

# Co-production and engagement with children and young people with SEND – a local authority perspective

Julie Hicklin , SEND Lead Manchester City Council  
and Michael Gallon, Project Officer

# Why engage with disabled children and young people

- Children and young people have a right to have their say about services they experience (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- Listening to the experience and working with people who use services ensures that services can be tailored to meet their needs more effectively.
- The priorities of decisions makers aren't always in alignment with the priorities of the children and young people themselves. If we only listen to one voice we risk not fully meeting the needs of disabled children and young people.
- Increasing the voice and influence of children and young people helps children and young people build valuable life skills.
- The 'Our Manchester' approach.

# Manchester's vision for children and young people with SEND

**To enable full participation in the city's opportunities, facilities activities and communities**

**Manchester as a disabled friendly city where:**

- Disabled children's aspirations are recognised and can be realised
- All areas of the city and all parts of city life are accessible
- Disabled children and adults can be independent and have choice and control over their lives
- Mancunians are the city's best assets and we should build on these strengths
- Everyone has the right to fulfil their own potential

**Our Manchester Disability Plan**

# Background

- Experience as a Preparing for Adulthood Pathfinder
- Children's and young people's voice – at individual and strategic levels
- Co-production not consultation
- Co-production with children/young people is very different to co-production with parents/carers
- Social model not medical model
- Person centred approaches
- Importance of changing culture across children's workforce (and wider society)
- Balancing views of young person and parent where these differ

We asked lots of disabled young people and people with special educational needs about themselves and what they think of Manchester. This is what they told us:



We asked lots of disabled young people and people with special educational needs about themselves and what they think of Manchester. This is what they told us:



**Ask us what we need!**

## *Our Manchester:* How to engage with us

Make sure what you do is open to everyone.  
Support us to have our say in a way that suits everyone (not always meet during the day, text etc)

Don't tell us that you can do something and then not do it

Let us be creative.  
Use videos, social media, pictures, photos

Make it meaningful  
'What is the point of telling you, is anything going to change?'

Support us to be involved and give us the chance to lead our own campaigns

Ask us what we think then tell us what you are doing with it and what is going on.

Tell us what is happening and future opportunities to get involved

Help adults to understand us and work with us more effectively.  
'I don't like always having to tell new teachers how to use the radio mic, they should already know'

# What supports participation

- Embed person centred approaches
- Supportive school and college culture – e.g. Rights Respecting Schools
- Focus on Preparing for Adulthood life outcomes from earliest years
- Access to high quality impartial information, advice and guidance for children, young people and parents/carers on wide range of topics
- Access to experiences that will enable young person to make their own choices
- Opportunities to influence individual and strategic plans – e.g. participating in own reviews, being part of school council
- Understand young person's capacity to make their own decisions
- Governance structures



# Work that has taken place - Background

- A 12 month placement was identified to engage with children and young people (CYP) with SEND and develop a sustainable model, ways of working and resources to gather their voice in order to influence strategy, services and the support they receive.
- 319 CYP attended 21 workshops and conversations, delivered across the city in mainstream and specialist schools and colleges, youth groups and schemes.
- An audit was carried out on EHC plans to explore whether:
  - Evidence exists that CYP have been directly involved in the writing of their plan.
  - EHC plans are aspirational with this being reflected in the outcomes
  - The EHC plan draws on other services that CYP access such as Short Breaks

# Engagement

- The main aim of the workshops was to understand SEND CYP's views and opinions on the following subjects as well as understanding how they wish to interact with the authority moving forward:
  - Communication with the Local Authority
  - Access to key decision makers
  - Services they access and wish to access
  - Barriers they encounter to accessing services and in every day life
  - What could be improved to make Manchester a better place to live for them

# Engagement – Key messages

- Young people want to interact with the local authority in a different way than their parents.
  - In their own settings (school or youth provision)
  - At a time convenient to them (evenings and weekends)
  - In a creative way
  - In a way that makes them feel valued
- They would like to speak directly to key decision makers (Directors, service leads, Councillors) but within their own setting.
- The majority of CYP with SEND would like to access an array of new services within their own area, initially with young people like themselves but with the aim to access universal services.

# Engagement – Key messages

What could be improved to Make Manchester a better place to live for you?



# Impact of engagement work to date

- Young People at from the school council at Castlefield Federation co-produced a pilot scheme to investigate the barriers faced by CYP with SEMD accessing universal services.
- CYP have provided valuable feedback on the Local Offer.
- CYP have worked with the Transition Team to provide feedback on various areas of their lives including education, employment, independent living and their future.
- Work with external partners e.g. Zion Arts, Speech and Therapy Service.
- CYP views have impacted directly on the development of a sustainable model which adheres to their requirements and the barriers they face.

# SEND CYP's Voice Toolkit

- Work has been carried out in partnership with SENCOs, practitioners and SEND CYP to co-produce a CYP voice toolkit.
- The toolkit will allow practitioners (and CYP themselves) to more effectively gather the voice of CYP with SEND.
- The toolkit contains the following:
  - An EHC Plan audit tool offering advice, guidance, checklists and examples of good practice. The audit tool is designed to ensure the voice and aspirations of CYP remains the primary focus and is reflected in outcomes and provision, creating a 'golden thread'.
  - A carefully researched bank of resources, activities, guidance and advice produced in partnership, aimed at overcoming barriers that have been highlighted in feedback collected during engagement.
  - Activities to be used to allow CYP to clearly demonstrate how they feel about the support they receive and influence change in their lives.
- The toolkit will be published on The Schools Hub and Manchester Local Offer.

# Youth Ambassadors

- Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN) were awarded funding to enable them to engage, train and inspire a cohort of 8 Manchester SEND Youth Ambassadors through their Change Makers Programme.
- They have been trained as community reporters and creative consultants exploring new approaches and learning new skills in gathering and presenting information.
- The programme allowed the Youth Ambassadors to record and present a manifesto and campaigns on issues that they are passionate about using digital technology and creative written methods such as poetry.
- The Youth Ambassadors have an important role to play in the future of gathering the voice of CYP across Manchester to influence the way the local authority develops strategy and delivers services that impact them.
- The Youth Ambassadors will represent the views of CYP in various ways such as at the SEND Board and Local Offer Review Board.

# Next Steps

- Roll out of SEND CYP Voice Toolkit.
- Further work with Youth Ambassadors to train them in gathering the voice of other CYP across the city of Manchester. Ensuring their participation across available workshops and events.
- Continued development of a sustainable model ensuring the Youth Ambassadors effectively capture the views and opinions of a representative portion of CYP in Manchester, ensuring they directly influence the development of strategy and services.
- Close work with schools, settings and external partners to ensure effective working practices are adopted to gather CYP voice moving forward.