



“When I first got involved with Circle it looked like there was only a few options there, but the more you are involved, the more doors open and it kind of built on top of itself.”

(Parent)



Participation Strategy for Children, Young People & their Families

“Too many people see the world/goals/aspirations as the ladder on the right. Every step is just out of reach, making the climb a struggle, or worse, impossible.

If we could just empower people to realise that all they need to do is create more steps and we may all achieve reaching the stars.”

(Bryan, Full Circle Group 2021)



When you see this icon throughout the strategy, it indicates direct input from families.

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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 reduce 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 strengths-based and solution focussed approach and focus on:
- Families with children affected by parental substance use.
 - Families with children affected by parental imprisonment.
 - Families with children at risk of school exclusion.
 - Families with very young children and who need additional support.
 - Pregnant mothers affected by substance use.
 - Fathers in their role as parents.
 - Young people who are using substances.
- 1.4** The strategies employed to achieve the charity's objectives are:
- Providing preventative and intensive family support services.
 - Working closely with schools and other agencies.
 - Promoting the best possible start in life – early years work.
 - Providing student placements.
 - Developing our workforce and providing post qualifying learning opportunities.
 - Undertaking practitioner research and the dissemination of good practice.
- 1.5** Circle has lengthy experience of providing locally based accessible services for under-supported families. Whole 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 on March 16th 2021, the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill passed the Scottish Parliament, meaning that the Convention will become a part of Scots law. 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',
 - **'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 a key contributing factor 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.
- 1.11** In October 2016, the First Minister made a commitment that Scotland would "come together and love its most vulnerable children to give them the childhood they deserve." She announced an Independent Root and Branch Review of Care ("the Care Review"), driven by those with experience of care.


The Care Review carefully listened, for over three years, to thousands (5,500) of infants, children, young people and families, many of whom did not feel loved, were not kept safe, were not respected, and were not supported to achieve their potential.


On 5th February 2020, Scotland listened to the Care Review conclusions and all political parties in Scotland promised to implement them in full.¹


¹ www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Promise.pdf


In February 2020, The Promise outlined the five foundations on which the work of change must be grounded:

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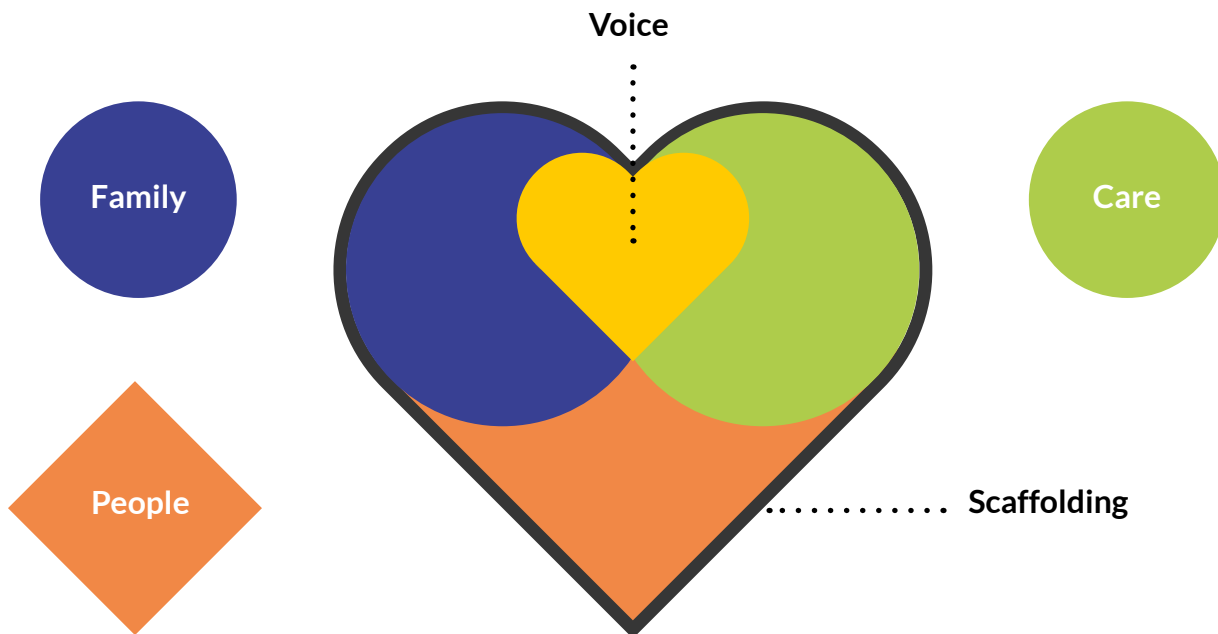
Voice: Children must be listened to, and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care, with all those involved properly listening and responding to what children want and need. There must be a compassionate, caring decision-making culture focused on children and those they trust.
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Family: Where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way.
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Care: Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed.
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People: The children that Scotland care for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community, who in turn must be supported to listen and be compassionate in their decision-making and care.
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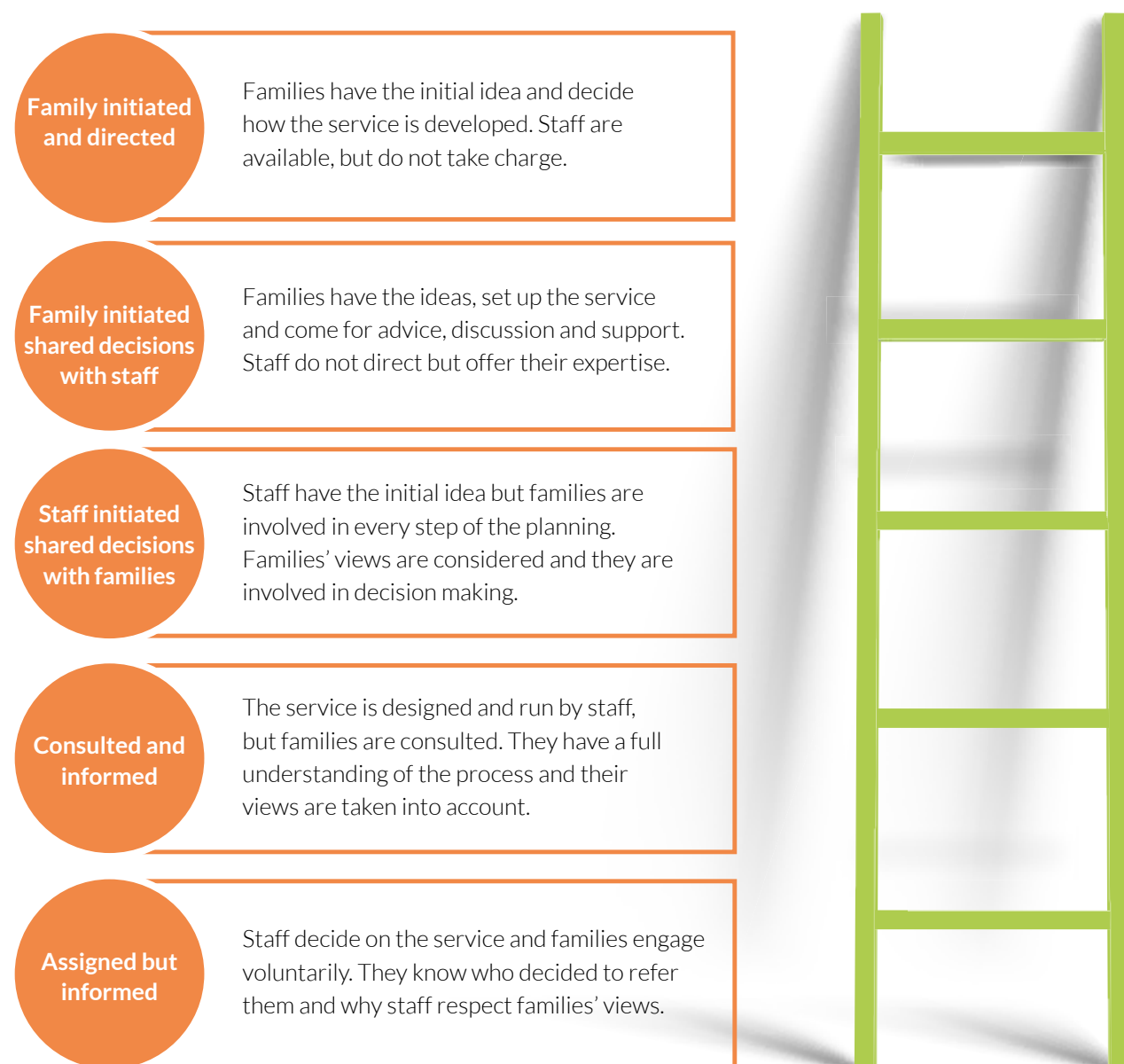
Scaffolding: Children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when it is needed. The scaffolding of help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.



2. What is Participation?

“Being involved gives you a better sense of understanding. You have the opportunity to be part of a solution and not always be seen as the problem.”

- 2.3 Our families often have little to do with the organisation outside the individual family outreach worker. While appropriate for the family to be participative in making decisions about the work undertaken by the family outreach 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 rules² of participation outlined by the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS) – “Remember – it’s my choice”.
- 2.4 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. The ‘levels’ of participation should be used to understand the participative opportunities available to our families. Treseder’s (1997)³ diagram below is adapted to consider the varying ‘degrees’ of family participation.



² cypcs.org.uk/get-help/i-work-with-younger-people/golden-rules/

³ Treseder, P. (1997) Empowering children and young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision-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:



4. Developing this Strategy

4.1 This strategy has been developed in consultation with families accessing Circle services and Circle staff. It has been developed with reference to existing literature, research and practice.

Our “Full Circle” group, made up of parents, have had full sight of the strategy and its development. Below are some key themes that they have identified and are included in the vision and aims of this strategy (see Section 5):

What is participation?



- It's about being included
- It reduces social isolation
- It's a choice – it's ok to say “no” ...but understand why you are saying no
- It's ok to feel overwhelmed, take a break, and come back in
- Taking pride in the organisation
- Putting something into the organisation, “giving back”
- Being a part of groups with other people who have similar experiences
- It is being informed and being kept informed
- All opinions are valid

What participation is not...



- Isolating people
- Not engaging with the process
- Keeping things to yourself and not speaking up
- Going through the motions
- Being forced to take part
- Feeling overwhelmed and then being excluded
- Coercion and manipulation

Benefits?



- It can be scary to begin with, but it's worth it
- Reduced social isolation
- Builds confidence to step outside your front door
- Builds confidence to step out of your comfort zone
- Gives a sense of understanding
- You can be part of the solution and not seen as the problem
- People mentor each other
- You have peer support
- Helps you to develop social and personal boundaries
- Develops respect for diversity
- Develops respect for different levels of maturity
- Learn to make informed choices
- Shows what you can possibly do instead of fearing what can go wrong

5. Our Vision and Aims for Participation – developed with our families

5.1 Vision

Children and their families are empowered to have their voices heard and they will be listened to, and acted on where appropriate, when decisions that affect them are to be made.



Full Circle Group definition of “empowered”: Given the opportunity to use rights and have choice.

5.2 Aims

Children and their families are empowered to have their voices heard and they will be listened to, and acted on where appropriate, when decisions that affect them are to be made.

- **Maintain and support a positive, safe and inclusive participatory environment.**



People can stand and watch or observe, but still be included. The word “culture” was replaced with “environment” as “culture” felt more like “you must take part”.

- **Involve families in the planning, design and development of our services and staff teams.**



The term “service users” replaced with the word “families” as a more inclusive term.
Inclusion of developing staff teams to support the tailoring and fitting of services to families who access them.

- **Provide opportunities for all families to exercise their rights and choice to participate as fully as possible at all levels.**



Added “provide opportunities” and “to exercise their rights and choice”.

- **Evidence the active participation of children, young people and families in partnership with them.**



“Partnership” means “collaboration”. It is about listening to and responding to families and not working from set menus of activity.

- **Increase learning between families through the experience of engaging with participatory activity.**



Added this aim as it is an experienced benefit of participating where families can learn from each other.

- **Enable and evidence increased wellbeing through the experience of engaging with participatory activity.**

5.3 To meet these aims we will

- Create opportunities and mechanisms for families who are supported by our services, to participate in their design, delivery and evaluation.



Changed from “Consult with” to “Create opportunities and mechanisms for”. This will increase involvement and encourage collaboration.

- Improve the family generated “canopy of information” we provide for staff and families by increasing their involvement in participatory activities.



“ We see Circle as the roots that grow the trunk of opportunity. The branches are the people and families involved. The leaves are the knowledge gained, generated and shared. This forms a canopy and a network of information where it can be passed on to other families and Circle staff to begin the cycle all over again. ”

- Maximise the opportunities for families to give feedback, based on lived experience, that will be incorporated into service improvement and utilised to lever an increase in knowledge and understanding at both local and national level.
- Embed empathic, participatory thinking and practice throughout the organisation which includes all stakeholders.



It is so important that this is “empathic thinking”, thinking about families’ experiences and connecting with families’ stories. This needs to be genuine, authentic and reflective.

- Monitor and evaluate all participatory activity across the organisation in partnership with families.
- Endeavour to have representation from families at board level where their voices have equal influence in the management and governance of the organisation.



Let us experience this in a way that helps to build our confidence and allows us to contribute.

- Align the organisational outcomes framework closer to what families are telling us that they need in relation to wellbeing and family strengthening.

6. Participation Action Plan

Action	Steps	People Responsible	Date to complete	Comments
Create opportunities and mechanisms for families who are supported by our services, to participate in their design, delivery and evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a guide to participation with a bank of resources made available via a Microsoft Teams channel. Incorporate participation into team meetings and supervision process. Inclusion of family representatives at project planning days/events. Trial the design of a new service element with families. Family representatives will be included in the evaluation process of services, not only participating in feedback, but also in its analysis and communication. 	<p>Development Manager & Admin</p> <p>Management</p> <p>Management</p> <p>Development Manager</p> <p>Development Manager & Project Managers</p>	<p>End of March 2022</p> <p>April 2022</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p> <p>April 2023</p> <p>April 2022 & 2023</p>	
Improve the family generated “canopy of information” we provide for staff and families by increasing their involvement in participatory activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a “family friendly” summary version of the Participation Strategy. A dedicated participation section on website populated and live. Creation of a family representative communications group with a plan of content for comms throughout the year. Initially content for newsletter with consideration given to wider comms as group develops and grows. 	<p>Development Manager</p> <p>Development Manager & Comms</p> <p>Development Manager & Comms</p>	<p>End of Feb 2022</p> <p>End of March 2022</p> <p>May 2022 for plan, then ongoing.</p>	

Action	Steps	People Responsible	Date to complete	Comments
Maximise opportunities for families to give feedback, based on lived experience, that will be incorporated into service improvement and utilised to lever an increase in knowledge and understanding at both local and national level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial using digital method of providing feedback at annual sweep. • Creation of “Participation Champions” group with representatives from each project. Establish group objectives on creating themed focus groups throughout the year. • Disseminate knowledge via communication platforms. • Re-design annual feedback sweep methods and process based on insights from group activity. • Gather feedback using new design and contribute insights to a new style “Impact Report”. • Identify and link with National research projects/ initiatives and contribute towards these based on insights gathered. 	<p>Development Manager & Admin</p> <p>Development Manager & project reps</p> <p>Development Manager & Comms</p> <p>Development Manager</p> <p>Development Manager</p> <p>Head of Operations Manager & CEO</p>	<p>April 2022</p> <p>June 2022</p> <p>Throughout 2022/23</p> <p>January 2023</p> <p>May 2023</p> <p>Throughout 2022/23</p>	
Embed empathic, participatory thinking and practice throughout the organisation which includes all stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation and related activity reported at management team meetings. • Upskill staff teams and families in codesign methodology and participatory practice. • Upskill staff teams and families in empathic, participatory thinking and practice. • Codesign & develop training programmes/webinars with families to deliver to interested parties. 	<p>Development Manager</p> <p>Development Manager</p> <p>Development Manager</p> <p>Development Manager</p>	<p>Monthly throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Throughout 2023</p>	

Action	Steps	People Responsible	Date to complete	Comments
<p>Monitor and evaluate all participatory activity across the organisation in partnership with families.</p> <p>Endeavour to have representation from families at board level where their voices have equal influence in the management and governance of the organisation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a monitoring & evaluation framework and system with a core family representative group. • Implement framework and system. • Inclusion of family representative/s at board away day. • Inclusion of family representative/s at board meeting/s as an observer. • Identify learning and development opportunities for interested family representatives in management and governance. Utilise existing board members to deliver session/s. 	<p>Development Manager</p> <p>Development Manager</p> <p>CEO</p> <p>CEO</p> <p>Development Manager</p>	<p>November 2022</p> <p>Feb 2023</p> <p>Feb 2022</p> <p>Quarterly?</p> <p>Quarterly/prior to meetings?</p>	
<p>Align the organisational outcomes framework closer to what families are telling us that they need in relation to wellbeing and family strengthening.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with database developers on outcome framework integration using family insights gathered in relation to wellbeing. • Trial usage of framework with 2-3 families & staff teams across all projects. • Make final adjustments to system and implement organisationally. • Sample outcome reports generated. 	<p>Development Manager & management team</p> <p>Project managers & staff</p> <p>Development Manager & management team</p> <p>Development Manager & management team</p>	<p>April 2022</p> <p>October 2022</p> <p>December 2022</p> <p>April 2023</p>	