



**YOUNG
WOMEN'S
TRUST**

**WORKING INCLUSIVELY
WITH YOUNG WOMEN:**

**A toolkit for
meaningful
participation**

PARTICIPATION AT YOUNG WOMEN'S TRUST

At Young Women's Trust we support young women aged 18-30, especially those struggling to live on low pay, to get into work that is right for them.

We are especially proud of our participation programme which puts the lived experiences and opinions of young women at the heart of our work. Everything we do – from the services we provide to the campaigns we run – is informed by young women. By working in this way, young women advocate for themselves and others to improve opportunities for all young women and, at the same time, gain social capital, confidence and new skills.

This toolkit aims to help you undertake meaningful participation with young women who might also face discrimination and multiple disadvantage. It highlights the huge benefits to young women themselves as well as to policy and practice – and considers challenges to participation, and how to overcome these. This toolkit is for anyone who wants to involve young women in the planning and delivery of their work, including policy makers, employers and practitioners working with young women. When we have referred to young women in this toolkit, we have in mind an inclusive approach that is suitable for everyone, including those with complex needs.

INTRODUCTION

Toolkits like this one created by Young Women's Trust (YWT) are essential for effectively engaging and involving young women who may have complex needs.

I myself have experienced homelessness and severe illness and because of YWT's in-depth experience and awareness I have always been well accommodated for at their events.

Despite exhibiting what many would consider inevitable barriers to success such as chronic depression, I have been able to speak alongside the Mayor of London at City Hall and at the House of Commons and have also been chosen to be one of the decision makers in the She Can Be Lord Mayor's Appeal. Opportunities like these have strengthened my self-esteem and self-belief at a time when they were crumbling.

But just as importantly a young woman's experience is a treasure trove of insight into today's society and its injustices. Companies, charities and organisations can utilise this insight to further fine tune their work with women and improve their overall positive influence on society. It is so important that there are more platforms for young women to be granted the space to speak out and influence because this way everyone wins.

Priscilla Casey

Young Women's Trust Advisory Panel Member





WHAT IS PARTICIPATION?

Voluntary and public sector organisations have led the way in ensuring that people are given the opportunity to participate in matters that affect their lives, with many organisations encouraging the participation of people with lived-experience to bring about change to service provision and influencing work.

This process involves information-sharing, a dialogue between those with lived-experience and those seeking their views, mutual respect and a clear understanding of how views shared were considered to shape the outcome. It's important to remember this is a two-way process and everyone involved should benefit.

WHY INVOLVE YOUNG WOMEN?



- Provides a richer understanding of young women's experiences
- Opportunity to gain new perspectives and ideas
- Generates services that match the real needs of young women
- Promotes diversity within the workforce
- Furthers understanding of the needs of young women and mechanisms to support them
- Enhances credibility of work
- Gives authority to messages and influencing work
- Bridges the gap between older and younger members of society
- Recognises young women as experts in their own lives and active agents in influencing the world around them

CASE STUDY

"I had the pleasure of working with two young women from Young Women's Trust's Advisory Panel with lived experience of pregnancy and maternity discrimination, who shaped our #PowerToTheBump campaign. They attended focus groups to generate ideas about how we could engage young women in information about their workplace maternity rights and acted as critical friends for all of the content generated, helping shape the language of the top tips and offering advice on imagery. The feedback and impact of the launch was phenomenal. The young women promoted the campaign in the media and spoke to their MPs which was a contributing factor to us securing a Westminster Hall debate on this topic, chaired by one of the young women's MP. Their enthusiasm, creative ideas and ability to see what would be impactful, has really helped make a difference to the project and the work of the Commission. As this was a relatively new way of working for the Commission, it has learned a lot about the values of co-production and working with different audiences. The young women paved the way on this and that impact cannot be overstated."

Rosie Wallbank, Equality and Human Rights Commission



HOW YOUNG WOMEN CAN PARTICIPATE

- Surveys or questionnaires

- In-depth research interviews (phone/in person)

- Sitting on board of trustees

- Staff recruitment/inductions

- Attending meetings

- Speaking at events and to the media

- Writing blogs and media articles

- Conducting peer-research

- Co-facilitating training/workshops with other young women

- Sitting on working/steering groups

- Small group discussions/focus groups

- Large workshops

- Formal advisory group

- Online participation e.g. polls or discussions through online groups/messenger chats, WhatsApp, using Zoom/Skype



How it works

At YWT young women help devise job adverts and interview questions as well as sitting on recruitment panels. Staff ensure young women make an informed and equal contribution to the outcome by using scoring matrices. Involving them in this way shows candidates how important young women's participation is and benefits the young women too – *"It was empowering to be on the 'other side of the table' and to gain an insight into the attributes that an interviewer might be looking for."* **Young woman, London**

How it works

Young women conduct peer-research to bring greater depth to our research work. In addition involving peer researchers seeks to balance power relationships between "professional" adult researchers and young women. We support young women to create interview guides and train them in basic research skills to conduct interviews with other young women effectively and ethically. *"Peer-research is good because it helps gather more honest results from one young woman to another."* **Young woman, London**



How it works

We run an Advisory Panel made up of 30 young women with lived experience of unemployment, low pay and other relevant issues. They inform the work we do through sharing their ideas and experiences and taking part in meetings, focus groups, events and workshops. They also write blogs, speak to the media and meet decision-makers and influencers. We run bi-annual residential weekends for members to come together, discuss issues, take part in co-creation and receive training.

BENEFITS TO YOUNG WOMEN

Young women tell us that there are many benefits when they can participate meaningfully in decision-making. These include:

- ♥ Improved confidence and self-esteem
- ♥ Improved skills in communication, leadership, teamwork and advocacy
- ♥ Improved knowledge of their rights and democratic processes
- ♥ Networking opportunities
- ♥ Feeling motivated and proud
- ♥ Feeling positive about their next steps and clarity on what they want for their future
- ♥ Feeling less isolated through meeting other young women with similar experiences
- ♥ Standing up for young women and helping create change

"Inspiring, rewarding and exciting are words I would use to describe my involvement with Young Women's Trust. As a young mother, especially a young black mother, I wanted to help change the narrative about young mums who want to work by highlighting the real issues. Sharing my experiences in meetings with policy-makers and on live TV built my confidence up and impacted positively on my career aspirations. Society can make you feel inadequate but since joining Young Women's Trust I feel the opposite of this. I am proud to be a young mum. I know the great things I have done, and I am proud to be part of changing the view of the young girl behind the buggy!"

Young woman, London

"I've gained life-long friends, met so many influential people and now believe in myself. I've had the confidence to talk to MPs, be on TV and stand in front of people who have no idea what it's like to be a young woman today. I've shouted from the rooftops and I know I won't stop. I've learnt skills that have helped me make the steps to change my career.

Participating with Young Women's Trust has been one of the best experiences ever."

Young woman, Bournemouth





SAFETY FIRST

CONSENT

Young women should be able to consent to take part in activities and this should be an ongoing process. In some cases, young women may inform you they want to put their participation on hold due to issues in their lives. Ensure you keep channels of communication open so that they can participate again when they are ready.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND SAFEGUARDING

Before every activity it is important to remind young women that the information they share will be used to inform a particular piece of work or project and that everything else will be treated as confidential.

It is important to also highlight that you will only pass on information about them to another agency if there is a legal requirement to do so, or if they, or someone they tell you about, is at risk of serious harm. If a situation like this occurs always try to tell them that you are sharing information about them, and with whom you are sharing it.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

All events or activities you run should be risk assessed to ensure the safety of young women, staff and volunteers at all times. Consider issues such as travel/arrival disruptions, illness, conflict, behavioural issues and staffing issues. Each venue has its own fire and safety procedures to follow so ensure you are aware of this before beginning an activity.

SHOWING WHAT'S CHANGED

To ensure participation is meaningful and leads to change, it is important to gather feedback from young women about their involvement and then demonstrate how their views have made a difference. This information is important in terms of measuring the outcomes of your work and can be useful for future funding.

At Young Women's Trust, we have a short online survey for young women evaluating well-being, skills gained, what went well and what could be improved. We send these out every six months to all young women who have participated in that period, share the findings and make any necessary changes and communicate this back to them. For those who are members of a group or involved in a specific project then evaluating their involvement can be useful to illustrate what's changed. We send journey questionnaires to our advisory panel members at the beginning, middle and end of their two-years on the panel to measure this.



Demonstrating the impact of participation to the young women involved is vital and ensures their continued involvement. We use 'involvement sheets' to summarise a project, show how young women's opinions, ideas or experiences have been used, and what has changed as a result. These are then shared with the young women, with funders or with partners.

"I am now in a full-time job which I love and I'm able to speak about the problems I have in a more open way. I feel I'm not the only young woman going through these issues and I met some amazing young women who I will be friends with for a long time."

Young woman, London

"This is why I love YWT. I can actually see how young women's voices are being utilised for the better."

Young woman, London



TOP TIPS FOR THE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG WOMEN

Young women tell us they don't feel listened to or taken seriously by government, employers, public services and other organisations.

That's why it's important that we provide them with meaningful participation opportunities where their views are heard and acted upon, and where they are given the opportunity to develop autonomy and social responsibility. Here are some useful things to consider:

1. BUDGET PROPERLY

Involving young women in a meaningful way requires a thought-out, dedicated budget. Make sure you budget for travel expenses, venue hire and refreshments. Also consider budgeting for accommodation for those with long journeys and thank you vouchers/crèche facilities where appropriate. Some young women may not be able to cover costs upfront, so look to remove this barrier by pre-booking travel or posting out travel cards.



2. BE INCLUSIVE

The activity you do should be appropriate for the young women you want to involve, requiring an awareness of their needs. Ask them in advance how you can support them to be involved, considering physical and mental health support, learning needs and accessibility. Allow chaperones/carers to attend if needed. Provide an on-site crèche or event nanny for those with caring responsibilities. If this is not possible, consider covering additional childcare costs. When involving young women at meetings, ask the meeting organisers to share questions or topics in advance, then arrange to meet the young women beforehand to help them prepare what they want to say.



3. SEND INFORMATION

To reduce the risk of drop outs, send as much information as possible in advance. This might include things like dress code, how many people will be there, activities they will undertake and what they will be talking about. For young women who experience anxiety, sending detailed information like maps or a step by step transport route can be helpful. Sending photographs or videos showing routes around busy stations or hard-to-find buildings can also help.



4. MAKE IT VARIED AND FUN

Use a range of participation methods such as surveys, pair and group discussions, creative exercises, ideation techniques (i.e. exercises that generate a range of ideas), filming, voting, games and presentations to elicit views. Where possible use emojis, pictures and GIFs to explain your message rather than lots of text and avoid 'death by PowerPoint'. This keeps young women engaged and caters for different learning styles and abilities.

"The filming activity was really practical. It gave us opportunity to use our skills in various ways, work together by ourselves and made us more confident speaking on camera."

Young woman, London

"I liked opening pretend payslips and talking about why some of us got paid differently because of our age. It showed me that age discrimination does happen to young people as well as old and I was surprised at how much I had to share about the issue."

Young woman, Great Yarmouth

5. MAKE IT RELATABLE

Ensure your messages and information are relevant to aid young women's understanding. For example, when asking young women for campaign ideas, show what other young female campaigners have done in the past.

"We supported young women to write introductions to our policy reports through asking them a series of questions on WhatsApp. This worked well and meant the young woman could contribute in a way that suited her."

Campaigns and Policy Manager, Young Women's Trust

6. STAY AWAY FROM JARGON

Assume no prior knowledge and explain things simply. Doing so creates a level playing field and an open environment encouraging young women to take part.

7. LISTEN, REALLY LISTEN

Repeat back what young women say. Doing so shows that you value their opinion and allows you to ensure that you've understood what they said.



8. BE FLEXIBLE

Not everyone has to participate at the same time, in the same way. One size does not fit all. Don't be afraid to change an activity last minute if you're losing their attention. If young women aren't able to participate in person, then consider ways to involve them through digital means such as Facebook discussions or WhatsApp conversations.



9. NEVER PASS JUDGEMENT

Young women who have faced discrimination and other disadvantages often feel judged, let down and unsupported. Always have an open mind, be understanding of their experiences and don't bring your personal views or experiences into discussions/activities. Ensure colleagues act in the same way.

"The session was really relevant to our experiences – this made it easier for us to identify a campaign we would carry out."

Young woman, Nottingham

10. GAIN MUTUAL RESPECT

Valuing the time and effort young women give to participate and treating them as equal partners will create relationships built on mutual respect and ensure their continued participation.



11. BE TRANSPARENT

Always be honest about what can and cannot be achieved or changed through their participation. Never over-promise.



12. SUPPORT AND SIGNPOST

Vulnerable young women may share experiences that cause them to get upset or ask for support. Where possible, identify a quiet space they can go to and check in on them to see if they are okay to continue. Consider training key staff in mental health first aid, conflict management and working with challenging behaviours. You should also have a named Safeguarding Officer who is contactable, if required. Always have a list of services to signpost young women to. This should include local and national helplines and websites covering mental health, housing, money/benefits/debt, domestic violence and Citizens Advice.

13. DEMONSTRATE THE IMPACT

This is where participation becomes meaningful and leads to change. Keeping in touch with the young women who took part to remind them what they were contributing to and what changed as a result illustrates that you take their views seriously. Even if the change was small – tell them about it.





WANT MORE INFORMATION?

For further advice or support email the Young Women's Trust Participation Team on:
info@youngwomenstrust.org

THANK YOU

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