

# ESSENTIALS:

## EVALUATION

tried and tested, creative  
evaluation activities

Thanks to:  
Damian Haasjes – Wiltshire County Council Youth Development Service  
Connexions Wiltshire & Swindon

Some of the activities, resources and strategies have been adapted from:  
*Hear by Right* and *Act by Right* – National Youth Agency  
*Spice It Up* – Save the Children / DYNAMIX

© 2008 this resource may be reproduced in any fashion for non-profit activities only.  
Please contact Unite Participation if you wish to use this resource for any other purpose

Unite Participation  
S4 Waterside Centre  
North Street  
LEWES  
BN7 2PE  
[unite.participation@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:unite.participation@eastsussex.gov.uk)

# CONTENTS

1. **Introduction**
2. **Building an Evaluation programme**
3. **User friendly services**
4. **Gaining regular user feedback**
5. **Youth Inspections & Assessments**
6. **Setting Improvement targets**

# SECTION 1:

## introduction

- Background

In this section we will introduce you to evaluation, how to use this resource and how it fits in with the East Sussex approach to the participation of children and young people.

## Introduction



The purpose of this toolkit is to provide managers with innovative and creative ideas about how they can engage children and young people in service evaluations. It covers tools for gathering information from young people as respondents and tools for helping young people to participate in service development by undertaking evaluations. The toolkit does not provide comprehensive guidance about how, when or why managers should do a service evaluation.

If you would like that kind of guidance please contact the Improvement Manager in the Planning, Performance and Information Management Team or read the generic guidance about programme evaluation that will be published in early 2009.

### **Why involve young people in evaluation?**

Children's services aim to improve the lives of children and young people; so it makes sense to ask them whether the service you are providing meets their needs.

At the most basic level, children and young people can be involved in evaluation as respondents. This means that their views are collected as part of the evaluation process to provide a fuller picture of service strengths and weaknesses. For example, you could collect young people's feedback through questionnaires, satisfaction forms, interviews or focus groups. This toolkit provides a number of creative ideas about how to gather information from young people as evaluation respondents.

At a more comprehensive level, children and young people can participate in service development by designing and undertaking evaluation. This could mean setting the evaluation questions, collecting and analysing evaluation data, and making recommendations about service improvement. This toolkit also offers a number of ideas about how you can help young people to participate in evaluation by collecting data and making judgements on your service.

By having in place a robust mechanism for evaluation, provides children and young people the opportunity to feel a sense of ownership of the entire process. Children and Young People need to be empowered to contribute through a diverse range of tools to ensure all young people have a chance to contribute to shaping the services they use.

## **What is Evaluation?**

Very simply, evaluation is the process of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of programs, policies, personnel, products, and organisations to improve their effectiveness. Evaluating your service is a critical part of continual improvement. While on an informal level managers evaluate their services often (eg when you identify problems and make improvements), formalised evaluation is less well embedded within Children's Services. A formal evaluation helps you to be clear about what you are trying to find out; systematic in your data collection; robust in your analysis; and direct in your recommendations. Formal evaluation is not only an essential improvement tool, it is also a robust way to provide evidence that your service is making a difference.

There are several different kinds of evaluations that can be used depending on what you are trying to find out. For example, if you want to know why some children and young people do not access your service, then a process evaluation may be useful; but if you want to know what difference your service makes in young people's lives, then an impact evaluation is probably the most appropriate.

## **How can a Toolkit help?**

To achieve involvement in evaluation requires commitment from children and young people, service providers and decision makers. To deliver evaluation, a programme which includes planning, training, delivery and a commitment to follow up on the outcomes has to be put in place jointly between young people and the services wishing to be evaluated.

The "essentials evaluation" toolkit has been designed as a support pack for managers who are undertaking service evaluation. It provides a programme of opportunities, activities and session plans to guide you in collecting information from young people, and developing evaluation techniques with children and young people.

We imagine that you will refer to these tools when you are planning your service evaluation.

The toolkit covers the following aspects of evaluation:

1. Evaluating services to ensure they are user friendly and welcoming
2. Evaluating services by gaining regular user feedback
3. Evaluating services through youth inspections and assessments
4. Skilling up for evaluation
5. Setting improvement targets

Each section will cover the following areas:

- When to do this form of evaluation
- Possible approaches
- Suggested activities
- Capturing the evaluation
- Training issues

**What are the key principle's I should think about when I am involving children and young people in evaluation?**

When you are undertaking any kind of evaluation, it is important to plan ahead, be strategic about what you are trying to find out, and be clear about how you will use the evaluation findings. There are few key principles you should consider before you engage young people in an evaluation as respondents or evaluators:

**Decide what level of involvement you want from children and young people in the evaluation and allocate resource accordingly:** do you want to get feedback from children and young people in the traditional sense, as service users, or do you want (and have the time and resources) to get them involved in designing and undertaking the evaluation?

**Only ask questions if you are prepared to act on the answers:** be clear before you start about the level of change you are able to make in response to the evaluation findings and tailor your evaluation accordingly.

**Always provide feedback to children and young people** about what you are doing to respond to the evaluation findings: match the level of communication to the level of engagement. For example it may be appropriate to feedback on a small-scale user feedback form completed in a waiting room through a notice-board display in the same waiting room. On the other hand, it may be appropriate to feedback about a large-scale survey distributed to all service users through a newsletter or an information stand at a service event; you may also want young people to deliver feedback to other young people.

**Make sure you have the resources in place to support children and young people's involvement:** if children and young people are participating as evaluators make sure they are properly supported and credited for their participation.

This toolkit is a resource which will be added to over time with new information. It can be accessed from [www.essp.org.uk](http://www.essp.org.uk) and can be used by anyone working with children and young people. If you have any further questions or would like to know more email [unite.participation@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:unite.participation@eastsussex.gov.uk)

## \* What's the vision?



### Linking Evaluation to the Participation Strategy

Involving children and young people in evaluation is at the centre of ensuring an effective programme of participation activities are in place. The East Sussex Participation Strategy sets out a clear vision for children and young people's involvement across the county. The strategy seeks the widest involvement of young people; this is captured in the extract taken from the strategy below.

***"Participate as fully as possible in decisions which affect them personally, the development of services, broader strategic development and local democratic activity"***

A copy of the Strategy is available from the Participation section of [www.essp.org.uk](http://www.essp.org.uk)

Evaluation forms a key aspect to delivering effective participation as it is the mechanism in which young people can influence change in the services they access. This is not just based on their ideas but on their experiences of accessing a service. Involving young people in evaluation also enables a broader range of children and young people to contribute and ensures that services are responsive to the needs of their users.

### Evaluation to action

A successful programme of evaluation requires a broad range of activities from informal feedback right through to the setting of service priorities and targets following children and young people's inspections.

This toolkit will not only support you in developing evaluation techniques it will also guide you when working with children and young people to take forward their findings and translate them into service targets. Doing this will enable services to set improvement targets that directly address issues being faced by users and therefore, be a mechanism in which tangible change and improvement can occur.

# SECTION 2:

## **BUILDING A PROGRAMME OF EVALUATION**

- Creating a programme of evaluation?
- Evaluation & the Participation Tree
- Implementing a programme of evaluation

In this section we will describe why it is important to build a programme of evaluation opportunities for children and young people. This includes ensuring that a menu of appropriate activities are in place, which will enable a range of young people to be involved and provide services with an approach which can embed the involvement of children and young people in the shaping of future provision.

## \* **Building a programme of evaluation**

Setting out a programme of evaluation ensures that a range of opportunities are available whereby different aspects of the services used by children and young people can be tested and assessed. To do this requires services and children and young people to plan out a menu of evaluation opportunities that meet both the needs of the services and are appropriate for young people to take part in.

### **How can a programme of evaluation be created?**

To create a programme of evaluation, it is important to first understand what the aims are and what might be needed in terms of commitment before choosing an evaluation technique. Often a range of opportunities will need to be developed. First of all start by asking the following questions:

- Why do we want children and young people to evaluate our service?
- What aspect of the service do we want evaluated?
- What do we propose to do with the evaluation findings?

The answers to these questions will set out what it is you want to find out as a result of involving young people in evaluation. Next ask the following questions:

- How many children and young people do we want to involve in evaluation?
- Do we want to involve them all in the same way and to the same level?
- What resource do we have available?
- Is this one off or are we looking to develop something more sustained?

Once the answers to these questions are identified, go and talk to young people who are to be involved and find out their answers to the following:

- How do children and young people think they can be involved in commenting or assessing how good or bad a service is?
- What level of activities would they like to undertake to do this?
- What are their expectations if they get involved in evaluations for how services will respond?
- What support will they need to do this?

## Evaluation & the Participation Tree

The “Essentials: Participation Toolkit” uses the participation tree as a good way of planning the types of participation activities that children and young people can be involved in. It reflects that it is important to have a range of levels of involvement so that the widest range of young people can take part and varying levels of resource and commitment are needed. Choosing the right activity for the size and scale of the project is also crucial.

Creating a programme of evaluation is no different. A wide range of children and young people need to be involved and it may be that you only want to evaluate certain aspects of the service. This can range from, is the reception area welcoming through to whether the service has the right strategic priorities.

Below is the participation tree put into the context of creating an evaluation programme. For more detailed information on the participation tree please refer to the “Essentials: Participation Toolkit”.



There are four core sections to this toolkit which provide a range of ideas on how to implement evaluation techniques within your service. The sections are explained below, each one is colour coded so as you work your way through the toolkit you should be able to locate the activities relevant to the type of evaluation you want to undertake.

### **1: User friendly service**

Developing a range of evaluation opportunities that assess whether the service provided is welcoming, friendly and approachable.

This aspect of evaluation should be accessible to the widest range of children and young people as it does not require specific training or commitment. Often this form of evaluation will relate to local venues rather than wider service issues, but is essential in ensuring young people are satisfied with the service they access on a regular basis at the point of contact.

### **2: Service Feedback**

Developing a range of evaluation opportunities that provide more feedback on the quality of service delivered to children and young people. This can form part of consultation exercises or ad hoc evaluation activities. It ensures that service users have an opportunity to comment in more detail as to the quality of service being provided and where improvements can be made.

This aspect of evaluation is accessible to a wide range of children and young people and does not require specific training or commitment. It can form part of an approach to customer satisfaction and could be an annual process by which views and ideas are sought from those accessing the service. It can also be an informal way in which programmes or projects delivered by services are evaluated by children young people.

### **3: Inspection of Services**

Developing a range of evaluation opportunities whereby children and young people as service users inspect and assess the services they access and comment on where improvement is needed. For example, this can include the regular inspection of youth centres and the programmes they offer, Connexions access points or annual inspections of targeted services such as youth offending, looked after children services and substance misuse services. Here children and young people as service users can test out the quality of service being provided, where improvement is needed and engage with service managers on their findings.

This aspect of evaluation requires training and support and the commitment of both children and young people and service providers to be engaged in a more sustained programme of activity.

This is the highest level of evaluation as it forms part of the governance aspect of services. To achieve this requires sustained commitment from young people and service providers and clear agreement must be in place as to the expectations of the level of change young people will be able to recommend.

#### **4: Skills for evaluation**

The more involved the level of evaluation requires greater training and development in order to ensure evaluators have the right skills to be involved. This section in the toolkit provides you with ideas and session plans to support the skilling of young evaluators.



### **Implementing a programme of evaluation**

Before you start organising a programme of evaluation based on the levels described above, please consider the following questions as these will guide you in your planning.

**What is it that needs to be evaluated?**



**How should this evaluation be undertaken?**



**Who are the children & young people that are going to be involved?**



**What support and resources will be in place?**



**Agree to what level the findings will be able to impact the service**

# SECTION 3:

## **EVALUATING SERVICES TO ASSESS IF THEY ARE USER FRIENDLY**

- **When to do this form of evaluation**
- **How to undertake this form of evaluation**
- **Ideas & Activities**
- **Taking forward the evaluation**

This section provides ideas on developing evaluation techniques where children and young people can test out whether the services they use offer a user friendly environment

## \* Essentials: **Evaluating user friendly services**



It is essential that children and young people feel welcome, valued and supported by the services they use. If this doesn't occur then the young person will walk away and not access the service again. To make sure this doesn't occur we recommend building in opportunities for children and young people as service users to be able to feedback on the friendliness and environment of the services they use.

## \* **When to do this form of evaluation**

- **To test out if children and young people find the service they access welcoming and friendly**
- **To test out if the access points for the services they use provide what they need and encourage them to use the service again**
- **To find out how the service can be improved on a day to day basis**
- **To create an environment in which all children and young people can feedback on the services they use**

## \* **How to do this form of evaluation**

This type of evaluation needs to be simple, not take too much time and be easy to organise. It should be based around an activity that a young person can do whilst they're waiting to see their worker or for a session to start. This is low level evaluation that does not require any training or sustained commitment. The outcomes of such evaluations should result in small but important changes being made to the service as the young person accesses it.

### Activities and Ideas for this level of evaluation

The following activities are possible methods to undertake low level evaluation that tests out whether a service is user friendly. Remember to tailor the activities to suit the needs of the service and the young people expected to take part. For example if you are working with young people with low literacy levels, then think of adapting feedback processes which might be based on pictures or accessible language.

### \* Comments Cards

**aim:** a quick and easy way in which children and young people can feedback on the quality of a service

#### Doing the evaluation:

As a team agree what you want to get feedback on. Then come up with two or three simple questions and put them on a comments card which young people when accessing the service can fill out. Have a box to put them in and keep it confidential. After the feedback time has finished review the comments as a team and agree if any changes can be made.

#### Other ways to get feedback on comments cards:

- Use smiley faces to rate the level of service
- Use number ratings (1-10) or stars

**Remember: Please feedback to children and young people how you have taken on board their ideas.**

#### Need:

A week set aside to run

Comments cards

Comments Box

Staff on hand to support young people in completing feedback

**\* Faces**

**Aim:** A quick and simple way for comments to be gathered on the quality of services

**Doing the evaluation:**

Choose a statement to describe what it is you want to evaluate.

e.g:

- Did you get what you needed from the service today?
- Was it fun?
- Would you come again?

Write the statements on the flip charts along with your faces; simply ask the young people to stick a dot on the sheet they agree with

This can be used in various settings, as part of a group session or part of a small group exercise and is a quick way to get feedback.

**Need:**

3 sheets of flip chart each with a face on it

Sticky dots

**\* The Bad, The Good, The Better**

**Aim:** A perfect way to get basic feedback from children and young people on what can be improved, either as part of a group or individually

**Doing the evaluation**

This will work well if you want to evaluate a service a child or young person has received or for testing out if a session or project has gone well.

This evaluation process will enable you to gather more detailed feedback. Simply as the following:

What was good?

What was bad?

What could be better?

**Need:**

Flip chart paper

Pens

Post its

Space

## \* Evaluation Targets

**Aim:** A visual way in which to record service user feedback

### **Doing the evaluation**

For each question you want to ask have a target. We suggest that if this is part of ongoing method of feedback you could do 2 questions a month. This can also be used for session feedback.

Ask the children and young people to stick their dot on the target to represent how they feel in response to the question. The closer to the centre the better they feel about the service or agree with the statement.

To get more detailed feedback add a comments section beneath the target, so young people can add comments to support their dots.

This kind of feedback could be used as part of a continuous evaluation process.

An example target question: How was the service you received today?

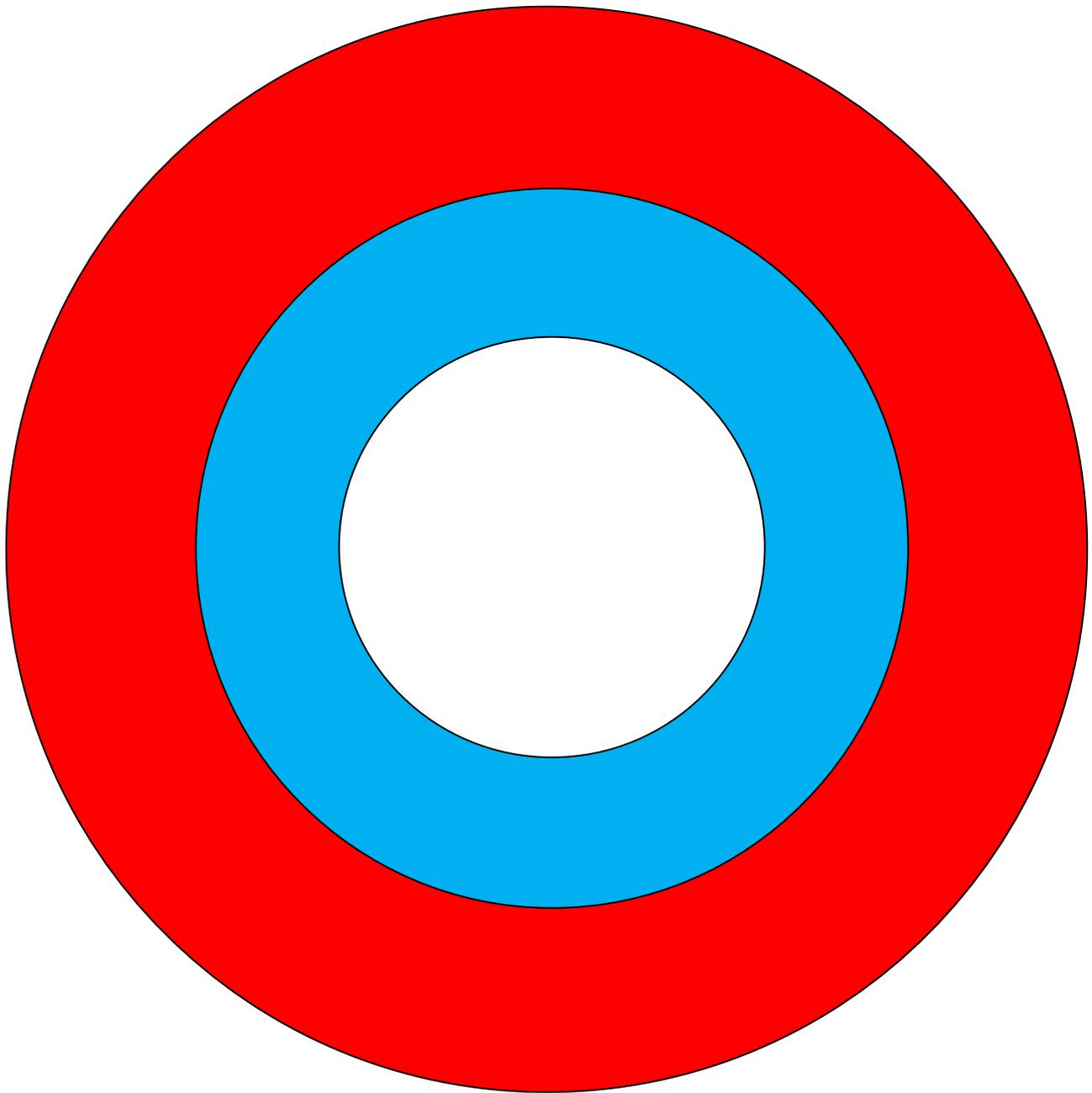
### **Need:**

Flipchart paper

Marker pens

Coloured dots

Evaluation questions



**\* 1-2-1 feedback**

**Aim:** A way to gather feedback from children and young people in a more formal setting

**Doing the evaluation:**

It is important when gathering evaluation feedback that some formal processes are in place to capture service user feedback.

1-2-1 feedback can be taken in various ways. If you are a service that has 1-2-1 sessions with children and young people such as YOT or Connexions then it could be a short interview with a worker could take place at the end of a pre arranged session with a young person. Alternatively arrange a dedicated time.

In a session setting it could form part of an evening's activities.

Whichever is appropriate make sure you have in place:

- A clear set of short questions
- Ask YP about their experience of service delivery
- Ask them for ideas on where improvements can be made

Be clear why you are doing the evaluation and an agreed way in which you will feedback to children and young people.

It may be more appropriate for another worker to carry out the 1-2-1 so that the young person feels they are able give feedback on their worker.

**Need:**

Time given over in service delivery

Agreement from children and young people to take part

Pre agreed questions

# SECTION 4:

## **EVALUATING SERVICES BY GAINING REGULAR FEEDBACK**

### **When to do this form of evaluation**

- **How to undertake this form  
of evaluation**
  - **Ideas & Activities**
  - **Taking forward the  
evaluation**

## \* Essentials: **Evaluating services by gaining regular feedback**



It is essential that children and young people can feedback on a regular basis to service providers on the quality of the service they are accessing. This is more than whether the service creates a user friendly atmosphere, this is about how good is the information or support provided by professionals, where there are gaps in delivery and what can make the service better. To do this can be fairly simple but it requires a commitment to effective consultation methods and building in evaluation techniques as part of the delivery of the service. Children and Young People should be involved in both setting the evaluation and contributing to it.

## \* **When to do this form of evaluation**

- **To test if the right service is being delivered for children and young people**
- **To test out whether specific aspects of the service being provided meets children and young people's needs and whether they are delivered in the right way**
- **To gain feedback on the delivery of sessions, projects and programmes that young people access and how they can be improved.**
- **To get a large sample of feedback from children and young people on the services being provided and what the priorities of the service or project should be**
- **To feed user views into service planning and strategy development**

## \* **How to do this form of evaluation**

This type of evaluation needs to well planned, clear and have in place agreed mechanisms for feedback. For it to work well children and young people need to be involved in the service they are commenting on, on a regular basis. The issues being tested must be clear and relate to the delivery of the service. This aspect of evaluation is asking children and young people who use the service to comment on

their experiences as customers and to share ideas on where improvements can be made.

This form of evaluation requires more commitment both from the service wishing to be evaluated and from the young people taking part. Ideally involve young people in the process of developing the evaluation to ensure that your approach and ideas will work. There are various methods that can be used to gain regular user feedback; these can be consultation questionnaires, evaluation workshops or small focus groups. Remember to consider the questions in section 1 (what is you want to evaluate, the young people you want to ask and what resource do you have available) before committing to a particular activity.

The following activities are suggestions for how you can develop this level of evaluation.



## A Focus Group/ Service Group/ Centre Group

**Aim:** Establish a user group which can support feedback on the service they use, and offers ideas on where improvements are needed.

### How to do it

Establishing a user group to feedback and comment on the service being provided is an effective way to involve young people in evaluation techniques. To make the session interactive it may be that you build in other activities in this toolkit or from the 'essentials participation' toolkit to ensure it is participative.

1. Recruit a group of young people who access the service and be clear on the impact they can make.
2. Work with the group and get them to set out how, as users, they can feedback through the focus groups. Do team building and training and development to support the young people.
3. At each focus group have a topic to discuss, support the young people to come up with ideas on where improvements can be made.
4. Support the group to engage with service managers to discuss some of the key issues.

### Ideas

- Encourage the focus groups run any of the evaluation ideas in section 2 – let them put the questions forward
- Arrange for a member of management to come and work with the young people
- A focus group could meet every 6 – 8 weeks, not too often but enough to keep the group together.

### Need:

A group of at least six children / young people

Support worker

Agreed ways in which the group can access management

Somewhere to meet, expenses for bringing young people together and accreditation or recognition for their involvement

Food and refreshments

**\* Questions, questions, questions**

**Aim:** Undertake a service user survey through a targeted consultation, through workshops or questionnaire

**Doing the evaluation:**

It's important to gain a good sample of feedback from the young people, as not all children and young people will want to participate in an interactive and creative way.

It is important to get a wide set of views and statistics to inform service planning.

On an annual basis undertake a service user survey, which could either be sent out or completed when accessing the service or even web based.

Don't make the survey too long and keep it relevant, be clear on what you want to find out.

Have in place a set period of time to run the surveys, building in a feedback process.

If you want to broaden the project, whilst doing the surveys you can also run workshops to build on the questions to explore issues in more detail.

Remember to make it worthwhile for the young people to complete the survey; perhaps a prize draw could be included for example!

**Need:**

Clear set of questions you want answered

Appropriate time to deliver consultation

Support for young people to complete questions



## \* Discussion Carousel

**Aim:** A way to discuss issues relating to a service and a chance for opinions to be shared and ideas created between service users and providers

### Doing the evaluation:

Doing an evaluation should not just be a one way feedback. It is important service users and service provider's work together to find out where improvements can be made.

Discussion carousel can either be done as an exercise where young people feedback to each other on the quality of a service or how the session has gone, or it can be an activity service providers can take part in as well.

### The Activity:

1. Get the group to make two concentric circles, with the chairs on the outside facing the chairs on the inside, if service providers are taking part make sure the groups are mixed up.
2. Set the topic for discussion or what it is you want to evaluate.
3. Give everyone a minute to consider their views then give the inner circle 2 minutes to tell the person sitting opposite what they think. The outer circle just listens.
4. Then swap over and the outer circle speaks and the inner circle listens – this way both groups have the chance to feedback.
5. Move round inner circle in a clockwise direction, the outer circle anti clockwise, you can either set a new question or build on the last one.

### Need:

Chairs for everyone

Watch or clock

A diagram of how the game works

**\* How, How, How**

**Aim:** Enabling you to evaluate and explore an issue and break it down into smaller issues to identify solutions

**Doing the evaluation:**

Explore new ideas for how change can be implemented.

This is an activity where a group can delve down into an aspect of the service and offer ideas on where improvements can be made.

Write a 'how?' question on a large piece of paper and draw four or five arrows coming from it.

Ask the question and write down any suggestions on the arrows coming from it, explore each of the suggestions in more detail by asking "how" again.

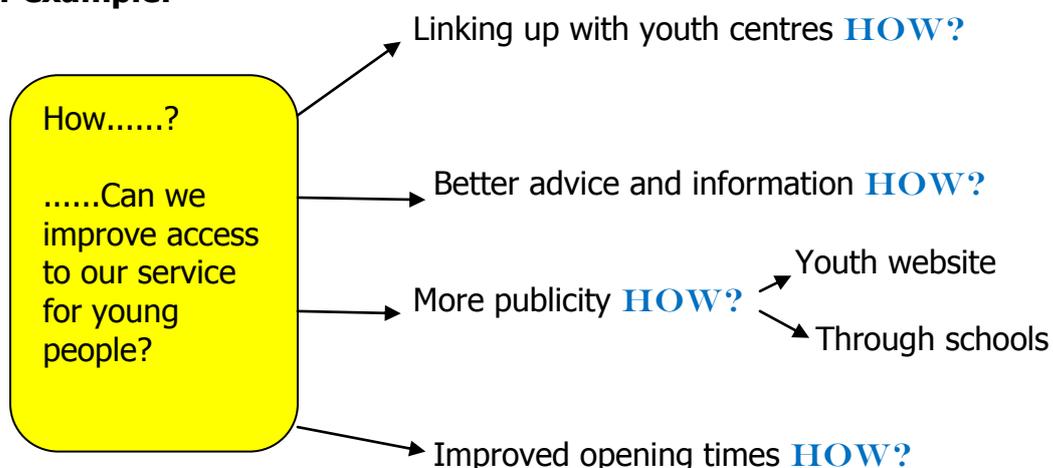
**Need:**

A long sheet of paper; wallpaper or joined up flip chart

Marker pens

A clear question

**For example:**



**\* SWOTT**

**Aim:** for a group to evaluate a programme or a project and contribute to future planning

**Doing the evaluation:**

This exercise is similar to the good, the bad and the better in the last section, however undertaking a SWOTT will provide more detail and should be delivered as part of a group session to promote discussion.

SWOTT:

**S**trengths: what was good?

**W**eakness: What was bad?

**O**pportunities: what could happen now?

**T**hreats: What might stop things happening?

**T**raining: What help / support do you need

Set the aspect or question you want to evaluate, e.g.:

"The young carers programme or the services offered to young parents."

For each of these examples work through the SWOTT, you can either do this as a group or split the group into smaller groups with each looking at different aspects. You can use post its, pictures, or words – Be creative!

**Need:**

Post it notes

Flip chart

## \* The Continuum Game

**Aim:** A game in which a group can feedback on and evaluate the services, projects or programme they have accessed

### Doing the evaluation:

This is a good to use either as a focused evaluation or as a way of feeding back children and young people's ideas and views.

#### Steps:

1. Set out an imaginary line across the room, marking each end with the statements you want to test out. This is your continuum, each end represents extreme or opposing points of view, the space in between the gradient opinion between the two.
2. Ask children and young people a series of questions about the services. They respond by standing somewhere along the continuum or the place which represents their view.
3. When the group has taken its place on the continuum ask why they have stood where they have and what ideas could change their mind.

This could be more creative, place the continuum on the wall, and young people place their views and ideas using pictures and photos.

### Need:

Space

Opposite views at each end of the continuum

# **SECTION 5:**

## **YOUTH INSPECTIONS AND ASSESSMENTS**

- **When to do this form of evaluation**
- **How to undertake this form of evaluation**
  - **Ideas & Activities**
- **Skilling children & young people for evaluation**

## **\* Essentials: Evaluating services by Youth Inspections and Assessments**

It is essential for services delivering to children and young people to know that what is provided is to a high quality and meets need. Where quality of service is not to a high level, then it is unlikely that key targets will be met and more importantly children and young people will not be being supported effectively.

Supporting children and young people to inspect and assess the services that are being provided is a big step towards achieving a youth led service. Ultimately where government inspector's comment on service delivery, here children and young people have the power to go in assess and make recommendations on where improvement is needed. If developed carefully, this level of evaluation can be invaluable to service development as it provides a unique way in which to understand the quality being delivered.

### **\* When to do this form of evaluation**

- **To undertake a full inspection of a service**
- **To quality check particular aspects of services being delivered**
- **To highlight where delivery can be improved**
- **As part of pre-inspection reports in preparation for the Joint Area Review**
- **To identify where change in delivery is required**
- **To form part of service planning and strategy development**

## **How to do this form of evaluation**

To do this form of evaluation requires in-depth commitment from children and young people and the services wishing to be evaluated. Often it requires a programme of support be it in the form of a project or part of the participation activity offered by the service. Children and Young people will need to be trained, have time to plan and deliver the inspection and then produce their findings.

### **If you want to undertake a youth inspection or assessment the following should be considered:**

- Is there capacity to support the training of children and young people who are going to undertake the inspection or assessment?
- Once trained children and young people will need to agree what it is they want to assess, the method they will use in which to do this and the criteria they will use.
- Services being inspected will need to be engaged in the development of the inspection through submitting evidence and reports and preparing staff if a technique such as mystery shopping is to be undertaken.
- Commitment and involvement of senior management is essential particularly to meet and discuss with children and young people their findings.

The following pages outline how youth inspections and mystery shopping can be delivered.

## \* **Mystery Shopping**

**Aim:** A fantastic way to test out the quality of a service being delivered against an agreed set of criteria, to highlight where improvement is needed following the service users experience as a mystery shopper.

### **What is mystery shopping?**

Mystery shopping is a way for children and young people to feedback on the services they use based on their experience when accessing it a random point in time.

Mystery shopping is for service users to go and randomly test out certain aspects of what is being delivered, to gain a true reflection of the quality.

The process usually focuses on a particular area of the service.

Some examples of where mystery shopping has been used:

Connexions – GCSE results week

Libraries – access to online information

Doctors surgeries – for contraception and appointments

Youth Centres – availability of activities

This form of evaluation is very effective and can set out clear recommendations for change and improvements.

### **Need:**

Somewhere for a group to plan and meet.

Training and development support

Agreement of service being inspected

Transport

Worker support

An agreed format to deliver evaluation

Time to deliver, plan and report.

## Things to consider:

If you want to introduce a programme of mystery shopping then you will need to consider the following:

1. **How long do you have to carry out the programme?** Remember you will need to build in time to plan the evaluation with the children and young people, time to deliver training and development to ensure the children and young people are equipped to take part and are well supported.
2. **Be clear on what is going to be evaluated!** Is this the most appropriate form of evaluation? Mystery shopping is most effective from the point of view of the service user coming in to 'shop' with the provider. So for example if you were evaluating the Youth Support Service, you could test out:
  - Access to staff
  - Knowledge and information
  - Wanting to find out a specific piece of information and whether the advice offered was sufficient.
3. **Make sure the service being evaluated is involved.** Firstly ensure you have their agreement, and that management have been involved in working with the children and young people in agreeing what aspects of the service should be evaluated.
4. **Set out the timeframe for the evaluation to be carried out.** Inform the service provider when the assessment will be taking place. DO not share the exact time or day, the principle works best with an element of surprise.
5. **Ensure a robust set of assessment criteria is in place.** i.e. what are you testing? How will you score it?
6. **Establish suitable arrangements for how young people will carry out the evaluation.** Consider: transport, risk assessments, locations.
7. **Time to feedback.** Allow time to compile the report to bring to together the findings and hold a feedback and debrief session with the shoppers and the service. It is crucial that the findings are discussed in order to highlight where improvement is needed and highlighting best practice.
8. **Recognition.** Given the commitment of the children and young people you will need to consider reward and recognition for their involvement. This could be accreditation, recognition of volunteer hours, or a reward of some sort, e.g. mobile phone card.

## **Mystery shopping in 3 easy steps**

### **Step 1:**

Recruit a group of children and young people to be the mystery shoppers. Advertise this through your service or perhaps through the local youth service or voluntary organisations.

Organise a time for the group to come together and set out what's going to be assessed. Deliver a 2 hour session which supports the group in learning about evaluation and gets them to think about how they assess a service and make judgements. Use some of the activities and example session plan found later in this toolkit, in the section "skilling children and young people up for evaluation".

With the group set the criteria for the mystery shopping exercise. Use exercises such as the World's Worst and Diamond Ranking as described later in this toolkit.

### **Step 2:**

Organise when the mystery shopping will take place. As a group set the days this will be delivered. Remember mystery shopping is meant to be a random test of a service so the places that are visited only tell them the period in which the mystery shopping will be taking place not the actual time the shoppers will visit.

Make sure each mystery shopper is clear on what they are testing and that they are clear on the criteria for which they will be assessing the service.

The mystery shopping visit itself should not be very long.

Once each mystery shopper has completed their visit go somewhere and get the mystery shoppers to write up their findings on the assessment sheets that each mystery shopper will have. A sample sheet is included in this section.

### **Step 3:**

Once the mystery shopping has been completed bring the whole group together to agree the findings. Capture both the numerical scores if a rating system has been used and the comments of the mystery shoppers.

Get the group to agree what their main points of feedback are and challenge them to come up with ideas for how the service can make changes to address the comments. Remember to capture the positive feedback as well as the negative.

Book a meeting for a number of the mystery shoppers to meet with the relevant level of management to feedback their findings and to be able to discuss their experiences.

## **Mystery Shopping Training – Session Plan**

### **Aims and Objectives**

- Ensure children and young people understand mystery shopping process- and how it fits into self-assessment
- Establish the scenario children and young people will be in and what their role will be
- Set the criteria and assessment framework for carrying out the mystery shop
- Establish when young people will carry out their Shop

### **The Mystery Shop**

Outline to the group how the mystery shop will work including, number of venues to be assessed, the period of time needed to carry out the exercise and the aspect of the service to be tested.

It is also important at this point to check with the mystery shoppers their level of understanding of what the service provides and why they would like to get involved in the mystery shopping programme.

It is important that the following points are addressed as part of the preparation session:

- The role of the mystery shopper is understood
- The mystery shoppers are challenged in how they make judgements, ensuring that fair and accurate assessments are achieved
- The mystery shoppers set the scenario they will use as part of the assessment to ensure they are comfortable throughout the process
- Everybody is clear on what they are assessing and how to score against the criteria

The table below sets out a series of activities that will help prepare the group ready for the mystery shopping exercise and covers the points set out above:

| Activity                       | Learning Points  | Resources  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Ice Breaker</b>             | To bring the group together  | Use Essentials Participation Toolkit for ideas   |
| <b>The World's Worst</b>       | Getting to grips with the extremes of good and bad service. This helps to set the broad criteria areas   | 15 minutes<br><br>Flipchart and marker pens  |
| <b>Mmmm Chocolate Biscuits</b> | A good Mystery Shopper makes fair and accurate judgements. It is important when assessing things that you have criteria to measure these judgements against. | 20 minutes<br><br>Chocolate and plain biscuits, enough for each participant.<br><br>Flip chart<br><br>post-its and marker pens |
| <b>Diamond Ranking</b>         | Getting the group to set the criteria for the Mystery Shop by identifying the nine key things they are looking for.  | Flip chart and marker pens   |

**Mystery Shopper's Name**.....

**Centre visited**.....

**Date and time**    /    /        am/pm

**Information requested**.....

| No | Criteria | Scores (please circle)                            |
|----|----------|---|
| 1. |          | 1:V Easy 2:Easy 3:Ok 4:Difficult<br>5:V Difficult |
| 2. |          | 1:Excellent 2:Good 3:Ok 4:Poor<br>5:Inadequate    |
| 3. |          | 1:V Easy 2:Easy 3:Ok 4:Difficult<br>5:V Difficult |

What did you like about the centre/staff/service?

What one thing would improve the centre/service?

## \* Youth Inspections

**Aim:** Youth Inspections provide an opportunity where trained children and young people can go and inspect services they access, against an agreed set of criteria and then offer recommendations for improvement.

### **What is a youth inspection?**

Youth Inspections are more formal and detailed than mystery shopping or any other form of evaluation. It is where children and young people go and inspect a service by testing and assessing quality of what is provided and by talking to other service users.

Examples of where youth inspections have been used in the past:

- As part of the quality assurance regime for youth services
- Inspecting quality of sexual health advice provided through doctors surgeries
- Assessing library services
- Assessing Looked After Children Services / Connexions services / Children's Trust Services

Delivering a successful youth inspection requires commitment from children and young people to be involved for a sustained period of time, commitment from service providers in training and supporting children and young people and a commitment from service managers to work with the youth inspectors and take on board the findings of assessments and set appropriate improvement targets.

This toolkit sets out the broad method for delivering such a programme but for more detail on running a full young assessor programme contact the Devon Youth Association, [www.dya.org.uk](http://www.dya.org.uk) who developed the young assessor model initially.



### **3 steps to delivering a successful youth inspection:**

#### **Step 1: Preparing for a youth inspection including training and development and planning for the delivery of the inspection**

For a successful inspection to take place it is important that plenty of preparation time and appropriate training and development are undertaken to ensure that fair and accurate inspections are delivered. Youth Inspectors must set the criteria for assessment, agree with the service what they are assessing and set out how they will deliver the inspection.

Training and development should cover the following areas:

- What is evaluation?
- The role of youth inspectors and their skills
- How we make judgements and can assess fairly
- Communication techniques
- Setting out how to deliver the inspection including criteria and method for delivery
- Agreeing what is to be assessed

Suggested session plans are included in this section which use the activities described in the "skilling young people up for evaluation" section within the toolkit.

It is suggested that a minimum of 9 hours (probably 2 or 3 sessions) will be needed to train a group of young people and to prepare an inspection with them. If you propose to put in place a youth inspection team that will deliver a series of assessments then a wider programme of activities will be required and a dedicated worker to run the scheme.

#### **Step 2: Delivering the Inspection**

For the inspection to work well everyone must be clear how it is going to be delivered. The inspectors themselves must be fully prepared, the arrangements in place for them to deliver the inspection and the services ready to be inspected.

The following checklist will support the delivery of an inspection.

- Has the service agreed to the inspection and is clear on what is being inspected?
- Has written confirmation been sent by the young inspectors setting out when the assessment will take place, the information required by the inspectors and how they intend to deliver the inspection.
- Has any pre-inspection information been requested?

- Are the transport arrangements in place for the youth inspectors?
- Has the programme for the inspection been prepared?
- Have any staff or service users being informed if they are likely to be interviewed by the young inspectors?

### **Step 3: Reporting the findings and setting improvement targets**

Once the inspection has been completed it is important that the findings and feedback are presented in a clear way setting out to service providers the recommendations from the young inspectors. Remember this must be owned by the young people and in their words. A further couple of sessions will be required to bring together the findings of the inspection. To conclude the inspection the following must be delivered:

1. Produce a written report which covers:
  - What aspect of the service was being assessed?
  - The approach undertaken by the young inspectors
  - The findings of the assessment
  - Recommendations from the young inspectors on what improvements can be made to address any issues highlighted
2. Arrange for the Young Inspectors to meet with senior management from the relevant service to discuss the outcomes of the report
3. Request that the service provides an update report of how the assessment was taken forward and where changes have been implemented.



## **Skilling children and Young People up for Evaluation**

If children and young people are to be involved in the full evaluation of services through youth inspections and mystery shopping, then a programme of learning and development needs to be in place. In particular it is important that the young people have an understanding of the following:

- Why evaluation is carried out
- What is a youth inspection or mystery shopping?
- How do we make judgements and what informs them?
- Assessing the right issues
- How can we set out where change is needed?

The following activities can be used as part of a development programme to skill up children and young people for evaluation and have been recommended for use in the session plans earlier in this section.

**\* Four Faces**

**Aim:** to challenge the group to think about evaluation and their thoughts on it and develop a greater understanding.

**Doing the Evaluation:**

Read out the list of statements below, and for each one ask the group to stand by the face that best describes how they feel about it.

Get the group to discuss why they are standing where they are and offer them the chance to move, once they have heard the different opinions.

**Statements:**

- The purpose of the evaluation is to uncover the truth
- Evaluation tells us if something has been successful
- Evaluation is expensive
- Evaluation is done by outsiders who don't understand and don't care
- Evaluation teaches us how to do something better
- Evaluations have decided what they want to say before they start
- You need specifically trained people to do evaluation
- Every ones views are equally valid in an evaluation
- Evaluation makes no difference
- People in power should change what they do in line with evaluation findings

**Need:**

About 20 minutes

Four faces

Post it notes

Marker pens

**\* I'm an evaluator!**

**Aim:** A quick way to explore the skills needed to be a successful evaluator

**How to do it:**

First of all ask for a volunteer and draw round them.

Using the outline of the person now ask the group to think of all of the things that makes a good evaluator. Consider the skills needed, attributes, the way in which to approach evaluations.

In a different coloured pen or using post it notes ask the group to consider where they think that training and development is needed to support them to carry out successful evaluations.

**Need:**

A large piece of paper

Marker pens

## \* Evaluation Charter

**Aim:** Gain agreement on what is meant by evaluation, why it's important and how the group wants to approach it.

### **How to do it:**

It is important, as a starting point that the group has a shared view on what evaluation is.

On a piece of flipchart write:

- Evaluation is:
- Evaluation is important to us because:
- Evaluations must:

Gain a simple definition for each one

Following this get the group to agree an approach they want to take, agree a contract between the group to make it a safe environment for sharing, increasing participation and interaction, e.g.:

1. Introduce ourselves
2. Explain what they are doing
3. Confidentiality
4. Listen

### **Need:**

Flip chart

Marker pens

30 Minutes

## \* **MMmmmmm Chocolate Biscuits!!!**

**Aim:** To get children and young people to think about their judgements

### **Doing the evaluation:**

Choccy biscuits are far nicer than the plain ones, but why? What makes us prefer them? The taste, the texture, the sweetness?

Have you ever thought about it?

Carrying out an evaluation is the same principle. How do we judge if something is good or bad and what makes us draw that judgement? It is important for the group in its development to unpick how judgements are made and why and to recognise that sometimes past experiences can inform our judgements and that it's important to be impartial and be able to evidence them.

1. Give everyone a chocolate biscuit and a plain biscuit, ask them to take a bite of each and on a sheet of paper capture how each ones tastes.
2. Get the group to feedback which biscuit they liked and why? 'Because it was', isn't enough, get good descriptions going.
3. To conclude discuss it's OK to have a view and a judgement, but it's important you have a reason and evidence it.

In evaluation terms you need to be able to state your feelings and why you feel that way. This challenges judgements reached and pre-conceptions

### **Need:**

Chocolate Biscuits

Digestives or rich tea biscuits

Flip chart

Marker pens

Paper

## \* **Worlds Worst**

**Aim:** A good way to look at the extremes of good and bad service delivery to help inform the setting of criteria for inspections and mystery shopping.

### **How to do the activity:**

What is it your evaluating? Once you know this get the group to explore it in more detail and challenge them on their ideas by getting the group to describe the "worlds worst" version of it. For example, the worlds worst youth centre, or the worlds worst social worker.

Bring ideas together on a giant mind map or by using pictures or words depending on the abilities of the group.

Get the group to think of the issues they have described and to come up with potential solutions for how this could go from being the worlds worst to the worlds best!

Doing this in preparation for a youth inspection or mystery shopping exercise will start to inform the criteria the group will set for assessing the service. Use this as an introductory exercise to collect the broad areas they will want to inspect.

### **Need:**

Flip chart paper

Marker pens

**\* Ideas Storm**

**Aim:** A way to explore all the different aspects of the service or project being evaluated as preparation for setting the assessment criteria. This activity is to generate as many ideas as possible before focusing in on the specific issues to be assessed.

**How to do the activity:**

Its really simple! Just give everyone post it notes and set the question. Ask the group to come up with as many ideas as possible and put each one on a seperate post it note.

Example questions relevant to evaluation –

What makes a good information, advice and guidance service for young people?  
What makes a youth support service welcoming?  
How do we evaluate a service?

Once all the post it notes have been placed on the flip chart work with the group to see if there are similarities or particular themes occuring. Where this happens group the post it notes together and agree the common issues.

Doing this activity will encourage the group to explore what they are going to evaluate and build on the information gained through activties such as worlds worst.

**Need:**

Different coloured post it notes or coloured marker pens

Flip chart paper

## \* **Diamond Ranking**

**Aim:** This activity will help finalise the criteria the children and young people will use to inspect a service.

### **How to do it.**

Set the question which relates to what is being assessed and then get the group to agree the nine things that they think needs to be tested in order to answer the question.

For example; "what needs to be in place to ensure young people receive good information and advice from health services?"

Use the most popular ideas gathered through the worlds worst or ideas storm activities and get the group to agree on the 9 most important. Ask the group to arrange their 9 ideas in a diamond shape with the top priority at the top, two in second place, three in third place, two in fourth place and the lowest priority at the bottom.

To ensure the diamond is completed the group must fully agree on the position of the priorities. Once the priorities have been agreed these should form the main criteria for the inspections young people will carry out.

### **Need:**

Post it notes

Marker pens

Flip chart

**\* Suggested approach for youth inspection preparation**

**Session 1**

| <b>Activity</b>                                 | <b>Learning points</b>  | <b>resources</b>  |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Ice breakers and team building exercises</b> | Bringing the group together as a team is really important   | Essentials toolkit for participation gives a range of ice breakers                |
| <b>Four Faces</b>                               | Explore the different issues relating to evaluation and a chance for the group to learn and challenge their views   | Flip chart<br>Marker pens   |
| <b>I'm an Evaluator</b>                         | A good evaluator must have a range of skills and attributes and it's important to have these in mind when evaluating services   | Large paper<br>Volunteer to draw round<br>Marker pens<br>Post it notes            |
| <b>Mmmm Chocolate Biscuits</b>                  | A good evaluator makes fair and accurate judgements, understanding how individuals judge things, being aware of prejudice and how it's important to offer reasons and evidence are all crucial to a successful evaluation | Chocolate Biscuits<br>Digestive or Rich Tea biscuits<br>Flip chart<br>Marker pens |
| <b>Evaluation Charter</b>                       | This will enable the group to agree its understanding of evaluation and set out the principles and approach they will take  | Flip chart<br>Marker pens   |

## Session 2

| Activity  | Learning Points  | Resources                                  |
|---|--|--|
| Ice Breaker   | As above   |  |
| Re –cap on last session and review evaluation charter                   | Important for everyone to be up to speed and set direction for session   | Flip charts produced from previous session |
| Meeting with the service that is being inspected                        | Crucial for service being inspected and evaluators to come together to discuss the evaluation. What will be evaluated, what is useful to look at, how it should be done? | Service manger from relevant service       |
| Set the angle for the inspection and the specific question to be tested | Before the session ends important to agree the exact angle for the inspection. What aspect of the service will be evaluated?   |  |

## Session 3

| Activity                               | Learning Points   | Resources                                  |
|--|---|--|
| Ice Breaker and review of last session |   |  |
| World's Worst                          | Looking at the extremes of a good and bad service helps set the scope of the evaluation. What is it that would make a service really bad or really good; this is important to understand as the group can start to think of the criteria they will use. | Flip chart paper<br>Marker pens            |
| Ideas Storm                            | Building on the world's worst do a giant mind map on all the issues that are important in relation to the evaluation topic. This will start to add some detail to the key criteria  |  |
| Diamond Ranking                        | Taking all of the information gathered so far, ask the group for the top 9 things they will use to test the quality of service. By getting them to rank the 9 most important should set the final criteria that will be used to evaluate the service    | Flip chart<br>Marker pens<br>Post it notes |
| Inspection arrangements                | Outline the arrangements for delivering the inspection, timings, locations etc  |  |

# SECTION 6

## **Setting improvement targets**

- **Improving at the right level**
  - **Capturing improvement  
targets**

## \* Essentials: **Setting improvement targets**



So children and young people have been involved in evaluating the services they use, they've identified where there are issues and have set out recommendations where changes should be made. The question is what should you do with this information now you've got it?

Like all forms of quality assurance, it should directly inform the delivery plan of the service, or the targets and priorities you set. Achieving the balance between what the customer needs (the child or young person) and what the service has to provide, will ensure that the service has the right focus and places its resources appropriately.

Setting improvement targets can be done at 3 levels:

1. If changes are needed at a **delivery point** level or relate to a particular aspect of service delivery, then consider putting in place improvement targets for the team or unit they relate to.
2. If changes are needed which require a **service wide approach** then consider setting improvement targets within the annual service plan. If the improvement targets don't fit directly within an existing priority then the service will need to address whether this will require a new priority focus to be set.
3. If changes are needed which demonstrate a potential change in **strategic focus**, then information gathered through youth evaluations could inform the setting of wider priorities found within the Children and Young People's Plan and Local Area Agreement.

**Remember:**

- After setting the improvement target, feedback to the children and young people how you arrived at this conclusion from the information provided through the evaluations
- You don't have to produce separate improvement targets that just relate to youth evaluations if other quality assurance processes or consultations have highlighted similar areas for change. Use them to help focus in on what specifically needs to change
- Try and baseline some of the improvement targets so that you can monitor progress over a period of time and future evaluations could test out improvement against these original baseline figures.

**\* Setting Improvement Targets**

The table below is a simple way in which to develop the process of setting improvement targets and also a mechanism for feeding back. Remember you can tailor this to suit your needs.

| Children and Young People's Evaluation Recommendations | At which level is improvement relevant (please tick)? |               |                 | Improvement Target Required | Service or team responsible for delivering target |
|--|---|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|---|
|  | Team / unit level                                     | Service Level | Strategic Issue |                             |   |
|  |   |               |                 |                             |   |
|  |   |               |                 |                             |   |
|  |   |               |                 |                             |   |