



Five  
Rivers®

# Participation handbook

Participation practice and how to deliver it



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## The Five Rivers Child Care Family - Participation Principles

- Participation and the views of young people are valued
- All children are given opportunities to be included in decisions that affect their lives
- Participation should be a fun, creative process and young people's contributions should be recognised and rewarded





# Introduction

## What is this book for?

This book will offer the reader a basic introduction to Participation within the Five Rivers Child Care Family, explaining the systems and structures within the organisations that allow young people to influence Participation practice and planning.

## Who is this book for?

This book is for staff, carers, teachers, support workers. It is especially relevant to staff who have a particular role or interest in delivering Participation practice.

If you are a new member of staff, you need to read this booklet before you begin your Participation work and before you read your individual Participation plan. This will be while you wait for an opportunity to take part in formal training in Children's Rights and Participation.

The Five Rivers Child Care Family includes:

- Five Rivers (including its five main services: fostering, residential, education, assessment & therapy and crisis intervention)
- Five Rivers Fostering Ireland
- Foster Careline
- Safehouses Fostering
- The Fostering Company North East
- Quality Foster Care (QFC)





# What is Participation?

## **'Nothing About Us - Without Us'**

Participation involves young people in decision making to lead to changes in the delivery of the services they receive.

Participation can be informal or formal. Informal examples include chats in the car or around the dinner table, engaging in joint activities like a sport or hobby.

Formal opportunities are created by the adult within the organisation. These need to be provided to allow young people to influence decisions. Both approaches are about your listening skills, communication and thinking creatively about what you do with what you have just heard.

For example – a young person in a car says to you, 'I think the safer care plan looks boring and it does not make me feel like I want to be involved in using it, it looks like it's written for a social worker and not 10-year-old me'. A Participation worker will act on this by speaking to a manager, creating a focus group where young people can design a safer care plan that better meets their needs.

To read more about the Five Rivers formal Participation opportunities go to [https://issuu.com/fiveriverschildcare/docs/your\\_voice\\_your\\_say\\_4logo\\_issuu\\_3](https://issuu.com/fiveriverschildcare/docs/your_voice_your_say_4logo_issuu_3)

Also go to our Vimeo film library <https://vimeo.com/5riverschildcare> and watch a cartoon made by our young people which explains what Participation is and how young people can get involved. This cartoon is designed to be watched by young people, but it is worth watching as a great example of how we involve young people in the running of the organisation.

## **Models of Participation practice**

It is important to choose the best Participation approach for different situations. You may hear about these different approaches.

- Consultation: gathering young people's views on a particular issue or question A, B or C.
- Participation: young people joining in decision-making with adults.
- Dialogue: in depth discussions with an open agenda or a particular topic.
- Involvement: adults lead and give young people opportunities and support to take part.



# Ladder of Participation

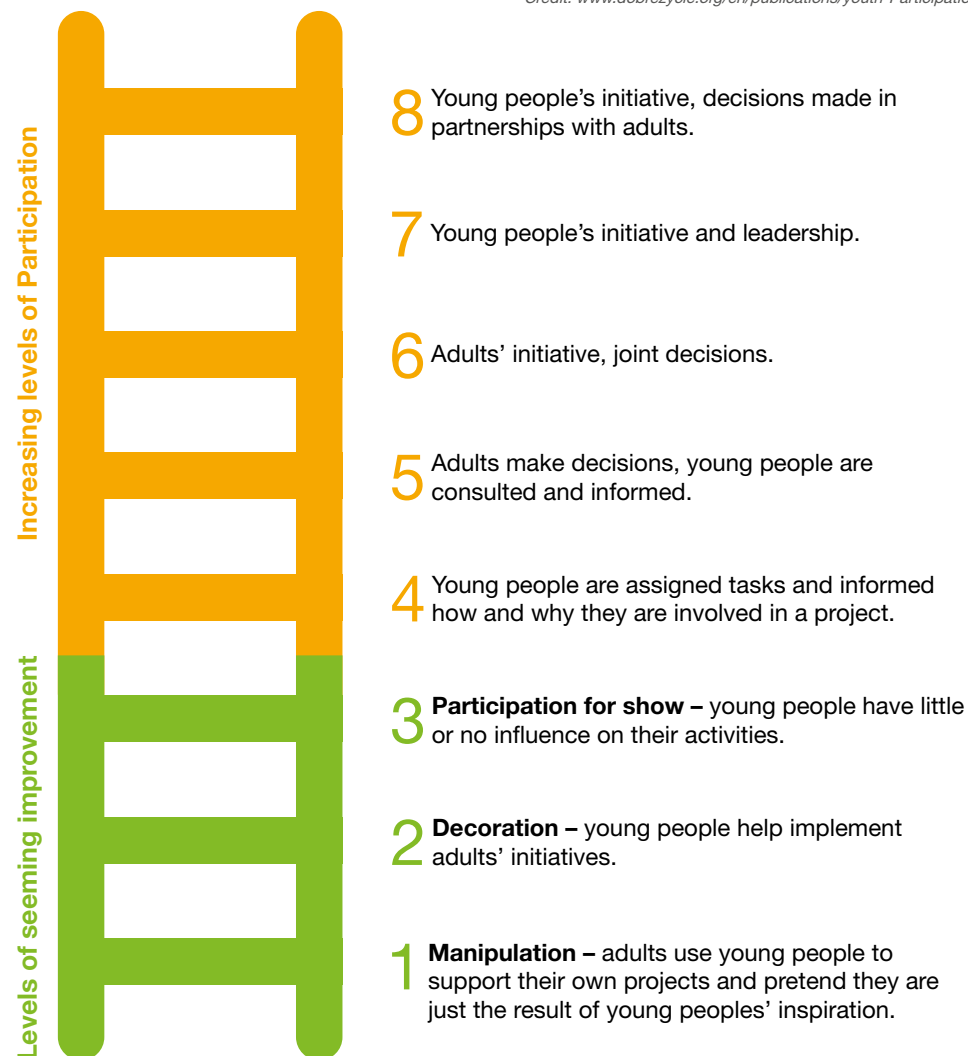
## Ladder of Participation

On the right is Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation. It shows 'young people-initiated and directed initiatives' as the top form of young people's Participation – this does not exclude adults from the process but their input is agreed and is limited. This does not necessarily mean it is the best approach as every project is unique.

Note: the bottom three rungs of the ladder are not considered Participation but are worth noting and avoiding.

In some situations, young people may have to be told of decisions being made about them, regardless of whether it fits with their views or wishes. We make these decisions in the child's best interest and whilst it can be difficult to go against their wishes, it must happen sometimes. For example, if a child is placed in a foster home, they may not want this to happen, but it has to for their safety and well-being – this would sit on the number four rung of the ladder (assigned but informed).

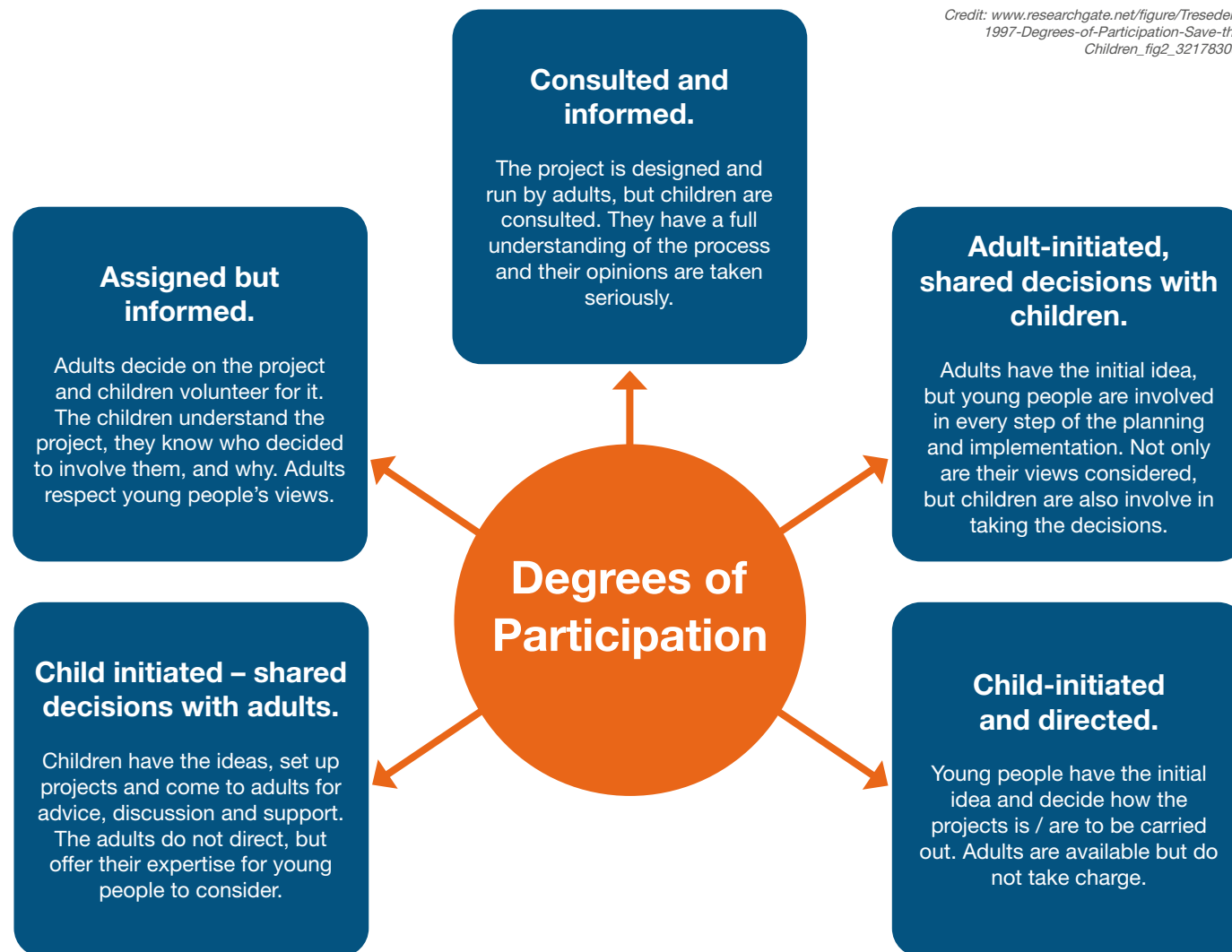
Credit: [www.dobrezycie.org/en/publications/youth-Participation](http://www.dobrezycie.org/en/publications/youth-Participation)



# Barriers of Participation

These may include:

- The gatekeepers of the information (carers or staff) may forget to inform young people of opportunities or think they are not interested.
- Staff or foster carers do not understand about Participation themselves so are unable to effect support or encourage young people to engage.
- Staff or carers have poor computer or digital literacy.
- Challenges of distance and travel.
- Staff or carers' fear of criticism, change or losing control.
- Feelings that adults know best.
- Apathy – what is the point nothing ever changes?
- Communication barriers such as language and cultural differences.
- Changes taking too long or not being visible.
- An experience of being over promised or being given levels of control that are unachievable.
- It is a bolt-on to someone's job.
- Not enough protected time for someone to carry out role meaningfully.
- No one with clear role or responsibility to deliver outcomes set within the plan.



Credit: [www.researchgate.net/figure/Treseders-1997-Degrees-of-Participation-Save-the-Children\\_fig2\\_321783095](http://www.researchgate.net/figure/Treseders-1997-Degrees-of-Participation-Save-the-Children_fig2_321783095)

# Why is Participation important?

It is a young person's right to be involved in decisions that affect them.

It is the responsibility of anyone who works with young people to ensure they are supported and encouraged to understand, explore and exercise their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Almost all of the United Nations members, including the UK, have signed up to this.

The UNCRC sets out 52 rules that many countries use to promote young people's involvement. These are the most important regarding Participation:

- **Article 12:** Children and young people have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions considered.
- **Article 13:** Children and young people have the right to get and to share information, as long as the information is not damaging to them or others.
- **Article 23:** Disabled children and young people have the right to active Participation in their community.

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering also say:

- Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care; are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases; and know how to obtain support and make a complaint.
- The views of the child, the child's family, social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer are sought regularly on the child's care (unless in individual cases where this is not appropriate).
- The wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service.

## Benefits for young people

Participation is important because it gives them an opportunity to have a say about issues and decisions that affect them, learn new skills, have fun and develop a closer connection to their organisation and community. As a result, programmes and services created for children will better reflect their needs.

Consulting young people before we make decisions helps us make sure we are getting things right. It may not always be possible to get the young person's exact choice, but we need to make sure we are creating opportunities for them to become involved, offering a level of control that suits their situation, age and level of maturity.

This type of Participation can happen with their care and education plans, within the home, school, the organisation and the external services young people use - on a local, regional, national or international level.

Participation supports young people's personal, social and political development, offering practical experience and the chance to learn how to exercise responsibility. It enables them to:

- Have a say over their own care planning (which is essential in reducing risk).
- Increase their connection and involvement in the organisation and the care experienced community.
- Acquire and expand skills that can be used in future employment and their lives, including problem-solving, negotiation and communication.
- Experience the democratic process, including understanding different points of view, the need for compromise and a sense of responsibility for group decisions.
- Protect themselves and challenge abuses of their rights.



#### Benefits for organisations

- Enables better policies for young people.
- Identifies priorities for young people.
- Encourages young people to offer different perspectives and fresh ideas.
- Helps exceed expectations set within the National Minimum standards
- Helps meet equality requirements.
- Enhances organisational credibility and reputation.

#### Benefits to the community

- Gives young people with care experience a visible platform within society to ensure their voices are heard.
- Increases the visibility of care experience issues, ensuring that they are given greater weight in economic, social and political agendas.
- Strengthens young people's ability to hold organisations, institutions, and governments to account.





# Participation practice in Five Rivers Child Care Family

## Five Rivers' Participation Aims

1. To establish and maintain a culture of Participation within the organisation.
2. To adopt the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.
3. To have access to the views of young people about service development with a range of tools and resources for consultation.
4. To ensure young people are aware of opportunities to participate.
5. To make sure that young people understand the benefits of Participation.
6. To use fun and individualised strategies to engage young people in projects including recruitment and induction of staff, policy development, service development, staff training, young people training, communications, research and evaluation, using ways that best suits them.
7. To ensure all staff, carers and teachers working with young people have the necessary skills and understanding of Participation practice to allow young people to take part effectively.
8. To adhere to the goals set out in our RESPECT Participation Plan

## Who is responsible for delivering Participation work with young people in Five Rivers?

Participation is everyone's responsibility. It features in the job description of many of the frontline workers, and in the handbooks of foster carers and staff. Participation is part of our ongoing training for staff and carers. Young people are involved in the recruitment, selection, induction and appraisal of key staff and in reviewing the service they receive.

However, within each team there is an especially appointed and trained staff member called a 'Participation Champion'. They have a particular set of roles and responsibilities to deliver, drive and evaluate the Participation practice and evidence within their area. You can find these roles and responsibilities in the appendices.

## What if a young person does not want to get involved?

It is a young person's right to participate. It is also a young person's right to NOT want to participate.

It is fine for the young person to choose not to participate if staff can honestly say that they have done everything in their power, to support them to:

- understand what Participation is,
- understand how they can participate
- enjoy themselves and have FUN
- join the activity at a suitable time and place

Young people who have been exploited, abused or neglected carry the experience of their views, wishes and feelings not having been considered. This impacts their self-belief and trust in adults. Therefore, consistently asking for feedback and engagement could begin to help shift this.



### Establish and maintain Participation practice in Five Rivers

There is a National Participation Lead. This person will help you to identify how good you are at Participation practice and advise you on which level of plan suits you.

There are two levels of Participation practice:

1. Establishing Participation practice
2. Maintaining Participation practice

These plans will require organisational change, but will ensure that it is not just an on-off activity, but an embedded culture.

### How do we allow young people to influence the Participation plan?

- **Regional Youth Councils** | Regional Youth Councils for homes, schools or regions take place in April. These give young people a chance to get together and talk about the issues they are experiencing and to suggest solutions. These issues get taken to the National Youth Council by a local representative.
- **The National Youth Council** | This takes place in the Spring half-term holiday at the end of May. In this meeting, representatives meet and talk about issues affecting them and they suggest projects that would help solve these problems. They then meet directly with the Boards of Directors and discuss these issues and project proposals with them.

Once the National Youth Council receive approval for the projects, the champion will include the project goals in the Participation Plan for the coming year, complete with a date and name of who is responsible for ensuring it happens. The Participation Champion will also work with the local manager to include any projects that have arisen as the result of information shared at the Regional Youth Council or local meetings.

### How does the whole organisation work together?

It is essential that the National Participation Lead has been informed of any new projects and has authorised their go-ahead. This is to ensure that we are not duplicating work being undertaken elsewhere in the organisation, it is in line with organisational plans and procedures and the project does not require any therapeutic supervision.

The Participation plan is dynamic and can be updated to include a project that has spontaneously arisen from young people as a result of information, conversation, feedback or dialogue with staff, carers etc.

“The Participation plan is dynamic and can be updated to include a project that has spontaneously arisen from young people as a result of information, conversation, feedback or dialogue with staff and carers”

### How to we review our progress?

In December, at the six-month halfway point, the champion will review progress and report back to the National Participation adviser to make sure everyone is on track and things are ready for any potential inspections, accreditation or review.

### External review, assessment, accreditation, and inspection – how to get ready

After every Participation activity, workers must fill in a Participation record and include a young person's evaluation of the event. You must then save this in your office Participation file.

When you have inspections such as Ofsted and Investing in Children, this file must be made available. Unless you have evidence to support actions or activities taking place, it will not be taken seriously by an external inspector or accreditor. Investing In Children carry out their accreditation once a year. It is the champion's responsibility to get ready for this accreditation.

### Sharing and celebrating young people's Participation publicly

In the office, you will have a Participation section on the notice board. This is a place where you can actively celebrate what has changed as a result of young people's Participation and is a visible commitment of your work. Keep this up to date and looking smart. Share our success and examples of change through our internal newsletters, website and social media channels. Remember that our Communications Team can help you to share any Participation stories or successes.



# Appendices and useful links

## Role and Expectations of Participation Champion

In line with Five Rivers Child Care Family, organisational focus and vision 'to become leaders in Participation', part of your job role and our expectations of you, will require the following responsibilities:

### Uphold Participation values and beliefs

- To always uphold the rights of the child and ensure that any work carried out is in line with the UNCRC.
- To be creative in the ways that you involve young people within your team.
- Champion Five Rivers and Partners' commitment to Participation - meeting standards as set out in our RESPECT Participation Plan.
- To assist Five Rivers and Partners to become leaders in excellent Participation practice within our sector.

### Responsibility to young people

- To ensure that every young person has the same access to information and opportunity to take part.
- To ensure that young people have timely responses and answers to questions from managers and staff as appropriate.
- To identify training needs of young people, and staff within the area of Participation.

### Commitment to the Participation plan

- Be able to demonstrate a commitment to the Participation plan.
- To ensure that the RESPECT Participation Goals are being met, as set out in the Participation plan.

## Form part of the Participation team and networks

- To assist the Registered Manager and Participation to inspire and motivate staff and young people in all aspects of Participation.
- To be the key contact for Participation within your team and with the Participation lead.
- To keep up to date with the various Participation projects ongoing within the company, to encourage and motivate young people to take part in ways and at times that suit them.
- To keep up to date with the various Participation projects and news ongoing - locally, regionally, and nationally – and to encourage and motivate young people to take part.
- To ensure that all teams have links with relevant local, regional, and national networks for the Participation of young people.

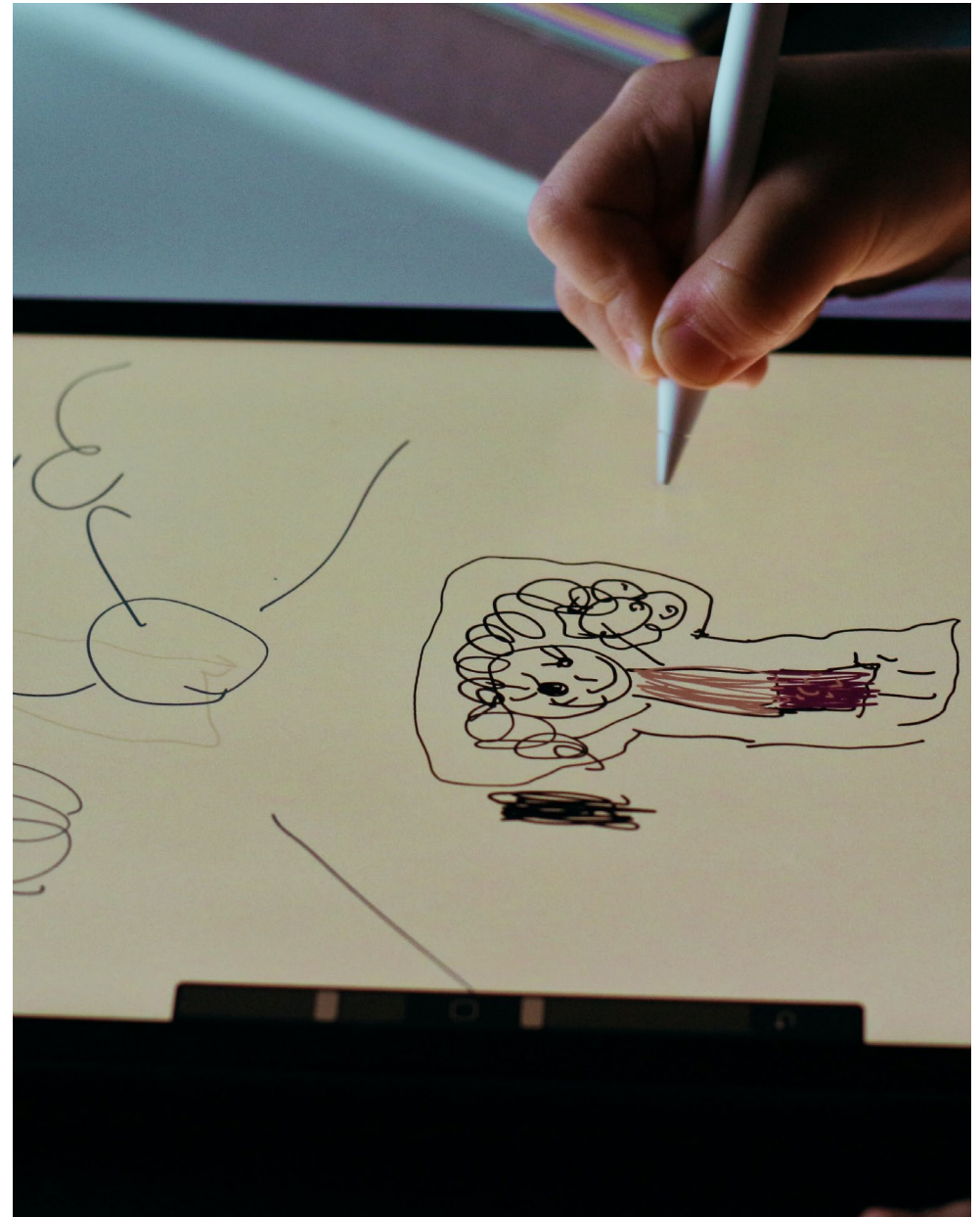
## Maintain good records for inspection

- Record evidence of Participation and consultations to feed into Ofsted and record what has changed because of young people's Participation.

### Formal Participation opportunities

You can find a list of all the formal opportunities here within our 'Children and Young People's Welcome Packs' here [https://issuu.com/fiveriverschildcare/docs/your\\_voice\\_your\\_say\\_4logo\\_issuu\\_3](https://issuu.com/fiveriverschildcare/docs/your_voice_your_say_4logo_issuu_3)

- **Five Riavers website** | <https://five-rivers.org/about-us/participation/>
- **Care 2 Listen** | A podcast with interviews carried out by our young people with a variety of participants, exploring what it means to have care experience.  
<https://soundcloud.com/user-724872833>  
<https://open.spotify.com/show/4duvT30iKNnpOEPsDS7qoe>  
<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/care-to-listen/id1469212795>
- **Five Rivers Child Care Vimeo Channel** | A video library of projects created by young people responding to and exploring topics raised within the National and Regional Youth Councils <https://vimeo.com/5riverschildcare>
- **Five Rivers Child Care ISSUU Welcome Packs** | A collection of resources to help support young people to settle in placement and access information.  
<https://issuu.com/fiveriverschildcare/stacks/4260361f47ca4bf6bac3714405cd4322>
- **Five Rivers Child Care ISSUU Creative Resources** | A collections of audio digital books made by young people. These resources celebrate young people's creativity and are a way of sharing views feeling and experiences in the hope that it will support and encourage others. Many pieces of work include audio and film within the books.  
<https://issuu.com/fiveriverschildcare/stacks/f970558154d4498a8761940307361e4a>
- **Five Rivers Child Care ISSUU Sons and Daughters handbook** | Two handbooks and a film made by sons and daughters of fostering families. It is designed to be read by other sons and daughters and is a celebration of their role in the lives of children who are fostered.  
<https://issuu.com/fiveriverschildcare/stacks/bea23ae9393d485a84f5849e3af1a7a7>







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