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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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