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Speaking Up and Being Heard

An analysis of young people’s participation in civic activities.

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Abstract

This research highlights the need for young people to be active participants in civic activities. This means going beyond engaging them in the process, by ensuring they have opportunities to help design, develop and review their participation and consider how to act upon the information they identify; generating positive outcomes for young people generally.

When youth participation is successful it contributes to shaping young people as the next generation’s leaders. To facilitate successful youth participation adults need to understand what participation processes young people find helpful and unhelpful. This research explored young people’s views on the facilitators and barriers for youth participation in civic activities. To support an understanding of these processes this research explored the views of young people currently involved with a Youth Council, through seven semi-structured qualitative interviews. This data was thematically analysed using a deductive approach, and was underpinned by relevant literature and the Culture of Participation framework (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, & Sinclair, 2003).

This research produced several key findings. Youth councils provide young people with a forum to learn and develop skills as the next generation’s leaders by teaching them new skills and offering them a safe place to explore and participate in civic activities. Young people need and appreciate adults who support their participation through behind-the-scenes support and encouragement, which does not take over or lead processes. Young people must be able to contribute to the design and development of youth centric participation processes through regular reviews and evaluations. And finally adults must view youth positively as their perception of adolescence affects the success of young people’s participation.
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## Contents

**Abstract** ................................................................................................................................. i

**Acknowledgements** .................................................................................................................. ii

**Chapter One: Introduction** ........................................................................................................ 1

Research goals and objectives ........................................................................................................ 1

Participation versus consultation .................................................................................................. 2

The policy framework .................................................................................................................... 2

Significance of the study ................................................................................................................ 3

Positioning of the researcher ......................................................................................................... 4

Structure of the report .................................................................................................................... 4

Definition of key terms .................................................................................................................. 5

*Young person* ............................................................................................................................ 5

*Participation* .............................................................................................................................. 5

*Civic activities* ............................................................................................................................ 6

**Chapter Two: Literature Review** ................................................................................................ 7

Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 7

Conceptualising adolescence ......................................................................................................... 7

Young people’s involvement in civic activities ............................................................................. 11

The benefit of young people’s participation in civic activities ..................................................... 13

Creating a youth centric approach ............................................................................................... 15

Participatory Action Processes .................................................................................................... 17

Chapter summary ........................................................................................................................ 19

**Chapter Three: Theoretical Underpinnings** .............................................................................. 21

Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 21

Theories of participation ................................................................................................................. 21

*The Empowerment Model (Arnstein, 1969)* .............................................................................. 22

*The Ladder of Youth Participation (Hart, 1992)* ......................................................................... 25

*The Model of Youth Participation (Treseder, 1997)* ................................................................. 28
Chapter Six: Discussion ................................................................. 66

Introduction ..................................................................................... 66

Section One: Young people’s participation in civic activities .................. 66

  Facilitators of participation ............................................................ 67

  Barriers to participation .................................................................. 71

Section Two: Adults’ roles in young people’s participation in civic activities ........................................................................ 74

  Conceptualising adolescence .......................................................... 74

  Being youth centric .......................................................................... 77

Section Three: The benefits from young people’s participation in civic activities ........................................................................ 79

  Being the voice of all young people .................................................. 79

  How youth participation benefits civic activities .............................. 81

  How young people benefit from participation .................................. 82

Chapter summary .............................................................................. 85

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations .......................... 87

Introduction ..................................................................................... 87

Key findings ...................................................................................... 87

Limitations of the research ............................................................... 91

Strengths of this research ................................................................. 91

Implications for policy and practice .................................................. 92
Recommendations ............................................................................................................................ 93
Future research in this area .............................................................................................................. 94
Conclusion......................................................................................................................................... 95

References.......................................................................................................................................... 96

Appendixes........................................................................................................................................ 102
Appendix A - Potential Contact List ................................................................................................. 102
Appendix B – Initial Letter to Organisations ..................................................................................... 104
Appendix C – Thank-you Letter ........................................................................................................ 106
Appendix D – Participant Information Sheet .................................................................................... 107
Appendix E – Participant Consent Form ............................................................................................ 109
Appendix F – Interview Schedule ...................................................................................................... 110
Appendix G – Human Ethics Application .......................................................................................... 112
Appendix H – Authority to Release Transcripts ............................................................................... 129
List of Figures and Tables

Figures
Figure 1: The Empowerment Model...........................................................................................................23
Figure 2: The Ladder of Youth Participation...............................................................................................25
Figure 3: The Model of Youth Participation...............................................................................................28
Figure 4: The Pathway to Participation.....................................................................................................31
Figure 5: The Ladder of Indigenous Participation....................................................................................34
Figure 6: The Culture of Participation.......................................................................................................36

Tables
Table 1: Overview of the respondents........................................................................................................42