

# Involving Young People in Conference Planning: **A model for action**



*Changing Our Future – New Directions in Health Services  
for Children and Young People  
Programme of Action for Children 2005*

**Celia Keenaghan and Mary Roche**  
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# Foreword

The health of young people and children is always the focus of our work but something changes when young people join with us in that work. It suggests a different kind of attention. We feel a bit more challenged and make fewer assumptions. There are splashes of colour and spontaneous bursts of energy.

Having taken steps towards young people's involvement in previous years, our national conference in 2005 **Changing Our Future – New Directions in Health Services for Children and Young People** represented a concerted effort at involving young people in planning and delivering a major part of our work.

I want to thank the young people's planning committee at the CRIB, Foróige, Sligo, and each and every young person who gave so willingly of their time, their attention and their energy by coming to the conference or providing their art. To the staff who support them, their parents and carers who trust them and the school staff who release them – a sincere thank you.

This document contains some useful ideas for anyone who wants young people to be involved in planning and developing health services that make a difference to them. For us it is an opportunity to remember the work we did and the fun we had together.

**Dr Sean Denyer**  
**Population Health**

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## Executive Summary

This report captures the lessons learned from the experience of the Programme of Action for Children (PAC) in involving young people in planning and delivering its annual national conference. The decision to involve young people in the 2005 national conference represents an expanding culture of young people's participation within the HSE.

Young people's involvement in planning the conference began early in the planning cycle. A young people's planning group was the key mechanism by which young people were involved. This group was locally based, met regularly and members had the support of their own organisation. They were formally linked with PAC's conference project team and there was openness and transparency in relation to their influence and input. Most of the ideas from the planning group were incorporated into the conference.

Young people were involved in the conference as delegates, presenters, and chairs. It was important to them that they had a significant representation in the audience. Joint work between adults and young people proved successful.

The young people who were invited to attend the conference were young people who are already involved in groups, fora, agencies related to health and youth. It was appropriate to involve young people in a conference of this nature who had the necessary experience and support. Speakers were briefed about the involvement of young people.

An important factor in ensuring the wellbeing and safety of young people attending the conference was the youth friendly venue and the availability of adults to attend with them. The involvement of young people required detailed planning and a dedicated staff and budget.

This approach is only one of many ways in which young people can be involved in health service planning. Positive feedback on the involvement of young people in the conference was received from young people and adults, delegates and presenters. The involvement of young people enhanced the learning experience of many and provided insights into addressing the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

# 1. Introduction

There is sufficient evidence in relation to the usefulness of youth participation to promote it as a principle of the work of the HSE. It is a new and evolving area of work that presents many exciting opportunities and challenges. This report aims to share the lessons learned from the experience of the Programme of Action for Children in involving young people in planning and delivering its annual national conference.

The report examines how and why young people became involved, what impact their involvement had and presents recommendations in relation to good practice.

## 2. Planning Youth Participation

### Background

Since 2001 the Programme of Action for Children [PAC] has hosted an annual national conference on best practice in child and adolescent health. Each year the target audience has been senior managers and practitioners in the planning and delivery of child and adolescent health services, policy makers and academic leaders. The broad aims have been to influence the dissemination of best practice, support evidence based practice and to share knowledge and networks.

The National Children's Strategy *Our Children Their Lives*, 2000 provided an explicit national context for hearing children's voices in matters which affect their lives. With the publication in 2002 of Best Health for Children's second major strategy *Get Connected – Developing an Adolescent Friendly Health Service*, recognition of the need to engage with and involve young people in working towards their health and well-being was placed firmly on PAC's agenda. Youth participation as a concept was gaining general acceptance and was beginning to be addressed in practical terms.

We were convinced that youth participation makes a difference to outcomes as well as to young people themselves. In response to needs expressed by individuals and groups working with young people, PAC organised a workshop *Young People's Participation in Health Service Planning* in May 2004. Young people and adults with experience of youth participation came together to share learning and move forward best practice. The National Children's Office [NCO]<sup>1</sup> was a key advisory and supportive partner in this and subsequent development of conference participation work. From this workshop a planning sub group was formed to work together on involving young people in PAC's national conference later that year.

In January 2004 PAC organised a Masterclass entitled *Taking Participation Seriously* facilitated by Gillian Calvert the Commissioner for Children New South Wales. This was hosted by the North Western Health Board's [NWHB] Children's Services. The event fed our imagination for what could be achieved drawing on the extensive experience of the New South Wales Commission in this area. At the same time PAC was pursuing an internal agenda to challenge and strengthen its culture of participation by facilitating discussions at team meetings, training events, and management workshops. In June 2005 a position paper *Young People's Participation in PAC* which documented PAC's commitment to youth participation was produced.

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<sup>1</sup> Now part of the Office of the Minister for Children

## Building on experience

Young people had been involved in all previous PAC conferences in creative ways such as the commissioning of youth forum theatre and presentations from Young Irish Film Makers. Each year saw this experience being developed. In 2004 PAC worked with project partners to have young people attend the conference and for the first time become active participants and presenters. One of the stated objectives was 'to involve young people in the planning delivery and evaluation of the conference.' 87% of respondents to this conference evaluation thought this objective had been achieved to a good, very good or excellent extent. The decision to involve young people in the 2005 national conference **Changing Our Future – New Directions in Health Services for Children and Young People**, was the culmination of the expanding participation culture within the organisation and work of PAC.

## The vision

As an organisation we had a vision of having young people alongside adult delegates at the conference. We wanted to recognise their right to a voice in matters affecting them. To this end we set out to involve them in planning and participating in an important national event where their health was the subject of discussion and learning. We believed that young people and adults would gain from the experience in terms of new understanding, ideas and perspectives. At the same time we needed to maintain a general target audience of influential adults in child and adolescent health and well-being. We aimed to involve young people appropriately, with honesty as to the opportunities for influencing decision making and in a way that would leave them empowered, respected and feeling they had made a difference. We also needed to ensure they were properly supported.

## Project planning process

In keeping with PAC protocol a project team for the national 2005 conference was put in place by January 2005 with lead people named for:

- Administration and budgets.
- Speakers and conference programming.
- Young people's planning.
- PR and Communications.
- Conference venue and event planning.

Responsibility for the involvement of young people was assigned to a specific PAC team member along with a student intern. The policy of providing placements to student interns, themselves young people, has been an important building block of PAC's participation work. Youth participation was considered a sub-project with its own work breakdown structure. The sub-project aim was to:

- Identify opportunities for young people's meaningful involvement in the conference.
- Identify ways for young people to shape the conference programme.

At every project planning meeting young people's participation was on the agenda. In this way ideas and actions from the young people's planning group were communicated to the overall project and vice versa.

### Lessons Learned in Planning Youth Participation

- Get young people involved in the conference planning process as early as possible.
- Young people are willing to participate at a national conference if they feel part of a group and are visible to each other and to adult delegates. This means sharing the stage and the floor.
- Work with committed partners who understand and are willing to share the costs. These partners are often the ones who can support young people in their own settings.
- Ensure all the target audience have the necessary experience to participate in the conference. We only involved young people who had previous experience working on health and related issues. Other fora for participation need to be used to involve people without this experience.
- To participate fully in a conference, young people need to be targeted, supported and paid for, through their organisations, services or projects.
- Regular face to face contact between organisers and young people directly involved in the conference planning is important. At a national level there are enormous barriers to working on a regular ongoing basis with young people scattered across the country. Issues of accessibility may override geographical representation. Moving the conference around the country each year and working with local groups each time goes some way to addressing this issue. Young people from around the country can be involved in presentations, chairing and as delegates.
- Targeting young people between the ages of 14 and 18 years of age provides the best fit for a conference of this nature.
- Youth participation needs to have a budget in the overall service plan and in the conference project plan. Bursaries need to be made available to enable some groups and organisations to participate and this needs to be built into conference costs.

## The Young People's Planning Group

The conference was hosted in Sligo, based on previous experience we decided to source young people locally for a young people's conference planning group.

A number of people with an interest in participation work were approached such as health promotion officers, school completion personnel and staff in the CRIB, a youth health café and project in Sligo. Other ideas were to contact transition year co-ordinators in local 2nd level schools to explore the feasibility of accessing students who could use the experience as part of their transition year curriculum. The CRIB had a young people's committee in place, which included girls and boys from a variety of schools and early school leavers. This group agreed to take on the young people's conference planning. They were aged 14 to 17yrs approx [also the target age group for participation at the conference]. A staff member from the CRIB, supported the young people through the process and the Foróige Project Manager secured organisational approval and support.

Twelve young people became involved in the group with a consistent core group of seven who moved the work forward. It should be noted that it is a good idea to link in with young people who have good support mechanisms available to them. For example, they need to be engaged with a key person who knows them, has an ongoing relationship with them and will look out for their needs. This might be in



the context of youth activities or health projects. It needs to be negotiated that this support will extend to the new participation activities. Otherwise an alternative plan should be devised by the organisation hosting the conference.

## Box 2

### Key Features of the Young People's Planning Group

- Locally based.
- Supported by youth organisation.
- Formally linked in to conference planning process.
- Clarity as to parameters of influence and input.
- Openness in balancing young people's needs and interests with PAC agenda.
- Transparent administrative process – agenda, minutes, and agreed actions.
- Met in a youth friendly venue with snacks available.
- Suited the young people's schedules.
- Used mobile phone text for regular reminders.

The first meeting took place in early March 2005 and we set the scene with a discussion on adolescent health issues to establish a context for what was to follow. All meetings were organised and documented similarly (PAC undertook the administration and funding of meetings) and kicked off with food. Again experience in working with young people has taught us that it is useful to provide snacks, particularly after school. The CRIB provided a youth friendly venue with good kitchen facilities that the young people were familiar with. Planning group meetings became a regular event (3 to 4 weekly intervals) and as the ideas emerged and took life, other young people became involved along the way. In time we moved to evening meetings to fit in better with their agenda. Regular meetings allowed a relationship to be built up between the adults and young people. Seeing their ideas taken seriously being acted on and becoming tangible was important to them. Forward planning with young people needs patience and text messages to mobile phones were a useful way to communicate and send reminders of upcoming meetings and events. Young people have significant demands on their time – school, extracurricular activities, homework, holding down part time jobs, meeting the demands of family, friends and interest groups and generally becoming themselves. It is easy to underestimate this.

**Figure 1. Time Line of Young People's Participation in the Conference**





### 3. How the young people helped shape the conference

Most of the ideas from the planning group were incorporated into the conference.

Day One of the conference was scheduled as a celebratory day to showcase innovative participatory projects and generally give the young delegates and presenters a high visibility – setting the tone for the conference. It included a launch of SpunOut.ie a national youth health website by young people from Community Creations, and the Guide – the ultimate school journal by HSE NW and young project participants. A hip hop youth dance presentation 'Sligo Street Elite' by St Anne's Youth Centre and friends, captured the energy young people brought to the conference at the end of day one. A member of the planning group designed the flier for the conference and together the group chose and adapted the conference title from a selection provided by the PAC team.

#### **Changing Our Future – New Directions in Health Services for Children and Young People**

Their idea for a film for the conference became a project in its own right. In partnership with the Model Arts and Niland Gallery's education department in Sligo, PAC funded a weeklong summer project where eight young people came together and made two short films with an adolescent health focus. The Model Arts Centre sourced facilitators, technology and the venue for the scriptwriting and film making. The planning group helped us to publicise the film project. Posters inviting participation were strategically placed around town, information was sent to youth groups and an advertisement put in the local paper alerting parents to the opportunity. An entry fee of €15 was agreed with the group as being accessible to families. One of the films succeeded in getting accepted for entry to a new Short Film Festival and the young filmmakers involved presented it as a short paper entitled 'Consequences' at the conference. Some of the young people have become friends of PAC and continue to maintain contact.

The choice of an interactive seminar on mental health and young people was commissioned from the HSE NW Regional Mental Health Promotion Service and run in parallel with adult seminars. Entitled 'I get knocked down but I get up again' it was attended by all the young people at the conference. A key outcome from the seminar was a mental health resiliency pyramid (akin to the 'five portions a day' model) that is being used as a basis for further work by the mental health promotion team HSE NW.

An idea to get younger children imaginatively involved in the conference albeit indirectly, resulted in another project run through PAC where all the primary schools in Sligo were invited to participate in an art competition on the theme of health.



*Conference Flyer designed by Philip Conlon*

All the art was photographed and exhibited electronically. Delegates were invited to take the pictures of their choice in exchange for a charity donation. In this way they could display works of children's art in their offices or use in reports. Winners of the art competition were invited, along with their parents and school principal to a presentation at the end of the opening day of the conference. Examples are used in this report.



*Eva Mulligan aged 5yrs from St Edwards NS, Sligo along with her Mum and Dad, receives an Award for Voices through Art from Frances Spillane, NCO.*

A suggestion for a salsa dancing class for a fun energising activity at the conference to be shared by adults and young people was a great success after proceedings on day two. A dance instructor was sourced through local networks and [salsanation.com](http://salsanation.com) and he suggested offering a Merengue dance class (an easier form of salsa). Total beginners learned some fun Latin dance moves and had a lot of laughs at a 50-minute session before the conference dinner.

Members of the planning group along with the National Children's Office Young People's Forum took on the responsibility for co-chairing each plenary session and attended the conference as delegates [see Box 4 for more on sourcing delegates].

The planning group also took on responsibility for the evening entertainment by suggesting, sourcing and operating DJ decks and DVDs. The disco for young delegates was a highlight and many adults were hooked also. Dancing proved to be a fantastic icebreaker and a simple fun idea which was enjoyed by both adult and young delegates.

*Fergus Finlay (Barnardos) and Catherine Swift (Planning Group) co-chair a conference session with presenter Professor Nick Spencer.*



### Box 3

#### Key conference ideas from the young people's planning group

- Have a significant proportion of young delegates attend [minimum 10%].
- Ensure young people get to present and co- chair.
- Commission St Anne's Youth Centre to showcase their youth dance performance and hold exhibition of their work with youth.
- Design the conference flier.
- Choose a conference title.
- Make a film and show it at the conference.
- Provide an interactive seminar specifically designed for young delegates on the theme of Mental Health.
- Include younger children in the conference indirectly through art.
- Organise a dance class as an energiser.
- Have entertainment for young delegates.
- Invite members of the planning group to attend the conference.

## 4. Elements of the youth involvement in the conference.

### Sourcing young people as delegates

#### Box 4

#### Sources of Youth Health Expertise and Participation in PAC Conference 2005

- Foróige [foroige.ie](http://foroige.ie)
- Dáil na nÓg and Chomhairle na nÓg [dailnanog.ie](http://dailnanog.ie)
- NCO – Children / Young People's Forum [CYPF] [elected from local Comhairle na nÓg] [nco.ie](http://nco.ie)
- SpunOut.ie a national youth health web-site by and for young people [spunout.ie](http://spunout.ie)
- HSE NW
- National Disability Authority [NDA] /People With Disabilities Ireland [PWDI] [nda.ie](http://nda.ie)
- Irish Association for Young People In Care [IAYPIC] [iaypic.ie](http://iaypic.ie)
- National Youth Council of Ireland [NYCI] [youth.ie](http://youth.ie)
- Youth Work Ireland [National Youth Federation] [youthworkireland.ie](http://youthworkireland.ie)
- Ógra Chorcaí
- Young Social Innovators [youngsocialinnovators.ie](http://youngsocialinnovators.ie)
- Sligo Institute of Technology Public Health and Health Promotion Students
- Consumer Panels Project for Children in Care HSE MW
- St Anne's Youth Centre Sligo



PAC had developed a close working relationship with the National Children's Office and an invitation to participate in planning and as delegates to the conference was extended through the office of Head of Communications. Twenty members of their twenty seven member Children and Young People's Forum [CYPF] from all around Ireland [four members of which are on the National Children's Advisory Council] were enabled and funded by NCO to attend. CYPF is elected or chosen from local *Cómhairle na n'Óg* and sits for 2 years in an advisory capacity to Office of the Minister for Children (formerly NCO and the Minister for Children).

Invitations were extended through the HSE Regional Child and Adolescent Health Development Officers to young people involved in health projects, health projects, allied organisations and services. Invitations were also extended through the organisations that supported young people's involvement in 2004.



*Nicole Stanton and Nicole Roddis, delegates from Knocknaheeney Youth Centre, Cork*



*Seamus Gough a young writer from Leitrim presents his findings from project work on Inequalities and Health*

The young delegates were from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds, from rural as well as urban settings and aged from 13 to 17 years. A number of presentations by young people were invited through youth participation projects from around the country. One group of young people in care who were planning to present at the conference chose to have adults present on their behalf. They were being asked to participate in a number of events and felt their views could be adequately represented by the adults with whom they worked. Young delegates from Sligo, Donegal and Leitrim were offered transport instead of hotel accommodation. This made their attendance financially feasible.



*The National Children's Office, Children and Young People's Forum members present their work.*



*Young people from Leitrim and Donegal who developed and launched 'The Guide' – a school journal with a mental health promotion theme in partnership with Community Creations and HSE NW.*

One of the difficult lessons learned in 2004 was that finding a suitable good value and high quality hotel venue for a conference does not always mean that young people will be equally or indeed respectfully catered for. From the beginning of preparations for the 2005 conference, PAC made this a core criteria for the choice of venue and in the end it was one of the deciding factors in the final choice. The event managers were able to assure us that young people would be treated with the same courtesy afforded to adult delegates and guests. They were enabled to use the leisure facilities on a par with the adults. [Often leisure centres are managed independently of the hotel and may have limits on the times young people over 14-16 can use the facilities e.g. not after 7.00pm]. They offer a very useful way for young people to expend their energy and have fun together. The catering choices were made in consultation with young people and the hotel was always willing to adapt the menu on request. A 'chill' room was set aside for the use of young people and the hotel independently supplied good quality board games. Their accommodation was reserved in the conference hotel. This reduced complexity of travel costs and arrangements. Minibars were disabled in rooms young people were to use. The young people themselves felt that they were very well treated by hotel staff and expressed their appreciation of this time and again.

## Box 5

### Key features of a youth friendly venue

- Provides the same service to youth as it does to adult customers.
- Can provide accommodation for young people on event site.
- Is flexible about the use of facilities such as swimming pool.
- Prepares staff to be flexible to meet the needs of young as well as adult guests.
- Offers a range of juices and non alcoholic wines.
- Adapts the menu on request.
- Imaginative use of spaces to accommodate informal and formal meetings and discussions among and between young people and adults.

## Looking after young people at the conference

It is a significant responsibility to ensure the well-being and safety of a group of young people for three days and two nights, in a hotel away from home. Without the considerable work of a number of supporting adults it is simply not possible to enable youth participation at a conference or indeed any event. The support organisations had safe practice guidelines in place and were familiar with arranging the organisation of parental and school principal permission. In the case of the young filmmakers this was organised directly by the PAC staff who had commissioned the project. A sufficient ratio and gender breakdown of support staff need to be available all day and all night to supervise and to meet young people's needs. Each supporting organisation – NCO, HSE, Foróige at the CRIB, Ógra Chorcaí – prepared for all this well in advance of the conference. They entered into a verbal contract with their young delegates in relation to codes of behaviour for the duration of the conference. The project team and the young people felt it was good practice for adults attending to support young people to observe the same codes of behaviour, for example not drinking alcohol. Young people attended the conference dinner. For some people it was their first time in a formal hotel setting and they enjoyed the experience.

### Box 6

#### Key elements in supporting young people's safety and wellbeing at a Conference

- Follow guidelines for looking after children [safe practice/child protection statement] <sup>2</sup>
- Secure parental consent for young people's participation.
- Consent is needed from parents and young people for photographs to be taken and used.
- Secure consent from school principals for young people's absence with permission [otherwise they may be marked absent].
- Ensure transport to and from venue is organised and clarify insurance arrangements.
- Have a named person available to meet and greet young people.
- Look after young people's organisation support staff.
- Provide youth friendly space 'chill room'.
- Have drinks and snacks available.
- Consult on and adapt menus.
- Arrange activities such as dance, music and games.
- Involve young people in conference programme design and seating arrangements to ensure their needs are met.
- Provide additional support for young people chairing or making presentations.
- Provide certificates of attendance and tokens of thanks.

<sup>2</sup> See References and Useful Resources *Young Voices*



The conference had a round table format with assigned seating. A number of these tables were set aside for young people and in expectation of their wish to leave the 'heavier' more academic sessions they were situated near exit doors. Interestingly the young people stayed throughout and participated in the same way the adults did. Young people who were presenting papers or chairing sessions also needed careful and timely preparation and support throughout. Both the adult and the young chairpersons were provided with guidelines and information on the session they were chairing. They were introduced to each other in advance of the session and given time to decide on a breakdown of responsibilities.

Debriefing for young people after the conference is recommended and gives the opportunity to explore any unnoticed or unexpected outcomes. It is important that young people have someone to speak to about any issues raised for them by participation in the conference. All were presented with certificates of appreciation for their attendance and their participation. Those who chaired and made presentations were given book tokens in appreciation.

## Funding young people's participation

The costs of participation were borne by either supporting organisations, the HSE or both. Much participation work relies heavily on partnership with the voluntary sector, such as Foróige and other youth organisations. They can match funding with personnel, time and expertise and share their venues. If youth participation is in an organisation's business plan it needs to have an accompanying budget.

### Box 7

#### Funding of Youth Participation in PAC Conference 2005

- For each young delegate there was a cost of the conference fee, transport, accommodation and dinner. In addition support staff had to be funded to accompany the young people.
- Funding arrangements included young delegate and support staff paid for in entirety by sponsoring organisation; grant aided by sponsoring organisation or paid in full/in part by a bursary from PAC.
- The planning group were funded by PAC.
- Youth Participation costs were built into business plans.

## 5. The impact of young people's involvement at the conference

45 young people participated in the conference making up about 15% of the delegates. Their presence added an exuberance and cheerfulness to the proceedings noted by many participants. The young delegates themselves enjoyed and benefited from the experience.

"...we have a voice and want it to be heard, perhaps have another youth planning committee next year – it worked very well this year."

(Young delegate)

"They were proud of having been able to contribute to the event. They felt respected and heard. They learned a lot."

(Accompanying Adult)

"We could do with another young people centred seminar (mental health one worked brilliantly)"

(Young delegate)



Young delegates getting geared up at registration

Quotes from the planning group...

"I learnt a lot about the health service for young people and feel more confident now as I know what is going on in the health service and can have more of an opinion."

(Young Member)

"Yes, we met Emily Logan and did group work in some of the workshops e.g. mental health and got a lot of different opinions which I found very informative."

(Young Member)

"...We got to see all our hard work put into play, we also got an adults opinion on our ideas and on our work."

(Young Member)

"Great experience in organisation skills, enjoyment from having an input in the future of the health service, one which we all use."

(Young Member)

"Involving young people early in the process meant that their needs could be more easily accommodated"

"Involving young people could not have happened without a significant investment of time and resources, including dedicated staff"

For members of the PAC team it was a challenging but very rewarding experience. Working with student interns assigned to participation work is a great idea. Students in Health Sciences from Sligo IT our local 3rd level College were invited to volunteer to help during the conference in return for the opportunity to sit-in on sessions. This also worked very well. All the speakers had been briefed on the participation of young people and were asked to tailor their presentations accordingly. Speakers and experts were very open to the youth presence and time and again welcomed the opportunity to share the stage with and hear the voices of young people...



*'This was an outstanding conference. First and most importantly, while many speak of youth participation, the voice of youth was integrated into every session in a thoughtful and meaningful way. That does not just happen; rather, it speaks to a deep commitment to young people and to their needs and development. Secondly, the content of the meeting was practical and most useful for those who participated. I was thrilled to be part of the program!'*

Professor Robert Wm. Blum  
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health



*'It was a novel experience for me to chair a conference session with so many young people presenting and in the audience. If I had any concerns about my role as (an ageing) Chair, they quickly vanished as the young speakers presented their experience of being consulted on the issues that are important to them. Each one spoke with great conviction, clarity and self confidence. They conveyed the excitement of working together in different fora to improve the quality of young people's lives. They lifted spirits and increased our faith that the future was safe in the hands of young people such as these'.*

Dr Ruth Barrington  
CEO Health Research Board



*'I have attended and spoken at many professional conferences in my career but I have not previously had the pleasure of participating in a conference in which the involvement of children & young people went far beyond the usual token representative. The PAC conference in Sligo in October 2005 was such a conference. Children and young people were an integral part of the organising committee and they jointly chaired plenary sessions. During each session, young people gave presentations and contributed actively to the discussion. The conference organisation was orientated to the needs of young people. I was delighted to have been involved in this innovative conference and congratulate the organising committee and the children and young people on a genuinely ground breaking development.'*

Professor Nick Spencer  
School of Health and Social Studies, University of Warwick, U.K.

The evaluation forms filled in by delegates indicated a high level of satisfaction with the youth participation elements of the conference. A small number of adult delegates indicated a discomfort with young people's involvement. The majority of respondents to the evaluation indicated that they felt they could put what they had learned into practice in relation to the inclusion of young people in planning and delivering. Youth participation was identified as the most common response in relation to questions on what delegates found most interesting and most meaningful.



## 6. Recommendations

*Throughout this report good practice and lessons learned have been highlighted. Direct contact should be made with the authors for further details on any area of interest. Distilled in the box below are some key recommendations for people considering the participation of young people in health service conferences.*

### Box 8

#### Key recommendations for participation of young people in health service conferences

- Be clear about the purpose and target audience for the conference.
- Build young people's participation into the planning process at the outset.
- Identify a dedicated budget and dedicated staff.
- Be honest and explicit about the scope for young people's roles in relation to decision making.
- Work with partners who are actively involved in working with a wide range of young people.
- Examine the conference theme and purpose for how it fits with meaningful participation of young people.
- Establish a young people's planning group.
- Establish clear lines of communication between the young people's planning group and the host organisation's planning group.
- If young people are invited to share the stage, they should be visibly well represented in the audience.
- Choose a venue that will meet the needs of adult and youth delegates.
- Make safety and wellbeing a priority by addressing issues of consent, care, engagement and recognition.
- Evaluate the process and share good practice.

## 7. References and Useful Resources

Our Children – Their Lives, National Children’s Office 2000. [www.nco.ie](http://www.nco.ie)

Get Connected: Developing an Adolescent Friendly Health Service, Best Health for Children 2002. [www.pacirl.ie](http://www.pacirl.ie)

Taking Participation Seriously, NSW commission for children and young people 2003. [www.kids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au)

Promoting Participation of Young People in the Programme of Action for Children, Programme of Action for Children 2004.

Young Voices – guidelines on how to involve children and young people in your work, The National Children’s Office, the Children’s Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland 2005.

Building a Culture of Participation: Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation: Handbook. National Children’s Bureau 2003.

Culture Shift:Towards Real Youth Participation: Leaflet.  
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For further information please contact:

Celia Keenaghan / Mary Roche  
HSE Population Health  
Children and Young People's Team  
Bridgewater House  
Rockwood Parade  
Sligo

Tel: 071 9174780

[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)