



**Children's Court
Guardian Agency**
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



Children and Young People's Engagement and Participation Strategy



Introduction

Context for the Children and Young People's Engagement and Participation Strategy

The Children's Court Guardian Agency's Strategy for Engagement with Children and Young People is a specific strategy aimed at promoting and enhancing the participation of children and young people in the Agency so we can obtain feedback from children and young people individually, and collectively as a group, to improve our service.

The Children's Court Guardian Agency Children and Young People's Strategy has been developed under the overarching framework of the [NI Executive Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030](#), which is the foundation and source of other plans, strategies and projects across Departments and Agencies in NI, and whose aim is to promote both well-being and positive outcomes for all children and young people in Northern Ireland.

The NI Executive Children and Young People's Strategy sits within the context of both international law (The United Nations International Human Rights Conventions including the Rights of the Child and the rights of Children and Young People with Disabilities) and domestic law (The Children's Services Co Operation Act, Northern Ireland's Programme for Government and The Children (NI) Order 1995.)

The values and principles of participation embedded in the NI Executive Strategy, are core to the ongoing work of the Children's Court Guardian Agency.



The legislative framework provided by the Children (NI) Order 1995 reflects the core role of the Children's Court Guardian in respecting the paramountcy of children and young people (paramountcy principle), ensuring the representation of their views, wishes and feelings in line with their age and understanding, and reflecting their needs in the context of the Welfare Checklist.

The NI Executive Strategy highlights eight high level outcomes, as the aims for children and young people in Northern Ireland. These include;

- ***Children and young people make a positive contribution to society***
- we want all children and young people to be able to say what they think about things that affect them and that their views will be listened to in school, at home, in their local area, and by the people whose job it is to make decisions about things that affect children and young people.
- ***What we will do***
We will make arrangements so that all children and young people can tell us what they think .
We will get services to tell children and young people what happens as a result of what they say.



Purpose of the Children’s Court Guardian Agency Engagement Strategy

The purpose of the Children’s Court Guardian Agency Children and Young People’s Engagement Strategy is to say how we plan to achieve the aims of the NI Executive and the Agency, relating to engagement and participation by children and young people.

Our Vision

“Better Outcomes for Children and Young People through the promotion of their best interests and representation of their wishes and feelings in the family courts”

Children’s Court Guardian Agency Strategic Plan (2023-28)

Values and Behaviours

The Children’s Court Guardian Agency is an Arm’s Length Body within Health and Social Care. We have a shared set of values with HSC which define our culture in everything we do.



Working Together

We work together for the best outcome for the people we care for and support. We work across Health and Social Care and with other external organisations and



Excellence

We commit to being the best we can be in our work, aiming to improve and develop services to achieve positive changes. We deliver safe, high quality, compassionate care and support.



Openness & Honesty

We are sensitive, caring, respectful and understanding towards those we care for and support and our colleagues. We listen carefully to others to better understand and take action to help them and ourselves.



Compassion

We are open and honest with each other and act with integrity and candour.



Children's Court Guardian Agency Strategic Plan - Our Objectives

Our objectives in respect of children and young people both individually and collectively are at the centre of our Strategic Plan.

Individual: This includes ensuring individual children and young people's voices are heard and their best interests are reflected by Children's Court Guardians in the Family Courts.

Collectively: Our goal is to enable children's and young people's voices to be heard by promoting their participation in our Youth Board, which provides a platform for young people's experiences and views to be heard by a wider audience. This will enable them to contribute to and influence our practice and our service.

Our objectives are;

1. Children and Young People

- At an individual level we will seek to engage with and learn from children and young people who have had the support of a guardian in order to obtain feedback on their experience of our service and how we can improve practice.
- We will engage with children and young people collectively, to develop an engagement strategy using a co-production methodology to enable the participation of children and young people in the development of the Engagement Strategy.



- We will develop and Implement an engagement strategy for and with children and young people.
- We will ensure that children and young people's voices are fully represented in court.

What Will the Children's Court Guardian Agency Do?

1. We will promote opportunities for children and young people to provide feedback on their experience of our service.
2. We will promote participation with our Youth Board.
3. We will work with our Youth Board to develop a Children and Young People's Engagement Strategy.

Reasons for Including Young People – Article 12 Children and Young People's Rights

- Involve children and young people to influence policy and practice.
- Engage children and young people in the processes of improving practice.
- Participation to be reflected in processes and culture
- Develop Quality Assurance mechanisms to ensure children and young people have the opportunity to participate.



Model of Participation

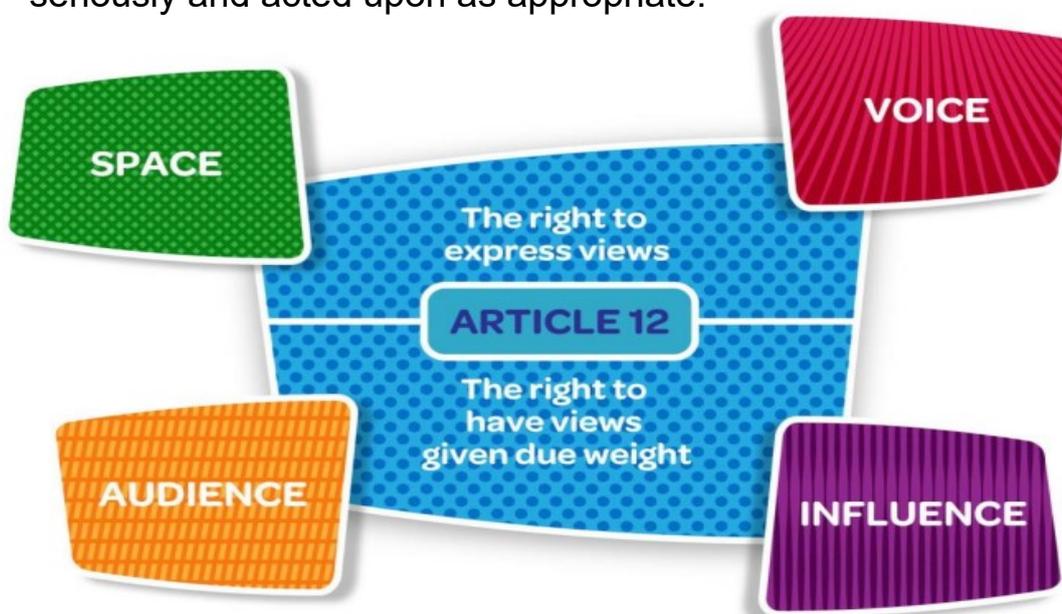
The model of participation which has been adopted by the Children's Court Guardian Agency is the Lundy Model of Child Participation (2007). The Lundy Model references the four elements of the provision as set out in Article 12.

Space: Children and young people must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view.

Voice: Children and young people must be facilitated to express their view.

Audience: The view must be listened to.

Influence: Ensure that children and young people's views are taken seriously and acted upon as appropriate.



This model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC which is intended to focus educational decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements have a rational chronological order:

- **SPACE:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their view
- **AUDIENCE:** The view must be listened to.
- **INFLUENCE:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.



Participation includes consideration of the following;

Due Weight: Under Article 12, children and young people do not have a definitive say in the decision-making process, but their views should be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

Best Interests: Article 3.1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, “In all actions concerning children whether undertaken by public or private social welfare, institutions, courts of law, administrative bodies or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child (young person) shall be a primary consideration”.

Process of Participation: Participation involves a process where there is active engagement and dialogue with children and young people, reflecting the four elements of the Lundy Model, Platform, Voice Audience and Influence.

Development of the Strategy

The development of the strategy involved engagement with children and young people who had used our service. The young people were aged from 14 to 20, some were already members of our Youth Board, and we welcomed young people who attended for the first time to participate with this project. The young people met over two days to share their experiences and views and to contribute to the development of the strategy.



What did we address?

We looked at the NI Executive's aims and objectives for children and young people in Northern Ireland,

"we want all children and young people to be able to say what they think about things that affect them and that their views will be listened to".

We considered how young people can provide feedback to the Children's Court Guardian Agency, to be able to say what matters to them and how they can be confident their voices are heard and listened to by people who make decisions.

What Will the Children's Court Guardian Agency Do?

The Children's Court Guardian Agency Strategy says -

1. We will promote opportunities for children and young people to provide feedback on their experience of our service.
2. We will promote participation with our Youth Board.
3. We will work with our Youth Board to develop a Children and Young People's Engagement Strategy.

As part of our engagement sessions we asked the young people how we can achieve each of the aims above.



We will promote opportunities for children and young people to provide feedback on their experience of our service.

We asked – “What can we do to make sure more children and young people are offered the opportunity for feedback?”

What young people said.

-  Make sure the About Me / About Court includes the information on how to give feedback.
-  Send out feedback form as both paper copy and send the app link to carer and to child/young person if they have their own phone.
-  Find out the best way to contact the young person, not through parents, but directly via WhatsApp / phone numbers.
-  Everyone who can do feedback should be offered so it is not unbiased.
-  Make the young person aware there is a feedback form to complete.
-  Make sure young people are more aware of groups that they can join to share views and give feedback.
-  Make sure the About Me About Court includes the information on how to give feedback.
-  Translate the feedback into my own language – when English is not my first language, so I can easily say my views. Carers /Guardians don't speak my language.
-  Reassure us that it is ok to say if it was a negative experience – need to feel comfortable and it helps if it is anonymous sometimes, to feel ok to give feedback.



-  Don't leave it only to the end of court proceedings before asking me for feedback about how I am participating/understanding- ask us too around the middle of proceedings, because they might go on for a long time, and then also at the end (I might be much older too).
-  Make a feedback survey and display it on social media /websites.
-  Important to have the thank you voucher or certificate.

What will we do?

- ✓ We will make sure About Me and About Court include the information for children and young people on how to provide feedback.
- ✓ We will develop and promote our website to make sure it is user friendly for children and young people and their families.
- ✓ We will promote and develop the practice for guardians to share information about our website with children and young people.
- ✓ We will develop a feedback section on our website where information about feedback can be seen and there is an option for feedback to be provided anonymously.
- ✓ We will look at our feedback system to make sure as many children and young people as possible are given the opportunity to provide feedback on our service. We will continue to monitor that this is working.
- ✓ We will continue to bring to our Board and our relevant Committees reports on children and young people's feedback on our service. We will highlight positive feedback as well as feedback which tells us that improvement is needed.



- ✓ With the consent of young people, we will provide anonymous examples of feedback on our website and we will ask young people who have used our service if they will share their stories to help others who may be going through court proceedings and who are looking for information.
- ✓ We will share examples of where children and young people's feedback has made a change or improvement to practice.

We will promote participation with our Youth Board.

We asked - "What do we do now, to promote participation in our Youth Board?"

What young people said

-  Allowing young people to have a say in their future, to feel heard- to feel seen.
-  Feel listened to regarding ideas/experiences.
-  Ask how this will help young people's CVs and help them think about a career path.
-  Social aspect is good, not as scary as they think.
-  Make sure everyone knows it is for young people like yourself- similar experiences, some young people wouldn't understand if they hadn't had the same experiences.
-  WhatsApp etc. social media to help our views be heard and to share our views safely.



-  Online review of events, opportunities, achievements and upcoming activities/ events (not newsletter).
-  Safety measures should be strictly adhered to.
-  Ensure that everyone in the Youth Board understands the importance of confidentiality- what other people tell you is strictly between the group- respect for each other.
-  Ensure that the diversity /culture/gender of young people is included throughout, this may include various communication tools and use of interpreter.

What will we do?

- ✓ We will ensure there is a respectful culture for all young people, and confidentiality and safety are central to our meetings.
- ✓ We will use our website to promote the Youth Board and we will share examples of young people's input, influence and achievements, as well as the positive social aspect.
- ✓ We will share information on events which we have held and upcoming events for the Youth Board on our website.
- ✓ We will explore appropriate communication options to share information, including WhatsApp.
- ✓ We will focus on what young people tell us to ensure they are heard and listened to and their experiences and words are reflected.
- ✓ We will respect diversity, culture and gender and seek to increase opportunity to provide feedback /participate in our Youth Board, when English is not the child or young person's first language.



How will we make sure that the views of young people who use our service are heard by our staff and by our organisation?

We asked - “How will we make sure you see what happens as a result of what you say and that it matters and makes a difference?”

What young people said

-  After feedback is done, we are told how our feedback has been used to make a positive change. through the website and through the Youth Board.
-  Use the feedback for children and young people- it could help them – worded in a way to help other young people going through the family court, on the website.
-  Maybe meet other young people who are going through it (proceedings).
-  Speaking to other young people who are going through proceedings when you are going through it- less stressful, might help.
-  Easier to access stories on website.
-  Getting the voucher is important.

What will we do?

- ✓ We will continue to invite young people on our Youth Board to the Board Meeting in December to share their experiences of participation with the Agency Board members on an annual basis.
- ✓ We will share information about the work of the Youth Board in our internal meetings as well as externally.



- ✓ We will publicise the work of the Youth Board on our website.
- ✓ We will develop our website to share feedback stories so children and young people who are experiencing proceedings in the Family Courts can read the experiences of other children and young people.
- ✓ We will use our website to share how children and young people have made a positive change and made a difference as a result of their feedback and participation in our Youth Board.
- ✓ When we consult with children and young people we will provide vouchers as gesture of appreciation and/ or Certificates of Participation.

We asked - “How will we make sure your views on our service are heard?”

What young people said.

-  Tell us about your website!
-  Let us know how to access it.
-  Every child is given a feedback form on paper or on mobile phone.
-  Get feedback form at the end of the case/ in the middle.
-  Frequently Asked Questions for the Website.

What will we do?

- ✓ We will ensure that Children’s Court Guardians share information about their role, about the website, and how to access the website with the children and young people whom they meet.



- ✓ We will explore how to increase opportunities for feedback including frequency.

We asked- “How do we share your views with other professionals who have power and influence?”

What young people said

Bring feedback to meetings about how the service can be better.

Feedback should be for a reason, not just in a file- themes from feedback.

Put feedback on the website- anonymous stories on the website.

What will we do?

We will continue to bring reports on feedback to our Board and relevant Committees, highlighting positive feedback and feedback which shows us where improvement is needed.

We will ensure that the purpose of feedback is to enable opportunity for children and young people who have used our service to comment on their experience and to use their feedback to improve our service.

We will share, with consent, anonymous stories on our website.



We will work with our Youth Board to develop a Children and Young People's Engagement Strategy.

We met with young people who had used our service over two days in order to develop a Children and Young People's Engagement Strategy.

What the young people told us has informed this document and will inform our Action Plan for implementing the Strategy over the next five years.

We will continue to build upon the processes we have developed for increasing feedback and to promoting a culture of feedback from children and young people in our Agency.

We will continue to promote participation in our Youth Board to ensure children and young people's experiences and views are heard, contribute to and inform improvement in our service.

Implementation of the Strategy

The five-year Strategy document has been further consulted upon with children and young people involved in its development, and presented to the September 2024 Agency Board.

The aims of the Strategy will be implemented over the next five years by the Senior Leadership Team and by the Operational Leadership Team.



Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the children and young people who have contributed to this Strategy.

Thank you to all the children and young people who have participated in the Agency Youth Board since 2017.

Thank you to all of the young people's parents, carers and social workers whose help has enabled the young people to participate and contribute.

Thank you to the staff from Children's Court Guardian Agency, Children's Court Guardians and Business Support staff who have contributed to and supported the development of the Youth Board.

Thank you to VOYPIC for their ongoing support and commitment.



Children's Court Guardian Agency for Northern Ireland

James House

2-4 Cromac Avenue

BELFAST, BT7 2JA

Tel: 0300 555 0102

Email: admin@childrenscourtguardianagencyni.co.uk

