in social change. Yes, all young people are different but if you find our passion and give us the skills to thrive, we will achieve outcomes you didn't know possible. Here are the key principles we feel PAC as a project have implemented that has enabled us to thrive:



**Long-term  
investment in  
young people:**

We have achieved a lot through our work with PAC over the past two years, but this would not have been possible without consistency and dedication from NE Youth and Youth Focus. This is not only in our professional careers, but as mentors and support systems in our own personal lives. We have grown together and they have helped us every step of the way. Time matters.

We know young people bring fresh, creative ideas to the table and can inform practice due to lived experience. In many cases, we are the experts that you need and we deserve equal, fair pay for our work.

**Paid  
opportunities:**



# Why did PAC work?

3

Bringing young people to the table:

Young people are demanding a meaningful seat at the table — rightly so, especially when decisions are being made about our lives and our futures.

We've ensured that youth voices are not only included in the conversation but also acknowledged by those in power. This recognition proves that we matter. When young people come together, we don't just participate — we create a movement capable of driving real, lasting change.

As young people with lived experience we know where the gaps are and what the solutions can be. Our understanding offers projects like PAC a unique opportunity to develop effective and sustainable solutions that are backed by real life experience.

Using lived experience to drive change:

4

5

Using a young person centered approach:

A young person centred approach means going above traditional engagement. It means recognising our individual unique needs and being understanding. It's also recognising that lived experience comes with trauma, and helping us navigate this to keep us safe and develop as individuals whilst motivating us to be our best authentic selves.

# The Toolkit



**01**

**A summary of youth voice**

10 - 14

**02**

**Engaging young people sensitively**

15 - 19

**03**

**Principles that underpin youth voice**

20 - 29

**04**

**Moving from consultation to co-production**

30 - 42



EMPOWER  
EVERY  
VOICE



01

A summary of  
youth voice

---

# What is youth voice?

## Youth voice: Simply Put

Youth voice doesn't need to be complicated; with the right guidance, it can be surprisingly easy. In its simplest form, youth voice is actively listening to young people and taking their ideas and contributions seriously. But more importantly, good youth voice goes beyond words; it is talking about action. Taking initiative can demonstrate your commitment to young people and will inspire others. Allowing young people to have active participation and engagement in discussions, processes and activities not only empowers us to thrive, but shows you are taking us seriously as key decision makers.



## Avoiding tokenistic practice

PAC has ensured youth voice remains at the core of the project and that engagement with young people is not seen as tokenistic. With time constraints and external pressures, we recognise at times it can be easy to fall into this tokenism practice when working with young people. If you are wanting to include youth voice and participation in your practice, it's important to ask yourself; is this superficial? What will I do with the feedback? How can young people be part of this change? What if young people share feedback I don't expect? Does it actually matter? If you are questioning any of these statements, then you are not effectively using youth voice and it can be damaging to us as young people - pushing us away and breaking trust.





# Youth voice: Why it matters

Youth voice is crucial as it ensures that the unique perspectives and experiences of young people are represented in decision-making processes. Including young people in the conversation brings new and fresh views and can help you better understand trends and preferences that are important to this demographic; meaning interventions are more likely to work.



Evidenced by our research findings, we know young people want a space to feel heard, and if they were, how much it'd both benefit them as individuals and prevent them from crime and harm.

Using lived experience as a driving force will also give you honest feedback on things that need to change for the better.

Youth voice is key in building positive working relationships between young people and professionals – creating a foundation of trust, belief and mutual respect. At the end of the day, who doesn't want to feel understood? If we know you value us and are working with us, we are more likely to engage meaning you will see the results.



# Youth Voice in Practice



Young people should never be viewed as hard to reach or difficult to engage, it should be you as professionals asking what can be done to make young people feel safe, comfortable and able to engage.

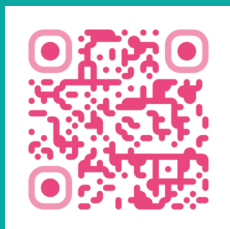
Too often we are told young people are the problem, but rarely part of the solution - and this needs to change!

How - by using effective youth voice in your practice and giving young people the chance.

As a group, we can be living testimonies of what can be achieved if you invest in young people.

But don't just take our project as the only example, here are some more projects that we feel have successfully used youth voice across the country.

Voices project



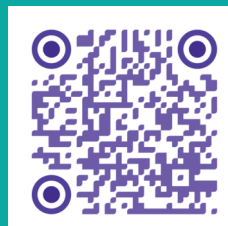
All child research project



Peer Action Collective



The Key



  
**SCAN ME** 

# Why these projects?

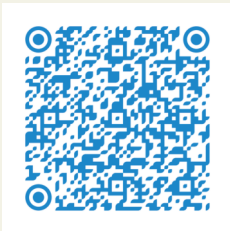
Below is a little explanation of why we like these projects and the key things that stood out to us.

## Voices project



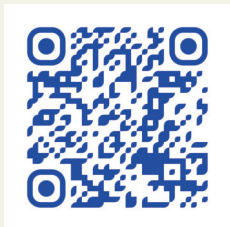
This project used young peoples voices throughout their evidence and findings. We particularly like the fact that their reports include the art work and designs young people worked on and developed throughout the project.

## All child research project



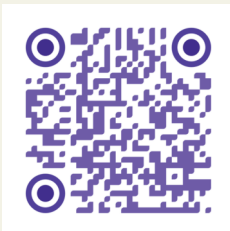
This project engaged a large number of young people in different schools with different backgrounds. It looks at topics young people have identified as important and worked with them in both the interview and evaluation process.

## Peer Action Collective



As a wider project, PAC puts young people at the heart of all their work. Using young people to research, write reports, recommendations and deliver actual social outputs. Young people drive this project forward.

## The Key



The KEY are an organisation we have had first hand experience with, and we have been part of one of their programmes. The KEY support young people to develop projects important to them, and fund these projects in order to make young peoples dreams a reality.

# 02



## Engaging young people sensitively



# What does engaging sensitively mean?



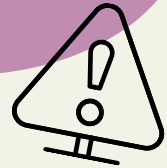
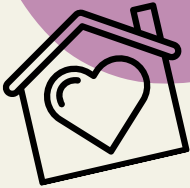
To create a space where a young person can do their best, the facilitator needs to understand their limits and boundaries to avoid overwhelming or harming them.

Engaging young people sensitively is crucial for maximising their involvement and allowing them to use their lived experience to create valuable change.



# Engaging young people sensitively explained

As young people, we have lived experiences. We know what works and we know what the issues are. However, this also comes with potential triggers and trauma, and sometimes we may struggle to verbalise this but our non-verbal communication will show this. Rather than being a 'problem' we want you to be consistent and curious, asking the question why and shaping the narrative of what can be done to make us feel valued. This trauma-informed approach is not always easy, but stick to it and you will see results.



# 1

**Navigating Triggers:** Being mindful of potential triggers that could remind the young person of past trauma, such as certain topics, places, or situations, and giving young people a choice to participate in these activities. This is empowerment and gives young people ownership over their own well-being.

# 2

**Creating a Safe Environment:** Making sure the young person feels physically and emotionally secure. This could involve providing a quiet space and being mindful of body language.

# 3

**Building Trust and Rapport:** Taking the time to build a positive relationship with the young person by being reliable, consistent, and showing genuine interest in their well-being. Your actions and commitments will do more than your words.

# Key principles to inform your approach

## What is a safe space?

When we discussed safe spaces with young people, they told us this could be anywhere they want to be with someone they want to be with. A safe space was just as much about the people in the area, as well as the make up of the space. Young people will often gravitate to spaces they feel are safe or good for them, and if you can unpick why they view these spaces in this way - you can make appropriate adjustments to your space allowing young people to feel safe and open up.



## How to create a safe space

From our own experiences and from our research, we know more can be done to create safer spaces that young people feel accepted in. We asked young people what can help make a safe space, and they said:



- 1 Bring activities like fidget toys and mindfulness coloring.
- 2 Make the safe space optional - give young people choice to come and go!
- 3 Provide snacks and food.
- 4 Allocate a trusted adult to the safe space BUT don't pressure young people to speak!
- 5 Ask young people what they want and shape the safe space to their needs and act on this feedback.
- 6 Respect that this space is FOR young people and make sure others are aware of this.

**REMEMBER!**

Language is critical. How you speak to young people really matters. Think about your tone, choice of language and how you say things. Language should be open, inclusive and encouraging conversation.

**NEVER DISMISS A YOUNG PERSON for their thoughts, feelings and actions.**



# Why does it matter?

**“We want you to be curious, ask us why we feel certain ways and help us work through our thoughts and feelings. That’s where you will see real change”**

**Interview participant**

Avoiding conversations and certain topics can, in some ways, be more damaging to us as young people.

We need spaces to process our lived experience, and if we can shape these experiences into positive outcomes it will help us move forward in a positive way, whilst also supporting others.

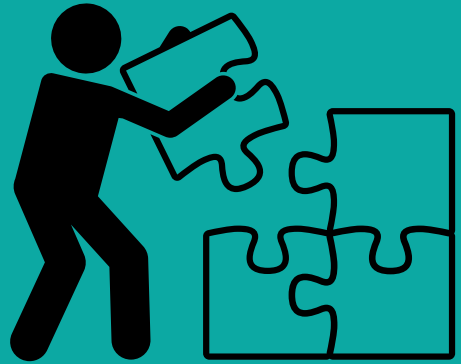
Every single person has the ability to make change, and in our opinion those with lived experience are the expert.

We need you to believe in us, invest in us, advocate for us, protect us, and show us why we are important.

**“We should listen to young people because they see the world not just as it is, but what it could be. With fresh eyes, bold ideas and the courage to challenge what no longer works”**

**Peer researcher**

# 03

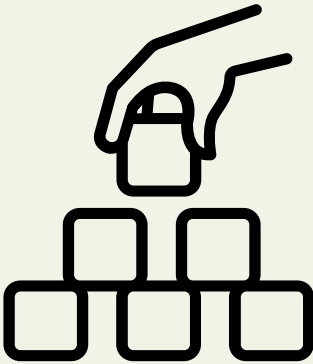


## Principles that underpin youth voice



## 2.1

### The building blocks



Now that we have discussed what youth voice is and seen it in action, we can start to unpick the key principles that we like to call the building blocks.

These building blocks are the fundamentals that, if incorporated properly, will transform your practice and give young people the voice they deserve.

From our experience in research and working with young people, below are our key Do's and Don'ts that we found need to be followed:

#### DO'S

- 1** Act on feedback
- 2** Letting young people lead
- 3** Recognise our value
- 4** Be honest and transparent
- 5** Active listening and investing time

#### DON'TS

- 1** Talking at young people rather than with.
- 2** Not recognising power
- 3** Young people engaging without understanding why.
- 4** Making assumptions and labelling young people.
- 5** Only working with specific young people.

# Youth voice: What to do



1

**Act on feedback** - Good youth voice goes beyond words; it is talking about action. This could involve organising events or advocating for social change. Taking initiative can demonstrate your commitment to young people and inspire others to be involved.



2

**Let young people lead** - Allowing young people to lead is a good example of youth voice as it ensures that their perspectives and needs are at the forefront of decision-making. This approach not only makes projects more effective and relevant, but also empowers young people, boosting their confidence and developing crucial leadership skills.

3

**Recognise our value** - Recognising young people's value is crucial because it empowers their experiences and perspectives, making them feel heard and respected. To do it well, actively listen to their ideas, involve them in decision-making processes, and provide opportunities for them to showcase their talents and contributions. This encourages their continued engagement.

4

**Be honest and transparent** - Successful youth voice includes young people in all aspects of the project. This means their involvement should be met with transparency and honesty. It's important that even if a young person's idea or suggestion may not be possible that they are made aware of this. As young people ourselves, we value professionals who are honest about their capabilities and ability to implement our suggestions.

5

**Investing time and active listening** - In order to successfully implement youth voice, it's important you're ready to invest time into young people. This could include meeting with young people before the start of their involvement in a project or being prepared to remain flexible to give young people what they need. Building positive relationships takes time, active listening and an effort to meet young people where they are.



# Youth voice: What to avoid



1

**Talking at young** people without their understanding, involvement and voice prevents true voices of young people to be heard. Without interaction and the ability to listen young people cant flourish in their given environment.



2

**Forgetting the importance of power dynamics** can impact a young persons confidence, mannerisms and responses- preventing them from feeling heard and understood. Its imperative to take into consideration your profesional role and its impact. From clothes to the way you speak, its vital to take care in presentation to be able to gain a closer power dynamic with young people.

3

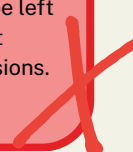
**Without the 'why'** it limits young peoples imaginations, creativity and understanding. Young people need to know the meaning of their involvement and what the end goal is.

4

**Assumptions** have the ability to prevent young people from growing learning and moving on from the past. As professionals its your role to allow for growth redemption and change without making assumptions judgements or creating fixed labells.

5

**Working with specific young people** prevents others from impacting change and creates a biased approach to youth voice. Without a wide range of young people and an unbiased approach young people can be left feeling unworthy and irrelevant when it comes to leading and making key decisions.



# Building trusting relationships



During our research, young people told us more can be done to build trusting relationships. When asked what the foundation of a trusting relationship was, most said it was a feeling of mutual respect with an equal power dynamic.

**We know you're in charge, you  
don't need to remind us every  
second**

,,

We asked young people what the most effective way to build these feelings were and we heard that fun 'ice breaker' style games are a great starting point. We took this further by asking a number of young people what their favourite ice breakers were, and this is what they said:



# Ice breaker 1 - Splat



- Everyone stands in a circle with space between each person.
- One person (the facilitator) stands in the middle and makes a finger gun shape with their hands.
- The facilitator spins around slowly, then points at someone and says “Splat!”



- That person must quickly duck.
- If they don't duck in time, they're out.
- If they do duck, the two people on either side must turn and “splat” (say “splat” while pointing) at each other.
- The one who says splat first stays in; the slower one is out.



- Play continues until only two people are left.
- Final two stand back-to-back, take slow steps forward.
- When the facilitator says “Splat,” they turn and try to splat each other first.
- First to splat wins!
- The facilitator can let others take turns in the middle.



# Ice breaker 2 - Two Truths One Lie



- Start as the facilitator thinking of 2 true things and 1 lie.



- Facilitator shares all three statements (in any order).
- The group guesses which one is the lie.
- Who guesses correctly then shares their own two truths and a lie

- Example: I have two dogs. I had purple hair. I have three sisters.
- Reveal the answer after everyone guesses!



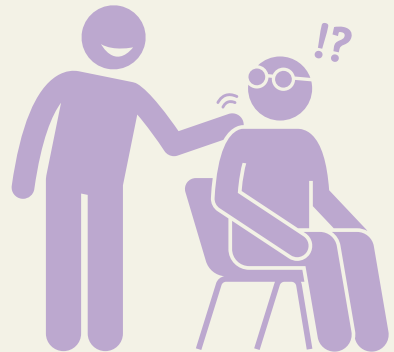
Facilitator note: Remind everyone to keep it appropriate and respectful. Only share what you are comfortable with!

# Ice breaker 3 - Wink Murder

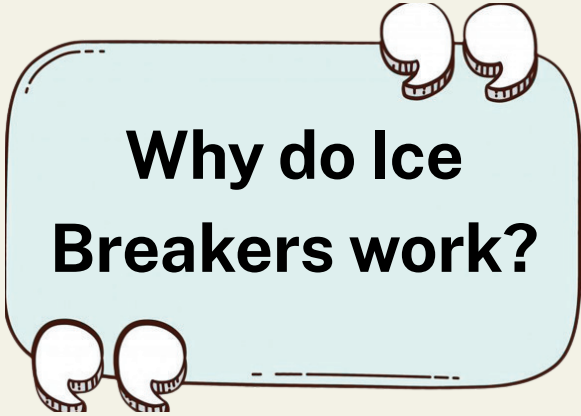


- Players stand or sit in a circle and close their eyes.
- The facilitator taps one person to be the murderer (secretly).
- Then, the facilitator chooses a detective (announced to the group).

- Everyone opens their eyes, and walks around room.
- The murderer "kills" by winking at players. If winked at, you must die dramatically!



- The detective watches carefully and guesses who they think the murderer is after every murder.
- The game ends when the murderer is caught by detective or all players are "killed".

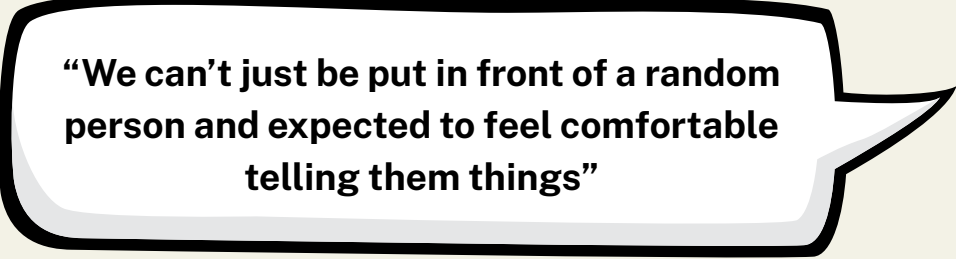



## **Why do Ice Breakers work?**


**We asked young people and they said:**



**“It helps you get to know them so you know you can trust them”**



**“We can’t just be put in front of a random person and expected to feel comfortable telling them things”**



Trust is the foundation of any relationship. Taking time to laugh and play games helps young people relax and feel more comfortable. Breaking down barriers and making it easier for young person to be themselves.

Once you have established a trusting relationship, you can start to build the bigger picture **with** young people.

Going beyond asking them their views, and giving them a platform to take lead and feed into the next steps.



This is moving from consultation to co-production and is key to long term, meaningful solutions.



# 04

## Moving from consultation to co-production



# Co-production in practice

Co-production to us means including young people at every stage or process. One of the biggest flaws we have found in current youth voice practice is professionals engaging young people for genuine reasons. Young people will be your biggest asset if you follow all the previous steps listed in this toolkit, and will open doors you as a professional never could. Co-production to us looks like:



Young people should be consulted and included in developing your ideas. Using young people as research leads will evidence your ideas, whilst also opening doors to those you may previously have found hard to reach. If young people trust you, they will let you into their world and their connections giving you the voices of those most in need.



Ask young people to review all the findings with you. Young people will be able to pick out extra layers of detail you may miss, and explain what young people are experiencing or explaining. This is key in ensuring solutions are appropriate.



Once you have the findings, you can now ask young people what should be done next in terms of action. Young people will give you creative solutions to issues raised, and will ensure all outcomes are in the best interest of their peers meaning your offer is the strongest it can be.

## Co-production in practice



Support young people to achieve their desired action, and repeat the process. We call this the 'feedback loop' and is the key in empowering young people. What has worked? What can be done different? What needs to be done next? are all questions to start the process and will continue to strengthen your offer to young people.



Each time you complete this cycle, more and more young people will begin to trust you and join the movement. The more youth voice influence you have, the more you will succeed.



Always present data in a way young people understand. When data is presented in a more accessible and inclusive way, young people feel empowered to become a part of the conversation. Avoid confusing terms, words and acronyms and simply present all data in a way anyone would understand.

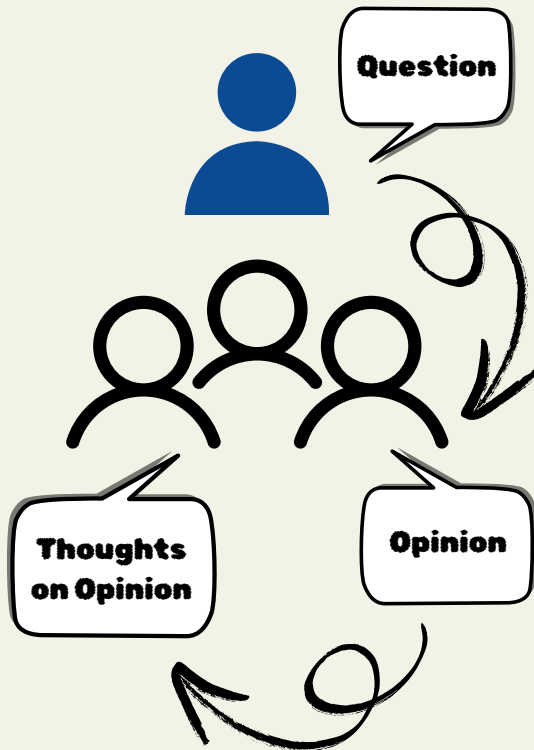


Our top tip for presenting data to young people is through using You Said: We Did.

We found that this is a simple way of outlining in a basic way what young people have said, and what has been done about this. Including this in the feedback cycle is key for showing young people their voices matter and have been taken seriously in the decision making processes.



## Our delivery model



One thing we are most proud of from our work with young people is our delivery model. We recognised that often interviewers or those asking the questions hold the power, and we wanted to do all we could to remove this. We adopted the approach of asking a question, then asking others in the group what they think on the opinion given.

This method is great at starting conversations between groups and allows young people to challenge each other safely, giving different and unique perceptions on issues they are facing. This also meant the group was having a conversation, and minimised how much we as interviewers needed to ‘take control’.

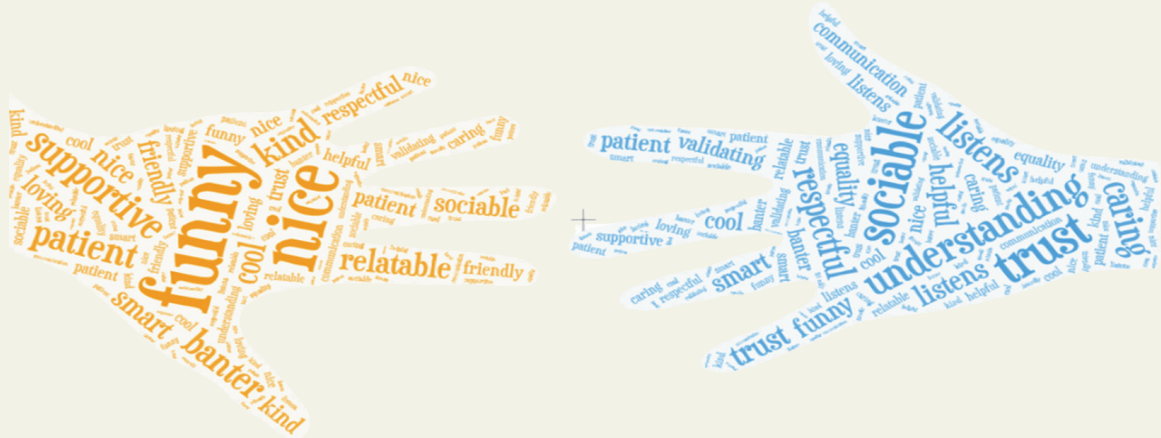
Through using this delivery model, we were able to work with young people and find out to them what needs to change.

In collaboration, we developed the following framework that underpins what young people describe as the key ingredients to positive, meaningful engagement.

# The D.U.R.S Framework

# D.U.R.S.

DELIVERY | UNDERSTANDING | RELATIONSHIP | SUPPORT



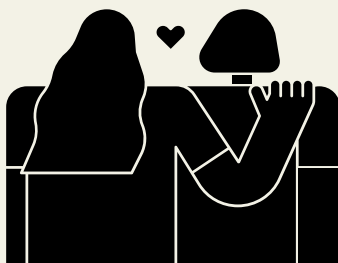
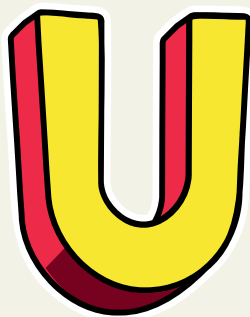
DURS was created from all the qualities young people said they believe a trusted adult demonstrates. We asked young people how these qualities look in practice and they told us it was through: Delivery, Understanding, Relationship and Support. From this, our D.U.R.S framework was born.

The D.U.R.S Framework has the ability to relate to young people and create engaging activities which young people enjoy and best learn in.



## DELIVERY

Young people told us what is taught is just as important as how it is taught. Delivery should be changeable and loose in order to create an environment for a youth lead focus to flourish. Every professional should use an open mind set and be able to cooperate with a diverse delivery framework meeting the needs of the individuals they are supporting.



## UNDERSTANDING

is created through listening and acting on what the young people need and want. The ability to acknowledge youth led leadership and to assist them throughout is crucial to allow room for young people to grow - "we want people who are relatable".

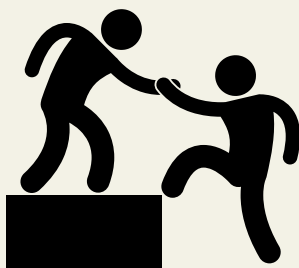
# R



## RELATIONSHIPS

are fundamental in order to build trust with young people. Healthy relationships are highly important in order to brake down any perceived power imbalance and allow for an open environment, in order to give young people the space to confide in trusted professionals. Having a strong working relationship with young people will also give them the confidence and support structure needed to thrive.

# S



## SUPPORT

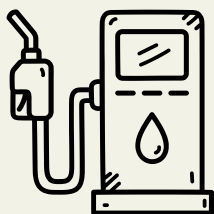
Is needed to uplift young people. Professionals need to create the correct balance of support and independence to allow young people to feel empowered but also learn through action. Young people need you to be there through the highs and lows, acting consistently and being one of the people they can turn to when needed.

DURS has the ability to shape young peoples futures and give young people the space to grow. Professionals need to look at their roles from a young persons perspective and listen to young peoples needs and wants.

# DURS



Youth Voice is a journey. The DURS Framework will need to be applied differently depending on each individual young person. Working with young people is never a direct process - its always turning, changing and developing and as a professional you have to support by steering us in the right direction without imposing on young peoples ideas.



To start, you need to really fuel the motivation of young people to want to take the journey alongside you. You are the driving force, asking young people where they want to go to.



Young people will hit a crossroads at time, but this is ok. Allow them to take whatever exit they want and navigate this with them. If this is the wrong way for them, help direct them back and try a different exit.



There may be bumpy times on the journey, but with consistency you can overcome the hurdles making the path smooth.



Sometimes young may need a little push in the right direction. Using positive reinforcement to encourage young people they are valued for their opinions.



It's always good to reflect on what's behind and how far we have come. Regularly remind us of the journey and the things we have achieved.



After a while, you can give us the keys and allow us to drive our own ideas forward. We still need you helping direct, but allow us to take more control over the journey.



Depending on experience, young people may start this journey at different places. It is critical you balance the right level of support with the right level of challenge to fully fuel the car.

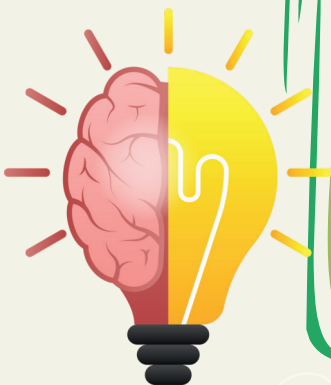


The more you fuel the car, the further we will take you.

# DURS IN ACTION

## Scenario 1 :A professional wants to know what is currently impacting young people in their local area.

To 'Deliver', a professional must build a relationship with the young people prior to their research. Remember the professional sets out the tone and atmosphere so they need to be able to read a room and demonstrate an ability to go with the flow in dependence of the young people. Young people prefer a interactive learning style so in this scenario we could list different topics face down on a table, ask the group to flip over one at a time and discuss if this is important or not.



To 'understand', a professional must be curious and invest in what young people are saying. Ask young people what they mean, explore why certain things are important or not and allow them to create the solutions. We also recommend doing some previous research to remove any bias and help shape your understanding. Remember some topics may be uncomfortable, so in this scenario we would remind the group throughout that they do not need to answer and are free to step out at any point if they wish to do so.





# DURS IN ACTION

## Scenario 1 :A professional wants to know what is currently impacting young people in their local area.

To form a positive 'relationship' in this scenario, we would check back in with the young people as things progress. We would provide the data to them in a way they would understand, and explain our thoughts and solutions using the You Said : We Did approach. If a young person told us anything we were concerned about, we would also check in and create the time and space to explore what they had discussed. Remember to be curious and consistent.



To 'support' the group in this scenario, we would go above our words. We would give the group a voice and control in the next steps and decision making process, and advocate for what they have said. We would ensure these voices are not suppressed at any level, and that we challenge any stakeholders to fully amplify youth voice. We would also list short, medium and long term goals to show the young people our action is meaningful and help motivate them for continued engagement.

# PAC CASE STUDY – PENNY’S JOURNEY



At just 17, Penny joined NE Youth as a Peer Researcher after experiencing violence affecting young people and years of school exclusion, where she often felt unheard and unseen. With no previous involvement in youth services, she decided to take a chance - attending an NE Youth open day where, for the first time, she felt truly listened to and accepted. Through the Peer Action Collective (PAC) programme, Penny began her journey towards creating safer, more inclusive communities for young people.

Since then, she has become a fearless advocate, using her lived experience to challenge professionals and stand up for her peers. Penny’s empathetic, open-minded approach, and her drive to keep learning and growing, has made her a respected youth voice in Gateshead and beyond.

Caroline Evans, Youth Lead at Gateshead Council, described her as: **“a real champion for young people... an inspirational role model for her peers.”**

Most recently, Penny became NE Youth’s first-ever Youth Voice Worker Trainee, a landmark achievement for her and for the organisation.

Penny’s story shows what’s possible when young people are invested in for the long term. She is living proof of resilience, transformation, and the impact one young person can make.

Her journey should be a trailblazer for others. **Young people matter, and when given the chance, they thrive.**

In this new role, Penny is keen to improve community relationships and ensure youth voice is at the heart of all we do. You can reach Penny by contacting: [info@neyouth.org.uk](mailto:info@neyouth.org.uk) or calling 0191 499 0571.

# Conclusion

This toolkit has been created by young people, for professionals, with one clear message: **youth voice matters**.

Throughout this resource, we've shared insights, tools, and real experiences that show the power of listening to and working with young people not just as participants, but as partners and leaders. We've shown what meaningful youth engagement looks like, and how it can create stronger, more relevant, and more impactful services, policies, and communities.

But a toolkit is only the beginning.

True change happens when professionals move from intention to action; when youth voice is not just heard, but truly valued, acted upon, and embedded into everyday practice. We're not asking for perfection; we're asking for commitment, openness, and respect.

We hope this toolkit sparks conversations, challenges assumptions, and supports you to co-create spaces where young people feel empowered, respected, and seen. Together, we can build a culture where youth voice isn't an afterthought — it's the foundation.

Please share this resource with your networks and if you would like to leave **feedback**, you can do this by scanning the below QR code:

If you think we can help support youth voice in your work, please get in touch - [info@neya.org.uk](mailto:info@neya.org.uk)





This toolkit would not have been possible without all the incredible young people who have been involved with our project. Your honesty, vulnerability and transparency has made this happen.

We would also like to give a special thanks to our trusted partners who have reviewed, reflected and directly fed into this toolkits content:

Caroline Evans, Gateshead Council.

Dr Shaun D. Wilkinson, Assistant Professor in Sport and Physical Education at Northumbria University.

Dr Rebecca Oswald, Professor Sarah Soppitt and Dr Samantha Walker, criminologists at Northumbria University and steering committee of Safer Children Network ([saferchildrennetwork.co.uk](http://saferchildrennetwork.co.uk))

Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit

Northumbria Police Prevention Through Education Team

And finally, with thanks to the Young Foundation who have provided feedback and support through our journey.



Youth Focus North East  
(Middlesbrough)  
[youthfocusne.org.uk](http://youthfocusne.org.uk)



NE Youth (Gateshead)  
[neyouth.org.uk](http://neyouth.org.uk)



**SCAN ME!**

Scan the QR code to  
act now and be part of  
creating meaningful  
change.

[Or Click Me](#)