Participation Strategy for Children, Young People & their Families

Contents

1.   Introduction

Circle

1.1   The charity has the general aim of promoting the social inclusion of families with children marginalised by poverty and discrimination. The charity's purpose is to improve the lives of children by strengthening families.

1.2   Our objectives are:

☐ To protect and promote the best interests of children
☐ To develop and strengthen the skills and resourcefulness of families in caring for their children.
☐ To support marginalised families with children to develop a self-supporting and effective family life
☐ To provide holistic and preventative services
☐ To establish locally based, effective, accessible and flexible services
☐ To work in partnership with other agencies to promote integrated services
☐ To support the development of the future social care workforce
☐ To develop and disseminate good practice to influence policy and practice
☐ To prevent school exclusion and improve the relationship between families and schools.

1.3   To do this we provide a range of family support services that take a strength based and solution focussed approach and focus on:

☐ Families with children affected by parental drug and alcohol use
☐ Families with children affected by parental imprisonment
☐ Families with children looked after by kinship carers as a result of the above
☐ Families with children at risk of school exclusion and parents who find it difficult to engage with school
☐ Fathers in their role as parents

1.4   The strategies employed to achieve the charity's objectives are:

☐ To provide preventative and intensive family support services
☐ Work closely with schools and other agencies.
☐ Early years work - to promote the best possible start in life.
☐ Provide student placements.
☐ Workforce development and post qualifying learning opportunities
☐ Practitioner research and the dissemination of good practice.

1.5   Circle has lengthy experience of providing support to vulnerable families through locally based accessible services. Family support in this context is not limited to a single 'programme' or model of intervention but is underpinned by a strengths based philosophy and a systemic, solution focussed approach. This underpinning supports a commitment to the active participation of children, young people and their families.

Context for participation

1.6   Under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children and young people have the right to express their views, and for these to be respected by adults when making decisions on matters that affect them.

1.7   The UNCRC is enshrined in the Children Scotland Act 1995 and will be further supported by the Children and Young Persons Bill. It is also embedded in the Scottish Government's key policy Getting it Right for Every Child.

1.8   A core component of getting it right for every child is recognising the integral role for children, young people and families in assessment, planning and intervention. The key principles include:

-   '**Putting the child at the centre** - Children and young people should have their views listened to and they should be involved in decisions that affect them',

-   '**Building on strengths and promoting resilience** - Using a child or young person's existing networks and support where possible',

-   '**Supporting informed choice** - Supporting children, young people and families in understanding what help is possible and what their choices may be' and

-   '**Working in partnership with families** - Supporting, wherever possible, those who know the child or young person well, know what they need, what works well for them and what might be less helpful'.

1.9   Participation is seen as key to the wellbeing of children and specifically the SHANARRI indicators 'respected', 'responsible' and 'included'.

1.10   The national parenting strategy also emphasises the need to ensure that families are involved in decisions that affect them.
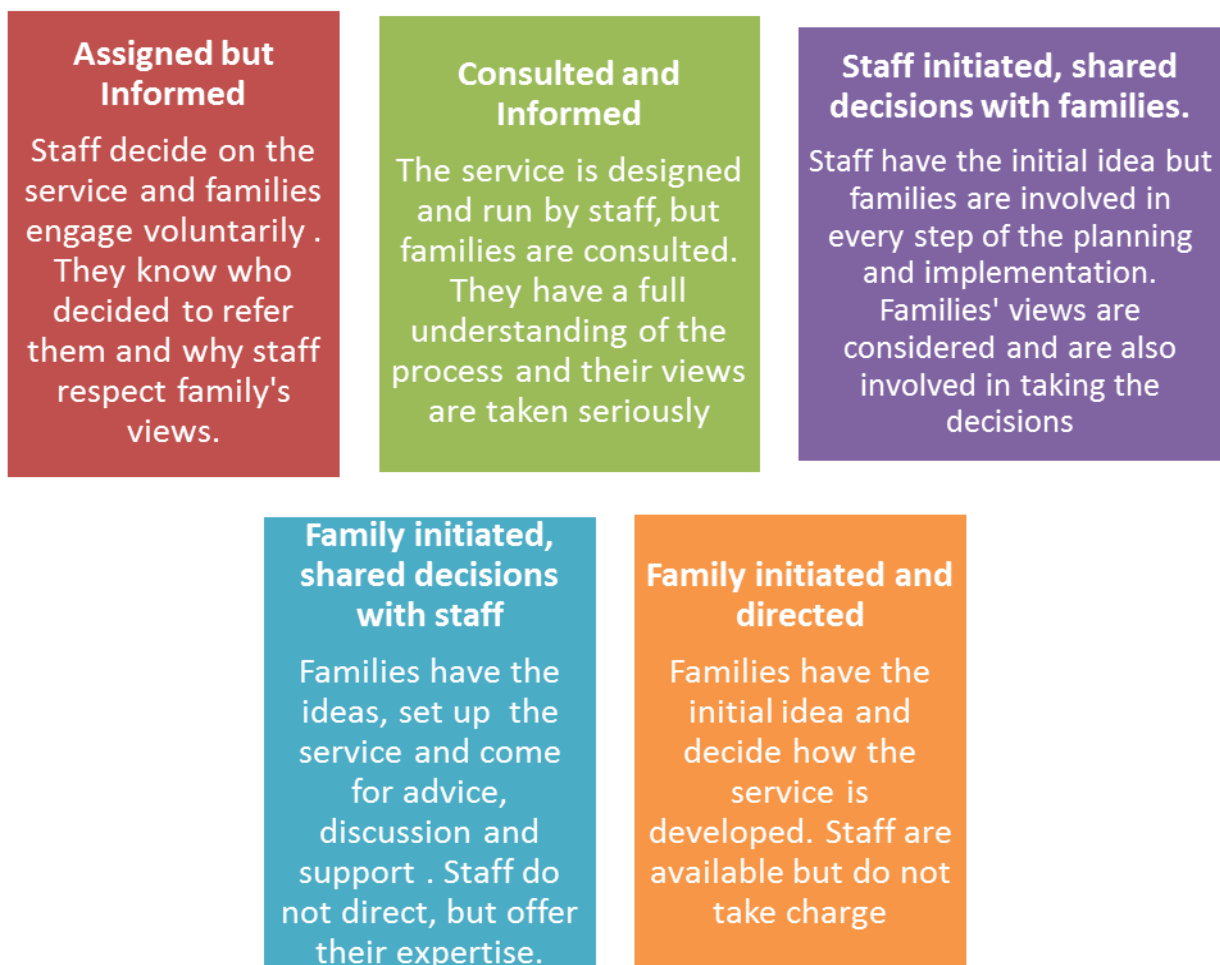
2. What is Participation?

"A process not an event and empowerment the outcome" (Crowley 2002)

2.1   Participation literally means 'taking part'. The term is now used to describe many different relationships and degrees of participative activity. There are a number of attempts to describe the different levels or degrees of participation but it is important to note that the 'top' level may not be appropriate for all contexts.

2.3   Our service users often have little to do with the organisation outside the individual family support worker. While appropriate for the family to be participative in making decisions about the work undertaken by the family support worker, they may have little interest in broader organisational decisions, even if they do affect them. In this context we must consider one of the *seven golden rules* of participation outlined by the SCCYP – "Remember – it's my choice".

2.4   The 'levels' of participation should be used to understand the participative opportunities available to our service users. Treseder's (1997) diagram below is adapted to consider the varying 'degrees' of family participation.

Assigned but Informed

Staff decide on the service and families engage voluntarily . They know who decided to refer them and why staff respect family's views.

Consulted and Informed

The service is designed and run by staff, but families are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their views are taken seriously

Staff initiated, shared decisions with families.

Staff have the initial idea but families are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Families' views are considered and are also involved in taking the decisions

Family initiated, shared decisions with staff

Families have the ideas, set up the service and come for advice, discussion and support . Staff do not direct, but offer their expertise.

Family initiated and directed

Families have the initial idea and decide how the service is developed. Staff are available but do not take charge

Treseder, P. (1997) Empowering children and young people training manual: promoting involvement in decisions-making. Save the Children.

3. Why is Participation important?

3.1 Participation of families in our work is central to our ability to develop effective services and achieve better outcomes for children young people and their families. The potential benefits of participation (as outlined below) are a good enough answer to the question 'why is it important?'

3.2 Benefits for children, young people and their families include:

• They feel respected and listened to; and learn to listen respectfully to others, helping everyone to get on better;
• Can build their self-confidence and self esteem;
• They feel that they have an opportunity to play an active part in their community; and can make a difference to their own lives and others;
• They feel more motivated and achieve more;
• Less bullying;
• They can gain new skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, negotiation, listening, communication and feedback;
• They are likely to feel more involved in group and democratic processes, and will have a better understanding of the society in which they live;
• Improved services that meet their needs.

3.3 Benefits for Organisations include:

• Services and policies designed, delivered and evaluated based on identified needs of children, young people and their families;
• Improved behaviour and enhanced relationships;
• Better targeting of resources;
• More effective services and improved outcomes;
• Enhanced credibility and reputation;
• Better safeguarding;
• Better quality and more inclusive decision-making;
• Increased capacity and sustainability.

3.4 Benefits to the Community include:

• Enhanced relationships between children and young people and other community members;
• Healthier children and young people;
• Better designed facilities for children, young people and their families;
• Less vandalism;
• Less bullying;
• Reduced anti-social behaviour and crime-levels;
• Improves social networks and increases community cooperation.

4.   Developing this strategy

4.1   This strategy has been developed in consultation with service users and circle staff. It has been developed with reference to existing literature, research and practice. What has been highlighted in the consultation process are the things individual projects already do to promote participation. It has also highlighted the differences between projects and initiatives which affect how participation is achieved.

What we already do

4.2   Significantly, services that Circle provide have been developed as a direct consequence of feedback from service users. Specifically the Families Affected By Imprisonment (FABI) service is a good example where the needs for this support was identified by families involved with Circle.

4.3   The involvement of service users in developing their own care plans is firmly embedded and underpinned by the 'solution focussed' approach which practitioners use in their work. Service users identify the issues they would like to work on and tell us what they will do and what support they want from others.

4.4   The participative instinct is also apparent in any group work delivered by Circle projects where the initial organisation and establishment of the group is routinely the development of an idea from service users. When established the groups are continued in collaboration with group members and there are examples where these groups have become the responsibility of service users.

4.5   The participation of service users at a broader project and organisational level is more ad-hoc and opportunistic. Staff encourage service users to take part when opportunities arise but there are few decision making systems which explicitly outline how the service users voice will be heard. Equally the review of relevant specific policy, procedure and practice does not routinely involve the participation of service users.

4.6   Opportunities for feedback are formally in place both through the care planning processes and the annual review of projects. Service users are also routinely involved in providing feedback on our services to others, including those who fund our services.

4.7   From the accounts of staff we can suggest that giving service users the opportunity to have their voice heard in Circle clearly has an impact on their ability to have their voice heard in other areas of their life e.g. in their community and nationally.

What service users want

4.8   Using the consultation with staff and the ideas this generated we came up with a list of activities service users could be involved in. We then produced a one page questionnaire which simply asked service users what they would like to be involved in. Fifty six service users completed the survey and the results are listed below.

4.9   It is important to note that there are a number of these activities which are already embedded as participative activities within circle (e.g. the views of service users are central to any support plan and production of the annual reports includes a concerted effort to get feedback from families), this therefore reaffirm this practice.

4.10   In addition to maintaining the things we already do well, the actions identified in the plan for 2014 will target those activities (identified by the majority of service users completing the questionnaire) as the kind of things they would like to get involved in e.g. nearly 70% of respondents would like to tell us what they expect from a family support worker and 53% wanted to help us update the information we give to families.

4.11   Whilst not receiving an overwhelming interest in certain aspects (e.g. staff development), there will be opportunities to target other participation opportunities at specific service users.

Total (56)			
I would like to……………	Yes	No	Maybe
…agree the support plan for my family	47	1	4
…tell Circle what I think about the service they have provided	46	5	4
…provide feedback on the staff who work with my family	44	10	2
…talk to others (e.g.researchers) about my experience of Circle	40	12	3
…tell Circle what I expect from my family support worker	39	9	5
…plan events and activities	30	16	8
…provide feedback electronically e.g. by email or text	29	14	12
…help to update the information Circle give to families e.g. leaflets, web pages	29	15	9
…represent Circle at events	27	20	7
…attend meetings to give feedback to senior staff and board members	26	20	10
…plan the work of the project e.g. group work programmes	25	21	11
…be involved in funding applications	24	12	10
…suggest and develop my own ideas for support e.g. support groups, coffee mornings	24	20	12
…help to develop policies and procedures for Circle e.g. positive behaviour	23	19	10
…help choose the staff who work for Circle	16	26	11
…help train the staff who work for Circle	16	30	8

5. Our vision and aims for participation

5.1 Vision

Children and their families are empowered to have their voice heard and will be listened to when decisions which affect them are to be made.

5.2 Aims

- To maintain and support a positive participative culture

- To involve service users in the planning, design and development of our services

- To enable all service users to participate as fully as possible at all levels

- To evidence the active participation of children, young people and families

5.3 To meet these aims we will:

- ✓ Consult with service users on participation

- ✓ improve the information we provide for staff and service users

- ✓ increase the opportunities for service users to give feedback

- ✓ provide other opportunities for children, young people and families to take part

- ✓ ask all projects to report annually on participation

6.   Implementation

6.1   All participative activity will require sensible, effective planning and the practical issues involved will need to be taken into account.

6.2   Actions for 2014

- ✓ Work with service users to develop a 'family support worker profile'

- ✓ Review web pages and leaflets in partnership with service users

- ✓ Add participation strategy to policies and procedures

- ✓ Include participation strategy information in the employee handbook

- ✓ Further develop 'electronic' opportunities for getting feedback

- ✓ Include a question about participation in service user evaluation forms

- ✓ List and communicate participative opportunities for service users in each project

- ✓ Consider service user feedback as part of formal staff appraisal

- ✓ Include section on participation in all project annual reports reporting on outcomes below.

6.3   Outcomes and indicators

Outcome 1

Service users have a confidence in having their voice heard, are actively involved in their communities and feel that their views are respected and listened to.

> Indicators   -   Positive involvement in Circle
> Service users supported by Circle staff to take part in other developments outside circle
> Service users self-report positive participation
> Service users self-report confidence in having their voice heard

Outcome 2

Circle staff have a good understanding of the importance of participation and are effective in empowering children, young people and families to 'take part'.

> Indicators   -   Recorded in case notes
> Reflected on in supervision
> Reported in individual project annual reports

Participation Action Plan   Date:

Action	Steps	Person Responsible	Date to complete	Comments
Work with service users to develop a 'family support worker profile'				
Review web pages and leaflets in partnership with service users				
Include participation strategy in the employee handbook				
Further develop 'electronic' opportunities for getting feedback				
Include a question about participation in service user evaluation forms				
List and communicate participative opportunities for service users in each project				
Consider service user feedback as part of formal staff appraisal				
Include section on participation in all project annual reports reporting on outcomes below.				