



## A Young Voice In Drug and Alcohol Issues

### *A Briefing Paper into Consulting Kent Young People*

#### *Background*

This paper aims to review current models of young people's consultation in service delivery across Kent and suggest ways of engaging young people in the commissioning process of the Young Peoples Joint Commissioning Group (YPJCG), whilst providing a voice on relevant issues effecting young people in relation to substances, which arise within the Under 19's forum.

As part of the *Kent Young People's Substance Misuse Plan of 03/04* it was intended that a model of young people's involvement would be developed, in line with Operational Outputs set out by the Home Office. Additionally the Health Advisory Service (2001) state that it is important that young people become fully involved in issues of policy, commissioning, planning and delivery of services.

On a local level the KCC document *Active Lives, The Future of Social Care in Kent – a ten-year vision* informs that, "The view of service users and carers shape service developments, and are integral to service monitoring". Whilst the proposed KCC model for the collaborative commissioning of services for vulnerable young people "*Children's Bill*" currently in development, suggest that services are shaped around the views of children, young people and parents and that future commissioned services will need to demonstrate systems in place that record the views of children and parents with their views used in the construction and delivery of service.

Furthermore, legally as stipulated in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child young people have the right to express their views on issues that affect them and to be listened to.

A number of benefits have been identified in consulting young people in planning and development. These include:

- **Better Services:**
  - Policies and services more genuinely meeting young peoples needs.
  - Providing the unique perspective of young people, improving effectiveness.
  - Obtaining the respect of service users
  - Increased awareness by young people of what organisations are trying to achieve.
  - Ensuring provision meets the actual needs.
- **Promoting Citizenship and Social Inclusion:**
  - Through early engagement in public and community life young people feels as if they are significant members of society.
  - Encourages democracy and a respecting, listening and co-operative culture.
- **Personal and social education and development:**
  - Good participation opportunities produce more self-assured and resilient young people.
  - Increase in skill acquisition, knowledge and communication for young people.

(The Children and Young People's Unit, 2001, The Youth Strategy Executive Group – Dumfries & Galloway Council, 2003).

### *Principles of Consulting Young People*

A number of principles of good practice exist when consulting young people in summary these include:

1. Give **clear information** on what you want consultation on.
2. Ensure the process is **inclusive**.
3. Provide **choice** where and when young people want to meet.
4. Young people are **not a homogenous group**.
5. Consult in **various ways**.
6. Keep **records** of consultation.
7. **Co-ordinate** consultation.
8. **Support** young people to be involved. Adults should be **sensitive** to the inherent differences in status, power, knowledge of resources and language.
9. Be clear with young people about how much **influence** they can have.
10. Youth participation should be **beneficial** for young people. *What are they going to get out of it?*
11. **Enjoyable** – fun, exciting and challenging.
12. Consultation should be **relevant** to the young person.
13. Avoid **tokenism**. Young people must be provided with real roles and tasks.

(Young Australians, Youth Strategy Executive Group – Dumfries & Galloway Council, 2003, DfES, 2003)

### *Young People's Involvement in Service in Kent*

A selection of relevant young people's services across Kent, were consulted on how they engage young people in the development and delivery of service to inform model development through local good practice and to identify potential consultation networks.

The following provides an overview of the way they consult young people:

**Connexions:** Consultation with young people nation wide was conducted in the planning and development stages of connexions. For example the young people themselves selected the job title "Personal Advisor". On a local level Connexion continues to consult with young people, with representation by two young people from the Kent Youth County Council attending Local Management Committee meetings and engaging in more specific work in relation to marketing. Connexions additionally have youth representation on interview panels. Payment is not provided, however Taxi's and meetings that entail eating out are paid for by Connexions.

**16+:** Young people's involvement is well developed within 16+. Youth workers are employed with fifty percent of their time being dedicated to encourage young people's involvement. Youth Forums, which are area based, are run throughout the county on a weekly or fortnightly basis by the youth worker, with the aim of young people contributing to the planning of service. On a county basis, an annual consultation event occurs. Young people led the last annual consultation. The young people set the agenda through information that was collected via questionnaire they had designed, which young people of 16+ completed.

Peer mentoring was one such development that arose from consultations with young people. Young people also were involved in the designing of assessment forms and the Pathway Plan document. Consultation is also sought from young people with regard to new policies.

Young people had been engaged on the County Board Steering Group, however this was less successful due to participation difficulties. An alternative to this has now been developed whereby area Youth Forum's alternate in attendance and present on particular issues to the board for a selected time in the meetings.

Young people of 16+ are also involved in the recruitment of staff. During the interview process applicants in addition to being interviewed by relevant professionals, are interviewed by a separate panel of young people, which then consults to the professional panel. Young people are also involved in the appraisal of staff. They were initially consulted on how they would like to be involved in the appraisal process.

Carers are not typically consulted in service delivery and development and young people of Black and Ethnic Minority representation is small, however this is also reflected in the care population of Kent, with a small proportion of BME young people in care. A limitations identified by the 16+ representative included a tendency for the same young people to get involved.

Young people are compensated for their time at a rate of £15 pounds a day with lunch provided. 16+ indicated that the KDAT could come to these established youth forums with particular issues for consultation on the condition that young people are compensated.

**KCA:** Young people are involved in the recruitment process of KCA staff through engagement on the interview panel. They are compensated £15 in vouchers for their attendance.

Young people who are both service users and non-service users have assisted in the design of service leaflets and posters and are consulted on branding issues.

During one to one work with young people, support plans are “owned” by the young person with there own set of goals.

Young people have also been consulted in the development of new programs such as outreach projects for young people excluded from school and those in children’s homes. Young people are also being engaged in a research project, which aims to develop as self-assessment and harm reduction tool for young people’s use.

In addition young people engaging in service complete regular satisfaction surveys.

**Grey Zebra – Kenward Trust:** Initially Grey Zebra had a steering committee which included young people (mostly from Maidstone Grammar) which met at the school. This was found useful for Grey Zebra, however young people deemed it “extremely boring”. In place of the committee group sessions were developed around the theme of young people and drugs. From this it was decided that the accredited CASCADE programme would be put in place, which has been active for the last 3 years. Grey Zebra additionally note that they specifically use a “bottom up” model of communication, whereby young people set the agenda.

### *Places Of Young Peoples Voice In Kent*

Across Kent are borough specific Youth Councils where substance related issues potentially could be brought. These councils make important contributions to the greater involvement of children and young people in decision-making. At a local level representatives work along side elected councillors at meetings giving the views of their peers. An example of one such Youth Council in Kent is provided below:

**Thanet Youth Council:** Thanet Youth Council is open to young people between the age of 13 and 20 years who live or attend school or college in the Thanet area. It is funded by the Community Fund. It aims to represent the views of young people and provide the opportunity to meet and work with councillors, local agencies and decision makers. Thanet Youth Council discuss issues which affect young people, and are consulted by groups such as Local Agenda 21, Community Safety Group and KCC. Members have representation at the Local Police Authority Group, Kent Youth Affairs commission, and Broadstairs and St Peter's town council to mention a few.

In addition to these borough specific Youth Forums/Councils there is the Kent Youth County Council, whereby young people are elected for a 2 year term. This group aims to get the views of young people and pass them on to K.C.C. The Kent Youth County Council is divided into East and West Kent and meets monthly.

**Children's Participation Project:** is a non-statutory local children's society working in partnership with the Kent Children's Fund. The purpose of the projects is to increase children's participation in their local neighbourhoods, to influence the development of children's district planning groups and their policies, to empower young people and have their views heard, to improve services so they are effective, attractive and accessible and to develop children's skills and confidence through participation. The young people involved are aged 5 to 13 years and include young carers, socially excluded and vulnerable children, children with special educational needs, refugee children and mixed ethnicity children.

Young people are involved in a range of activities including consultations that inform Children's fund planning and development, designing and carrying out a children's grant scheme, delivering activities, directing project activity and carrying out evaluation, wider consultation at a regional and national level, selection and recruitment, presentations to decision makers and producing a newsletter to feedback to peers, partners and decision makers.

### *Consultation With Young People Regarding Future Involvement*

Two young people (Spangle Patton and Stephen Ferguson) from the Kent Youth County Council were consulted on their views of young people's participation regarding drugs issues and the commissioning of services. These young people also are involved with the Maidstone Youth Forum and the United Kingdom Youth Parliament and British Youth Council.

Both Spangle and Stephen indicated that simply attending the Under 19's reference group might not be the most productive use of their time. They indicated that these styles of meetings could be "boring" and indicated a preference of working on more specific issues with smaller groups of people. They stated that they would be happy to attend meetings, however they felt this would be less productive.

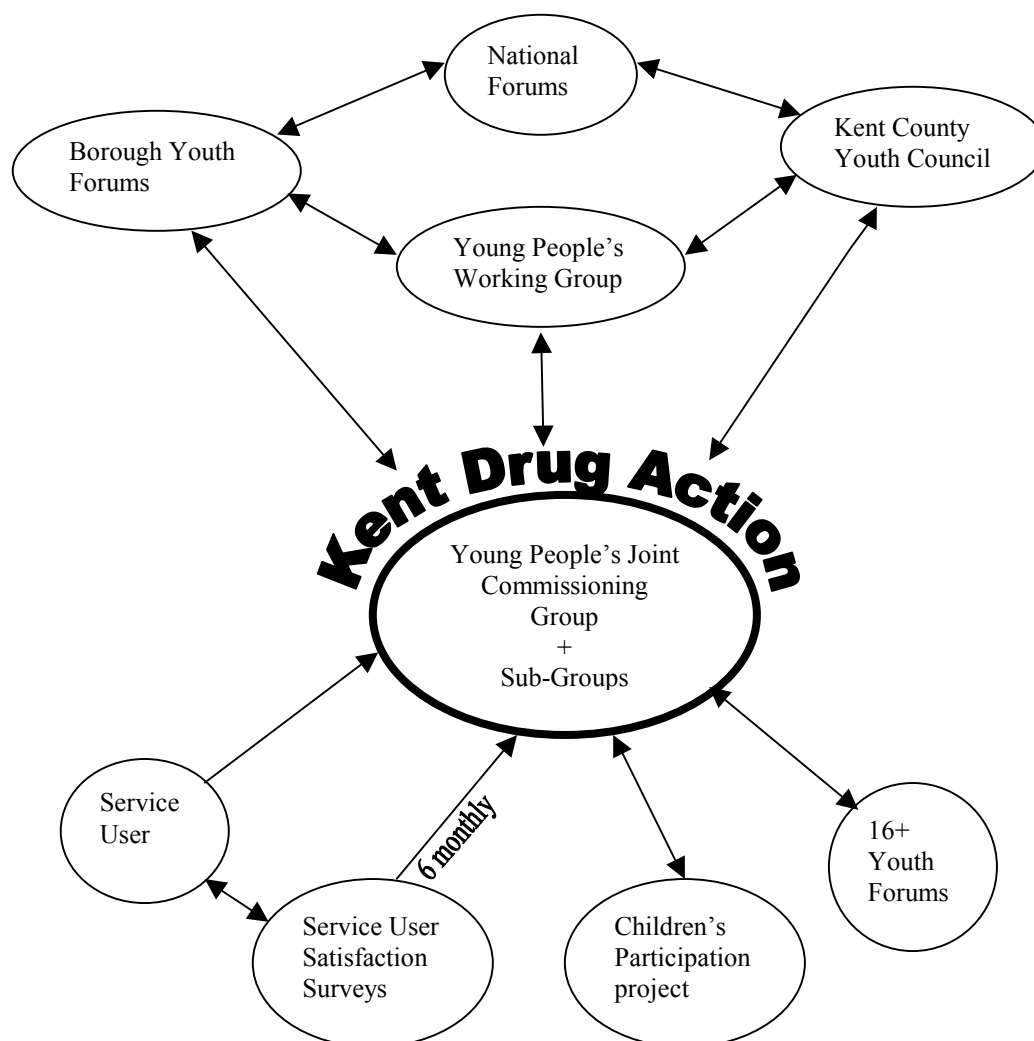
Spangle and Stephen highlighted that they were only able to offer their own views on issues, which would be a narrow representation of the youth voice. However they suggested that they could bring issues to their associated youth forums and councils for a wider view, support strategies to obtain wider views of young people outside youth councils and be engaged in small working groups around specific issues. A current example of ways of working with young people is illustrated below:

[www.drugsuk.org](http://www.drugsuk.org): Young people of the Kent Youth County Council have reviewed the website recently with the Young Person's Research and Verification Officer. The young people were able to check in with their peers regarding how well known the site was, whether access was denied by internet filters at school and provide a brief report on the strengths and weakness of the site in regard to young people. An online questionnaire was then developed in conjunction with the young people, ensuring the use of appropriate language etc. It is aimed that from the results of the survey young people will assist in making interpretations and recommendations.

### *A Proposed Model of Young People's Consultation in the KDAT*

The figure below provides a suggested model for the consideration of the Under 19's Reference Group and Young People's Joint Commissioning Group incorporating the principles of good practice and existing sources of potential young people's consultation as reviewed in this paper.

Figure 1: Model of Young People's Consultation on Drug Issues



The proposed model attempts to include principles including:

☺ **Multiple Methods:** which includes working closely with a small group of identified young people who become skilled in substance misuse issues and develop a working relationship with members of the Y.P.J.C.G. This group of young people then support consultation to broader groups and could attend meetings to discuss specific issues if necessary. Additionally service user feedback would be communicated at regular intervals through reports based on questionnaires.

☺ **Inclusive of young people from a variety of backgrounds:** The groups identified above represent a diverse range of young people across Kent, including young people from vulnerable groups in attempt to ensure that young people's views are adequately represented.

☺ **A mutually beneficial relationship:** It is aimed that the current model would encourage and support incoming communication to the Kent Drug Action Team from various groups of young people in addition to bringing issues to these groups.

### *Issues For Discussion*

💬 **Payment?** To consult with young people of 16+ payments of £15 per young person is required. Children of the children's participation project are rewarded with vouchers. However it has been decided by the Kent Youth County Council young people that they should not be paid. The elected adult county councillors then decided that they should receive a £10.00 voucher for their attendance. The young people have accepted this. A decision is required regarding our position on this

💬 **Policy?** Is a policy required regarding when consultation is required by the Young People's Joint Commissioning group?

💬 **Model improvements/alterations?** Are there any additional groups that should be incorporated into the model or other methods to consider? E.g. Parents. Are there practical implications to service providers? For example establishing regular methods of consumer feedback e.g. development of a questionnaire.

💬 **Co-ordination Roles?** Is an identified person required to take lead and co-ordination with regard to consultation with young people?

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