

## Participation Policy

### What is participation?

Young people at St Christopher's define participation as:

***“Participation is the active involvement of young people in experiences, opportunities and decisions about their lives. It gives young people the power to shape both the way they are involved and the outcomes of their involvement.”***

This may mean influencing decisions about their own lives, or it could mean young people collectively influencing their homes, or things that are important to them in the wider world.

We don't see young people as 'adults in waiting'. They can make valuable contributions, irrespective of their age, and we empower them to have their say. We ask young people living in our homes and with our foster carers and who use our services to help us make decisions on issues that will affect them. We listen to their views and use them to shape what happens next. This means we can evolve as an organisation by keeping young people at the heart of our care and ensuring that young people's needs are met.

Young people at St Christopher's have developed **Five Principles of Participation** to help adults think about how best to plan and deliver participation with young people.

1. All of our young people have a say, but also have a right not to say too.
2. Participation should be fun and make a difference.
3. Be honest and tell young people what is going on – so there is no confusion about which decisions young people can be involved in, how much their views are taken into account and how much they will be able to change things.
4. Their involvement is valued.
5. Always trying to do better – nothing is ever perfect – ask young people how to make things better.

## 1. Why participation is important

1.1 This policy sets out why we believe it is so important that:

- Young people are able to contribute to and participate fully in decisions affecting them.
- Adults recognise the value of involving young people in decision making, and are skilled in enabling them to do so.

1.2 A core principle of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a commitment to ensuring that young people have the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect them and to be active agents in their own lives. Our aim is for young people to understand, experience and exercise their rights.

1.3 Participation provides opportunities for young people to:

- Learn new skills
- Influence the world around them
- Develop self-esteem and confidence
- Have fun, make friends and strengthen relationships
- Promote a positive image of themselves among communities, professionals and peers
- Take on meaningful roles and responsibilities
- Have the authority to hold those with statutory responsibility to account
- Ensure that adults think in a way that respects children, young people and childhood.

1.4 St Christopher's seeks young people's views and opinions on matters that they themselves view as important. Everyone in St Christopher's has a responsibility for creating opportunities and the right environment for young people to have their say in ways that they want to and allow them to have meaningful input into decisions that affect them. All staff working directly with young people complete training on the Rights of the Child and participation so that they develop skills in creating opportunities for young people to share their views.

1.5 By involving young people in our work we are paving the way for greater accountability to them. When young people meaningfully participate, honesty, transparency and communication between young people and adults can be improved. A relationship based upon respect begins to flourish, where young people's views are valued, heeded and acted upon.

## 2. Our commitment to young people

- 2.1 Every member of staff across the entire organisation has a role to play in ensuring the rights of all young people are respected. These rights are not earned. Every child is born with the same rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what they believe in or what they may have done. Sometimes people talk about the need to consider these rights alongside the child's responsibilities. This gives the mistaken impression that a child's rights are somehow dependent on them behaving a particular way. This is not the case. Their rights exist entirely separately and, as such, no one can take them away. This does not mean that young people cannot be expected to behave responsibly towards other people. Where adults demonstrate their respect for young people's rights, young people are much more likely to apply the values of respect, understanding, peace, tolerance, equality and friendship to their own lives.
- 2.2 Young people have a range of formal opportunities through which they can express their views and participate in the decision making process. They also have the right to take part and inform decisions that are being made about things that are important to them in their day to day lives in more informal ways.
- 2.3 We will **always** endeavor to involve young people in:
- Recruitment of new staff and Trustees – we will seek to involve young people in the recruitment to all roles across the organisation, not just operational ones. This may include involvement in writing adverts, drafting interview questions and interviewing candidates.
  - Shaping and endorsing the way that we represent young people in our promotional materials through images and text.
  - Service design and delivery – advising on how best to develop new areas of our work.
- 2.4 As a minimum **all** young people should be offered opportunities to:
- Input into their own care plans about how they would like to be supported
  - Collaborate with staff about how to allocate activity budgets and in the planning of activities
  - Take part in an organisation-wide annual survey that is used to inform their service's annual plan and the organisation's strategy
  - Raise any issues through our complaints process and day-to-day conversations
  - Speak directly to Trustees and Senior Leadership to give their views.

2.5 There will also be opportunities for young people to:

- Help design and carry out research on important issues
- Co-produce training for staff about issues that are important to our young people
- Co-produce programmes of work to support the development of the life skills programme
- Endorse relevant policies
- Take part in consultations about meaningful and important issues in the lives of young people
- Inform and create learning resources that enable other children, young people and adults to develop a greater understanding of children's rights.

2.6 We will be clear to young people about which decisions they can be involved in, how much their views are taken into account and how much they will be able to change things. For example, Trustees have responsibilities set by law and some decisions will, ultimately, need to be made by them.

### **3. How we approach participation**

- 3.1 Real participation is not tokenistic, meaningless, manipulative, compromising or unethical. It is about adults and young people listening, sharing experiences and learning from each other. To make the process as accessible as possible, adults should adapt processes to suit the individual child, including their age, abilities and life experiences.
- 3.2 Where opportunities exist for young people's views to be sought then this must be done in a way that is respectful, genuine and appealing for the young person to ensure that all have an opportunity to be heard.
- 3.3 Young people should be given clear feedback about how their contribution has made a difference. Without this young people can feel that they have not been listened to and that their involvement has been for nothing.

*"We say it's okay"*

This policy has been approved by St Christopher's young people.