

# Engaging Younger People to Participate!

## (TPAS Cymru Plain and Simple Leaflets)

Engaging younger tenants to 'get involved' remains an ongoing challenge when it comes to tenant participation. When they are successfully engaged young people bring a unique viewpoint, in depth local knowledge and plenty of fresh ideas and creativity. This can hugely benefit the communities they live in and improve service provision. It is good practice to involve ALL tenants and get their voices heard; therefore more young people **MUST** be involved through effective practice and participation methods.

### **A Change of Mindset**

It can be easy to assume a lack of previous involvement by younger people is due to a general lack of interest or motivation on their part. It is a common myth that all young people are uninterested in being involved in the decisions that affect them, their families and communities. This assumption is one of the biggest barriers to overcome if organisations are to successfully engage with them.

It is crucial to develop a '**young person friendly**' culture throughout your organisation that challenges the assumption that young people don't want to get involved. If positive attitudes aren't established then a relationship of trust between young people and the organisation cannot be expected to develop. This trust is fundamental to fostering the successful and long lasting participation of younger people.

### **Just some of the advantages to be gained by successfully involving younger tenants:**

#### **Benefits to young tenants and the community:**

Being listened to and valued can help increase self-esteem and confidence for young people.

Participation can offer practical experience and contribute to a young person's personal and social development.

Getting involved can bring younger tenants in contact with others living in their community and help relieve loneliness and isolation.

The more opportunities there are for young people to be involved, the more likely they are to become more active members in their wider communities and remain involved as they get older.

Involving young people can challenge the stereotypes that a community might have about them, foster better relationships and contribute to community cohesion.

### **Benefits to landlords:**

Young people have a unique perspective on the services they receive. By listening to what they have to say, the way in which services are delivered and developed can be changed and improved.

Developing an effective relationship of trust with young tenants will benefit the organisation for years to come. They are the tenants and community members of the future after all and may continue to be involved in positive ways at a later age.

Effective engagement of younger tenants can contribute to decreased complaints of anti-social behaviour.

**Removing barriers.** We can't expect young people to get involved if we don't remove the 'barriers' that will affect their ability or willingness to participate. It is good practice to assess your current Tenant Participation services as well as new services in development to highlight and identify potential barriers that will make it more difficult for younger tenants to be involved. This could include unsuitable timings and venues, literature/information being conveyed in an unsuitable way and/or a lack of flexible options and ways for them to participate.

**Use social media effectively.** The majority of young people have social media and use it every day. Many young people are uncomfortable dealing with staff in person or over the phone and social media removes that barrier. Research has shown young people engage more with pictures, videos and short posts so it's worth thinking about how information could be displayed differently. **Helpful fact:** *More young people use Facebook than Twitter.*

**What's the reward?!** Young people are more likely to get involved if they can see the immediate benefit. They need to see '**what's in it for me?**' and may not see the long term rewards that older tenants recognise from being involved. Therefore, it should be made clear what they will get out of participating, whether it's a reward incentive of a voucher or the chance to gain a new skill/experience to add to their CV. There are plenty of ways to '**hook**' them in so be creative!

**Work with others!** Identify where existing groups and activities exist and link with other organisations that are already engaging with young people well. They may already be doing something with younger people that you can support and /or get involved with. Make the most of the tenants, community members and organisations you have already engaged well with as they can be a key tool to help you '**spread the word!**'

**Flexibility!** It needs to be easy for young people to be involved. Being flexible with timings and venues to accommodate the needs of young people is often not enough. You should take activities to them and provide opportunities for

them to be involved as little or as often as they want to. It is also important that participation doesn't become a condition of access to youth services and fun activities.

**Feedback!** Giving feedback is essential for the continued involvement of young people. It shows the difference that they have made by participating and consequently makes the participation more meaningful and helps them gain a sense of pride. **Note:** It is also important to let young people know if changes can't be made and why.

**Keep it fun!** They won't come back if it's not fun so be creative in the methods you use. Using Informal methods is likely to be more engaging and enjoyable than more 'traditional' methods. However this doesn't mean young people can't be involved in 'traditional' methods of participation if these are planned correctly.

## Case Studies

Ty Cyfle is a unique transition housing project aimed at addressing the issue of failing tenancies of young people and the cycle of youth homelessness. Ty Cyfle has become well known in the Welsh housing sector as example of effectively engaging with young people to achieve excellent outcomes. The project showed understanding of participation as a process, especially when working with young people and, in this case, young people with chaotic lifestyles and complex needs.

The project staff successfully worked in partnership with Afon Youth Forum (a diverse group of young people who have first-hand experience of the problems they hoped to solve). Time and effort was put into building trust and developing strong relationships with the young people they were working with. They wanted the agenda to be based on what the young people wanted.

This was evident throughout the entire project, the young people were involved in every step of the development, including working in collaboration with the professional designers on decisions on the layout, fixtures and fittings and decor. Previously unemployed people even worked on the building of the site.

They completed an accredited employability qualification 'trade that works' which contributed to 40% going into employment. The project was a huge success, achieving impressive outcomes, including 100% tenancy sustainability within the first year, with no rent or ASB issues. This was compared to previous figures of 61% of housing placements for young people breaking down.

## Need assistance developing your Young Persons' Participation Strategy?

TPAS Cymru is developing a comprehensive package to support the development of your participation including assessment of current practice, information, training and monitoring.

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