YOUNG RESEARCHERS: GUIDANCE

Dr Louca-Mai Brady and Berni Graham

Contents

1.Introduction

Barnardo's is committed to meaningfully engaging children and young people (CYP) in all aspects of its work. They understand the importance of involving CYP in research, giving them a space to speak out, having their voices heard by the right people, and influencing their actions to actively involve CYP in the issues affecting their lives and the lives of their peers.

While Barnardo's have been working collaboratively with CYP as researchers for some time, the demand for running young and peer researcher projects has increased. This Guidance and Toolkit were commissioned to provide Barnardo's researchers, project workers and others with clear guidance and tools to use when supporting CYP from a diverse range of backgrounds to be young researchers.

There is considerable literature on CYP's involvement in research, including but not limited to working with young researchers. This is referenced throughout these documents. The Guidance and Toolkit draw on previous work by the authors (particularly Brady and Graham, 2019) and existing knowledge and resources identified through desk research at the start of the project.

This identified a wide range of documents and online resources related to training and supporting young researchers and considerable academic literature on the topic. These are referenced where used and included in **'References and further information'** (page 37) at the end of this document. However, many focus more on the results and outcomes of research with CYP and do not explain much about how young researchers were trained and supported. Much of the material is aimed at academic researchers and assumes a certain level of knowledge and research expertise.

2. How to use the guidance & toolkit

The documents aim to provide inspiration and inclusive and accessible activities that researchers, project workers and others can use and adapt to support the CYP they work with to plan and undertake a research project and/or collaborate with adults on research projects.[1]

The Guidance (this document) provides an overview of key issues and arguments on issues to think about and how best to provide inclusive, good quality and consistent training and support to young researchers of varying ages, interests and needs.

The Toolkit provides tools, activities and ideas which researchers and practitioners can use and adapt when recruiting, training and supporting young researchers.

2. How to use the guidance & toolkit

Definitions

Here are the working definitions of terms used in this Guidance and Toolkit. Other literature may define these slightly differently. Many of the terms and meanings overlap.

- **Research:** A process of investigating or studying something in a systematic and rigorous way to create new knowledge.

- **Evaluation:** Uses research methods to determine how well a service or project is working and/or what it has achieved.

- **Public involvement/participatory research:** Research carried out 'with' or 'by' CYP, rather than 'to', 'about' or 'for' them. This includes training them as young researchers, but also CYP advising and working on adult-led research

- **Participation/ 'voice and influence':** a process by which CYP influence decisions which bring about change in themselves, their peers, the services they use and/or their communities.

- **Young people-led research:** when young researchers take on full ownership of research, including deciding what to research, and have responsibility for most decisions throughout the research process (with adults supporting as needed).

- **Coproduction:** a participatory approach in which professionals and CYP work together in equal partnership and for equal benefit from the very start of the process (see Co-production).

- **Young researchers:** CYP involved in participatory, co-produced and CYP-led research (i.e., actively involved in the research process)

- **Peer research:** research that is conducted by people with lived experience of the issue being studied (e.g., they can be the same age and/or have similar life experience and/or experience of using a particular service)

3. Why do young researcher projects?

Traditionally most research about CYP has been done by adult researchers on rather than with CYP. In other words, CYP are research subjects or participants rather than actively involved in creating knowledge.

But CYP have a right, under Article 12 of the <u>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</u>, to have a say in decisions that affect their lives. Article 12 is linked to other participation rights, such as the rights of freedom of expression (Article 13), freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14), freedom of association (Article 15), protection of privacy (Article 16) and access to information (Article 17). The UNCRC gives CYP a status as rights' holders, entitled to be heard and participate in decision-making processes, including research. Supporting CYP to do research can be a great way to enhance their participation rights and create new opportunities for their views, experiences and perspectives to influence change, transform attitudes, mindsets, policy and practice (for more on this, see Groundwater-Smith, Dockett and Bottrell, 2015; Lushey and Munro, 2015; Graham, Simmons and Truscott, 2017; Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra, 2019).

Developing research skills enables CYP to identify their own research agenda and for their experiences, priorities and concerns to be better reflected in evidence about them and to inform the policies, practices and services that affect them:

"Participatory [research] approaches are important in redressing the democratic deficit between young people and the organisations and institutions that impact their lives. Young people need to be provided with a meaningful opportunity to choose and design the research about them and use it to influence the decisions that will directly affect them" (Walsham, 2020, p. 2).

"...child-led research has emerged as an approach that can provide CYP with particularly meaningful opportunities to participate. Therefore, there is a growing interest in child-led research as a mechanism to enhance participation rights, based on the premise that CYP bring particular expertise to the research process" (Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra, 2019, p.7)

3. Why do young researcher projects?

Benefits for CYP of being involved in research include:

- making an active contribution to their communities and to improve services used by other CYP;
- developing a variety of transferable skills (such as research, writing, presentation, communication, project management, interview skills, negotiation, decision making,...);
- enhancing their life and work experience and in turn their CVs;
- extending their social skills and networks;
- accessing broader personal development, for example, increased confidence, knowledge, self-esteem, and the confirmation that their views matter and can affect change;
- gaining acknowledgement of their contribution by receiving payment, reward or other recognition.

Training and working with young researchers offers practitioners working with CYP new or different approaches to participation and a chance to learn about research. Or if they are researchers, an opportunity to learn about participation and how CYP might approach it differently.

The Guidance and Toolkit do not presume knowledge and prior research experience by either professionals or young researchers. However, it may be that a project could benefit from specialist research input – e.g. if you want to do an evidence review or require more expert advice on ethics, particular methods or the use of validated data collection tools or more advanced qualitative or statistical analysis. In such cases, we would suggest teaming up with, or getting advice from, professional researchers within your own organisation or further elsewhere. For example, in Barnardo's, the project lead may be a practitioner for an existing group of CYP or service, or a worker from outside the service, who would be responsible for recruiting and supporting young researchers throughout the project. The Research and Evaluation team would lead on the delivery of young researcher training and provide support to the project lead throughout the research process.

Similarly, if you're planning creative outputs alongside, or instead of, a written report, or presentation, it may be useful to budget for and involve a relevant professional, such as an artist, filmmaker or web designer.

4. What do young researchers do?

Top Tip: You don't need to be a researcher to support young researchers

Working with requires participation as much as research skills and offers an opportunity to learn alongside young people. If you need research expertise, others can provide advice, support and training.

This guidance is concerned specifically with young researchers (see Definitions, page 5). This can include:

- **CYP-led research:** when young researchers take on full ownership of research, including deciding what to research, and have responsibility for most decisions throughout the research process, with adults supporting as needed.

- **CYP as co-researchers:** a partnership between professional researchers/project staff and CYP, in which decisions about the project are made together. Young researchers have a high level of involvement and are guided and supported by adults to play a significant and equivalent role in all or most stages of the research process.

Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra (2019) identified child-led research (see first point above) as having the following characteristics:

- Children and young people are motivated to join the research and remain involved because of its potential to influence change in their lives and the lives of other children.
- In-depth and full engagement of young researchers in all parts of the research process.
- Adult facilitators are involved, but control of the research remains with the young researchers.
- Exploring young researchers' expertise and experiences are central components.
- Young researchers are considered better than adults at identifying issues of importance to CYP in similar situations to them.
- Young researchers feel that they can obtain richer and more extensive data from their peers than would be possible by adult researchers.
- Young researchers bring their own experiences to the generation of knowledge, including analysis and findings.

4. What do young researchers do?

Co-production

As outlined in 'Definitions' (page 5) co-production is a participatory approach in which researchers, practitioners and the public (in this case CYP) work together in equal partnership and for equal benefit from the very start and throughout the research process:

"co-production works to ensure young people are active and equal agents in the production of services designed to address their needs and research designed to reflect their experiences of those services" (Dixon, Ward and Blower, 2019, p. 12).

For further information and guidance on co-production:

- Welcome to the Co-Production Collective www.coproductioncollective.co.uk/what-is-co-production/resources

- National Institute of Health Research resources on co-production

- Social Care Institute for Excellence resources and training: www.scie.org.uk/co-production

Young research advisors

- If the research is controlled and led by adults, CYP may be consulted or have an advisory role rather than being young researchers (see Definitions). This is a valid and worthwhile way to involve CYP, but it is essential to clarify the difference. The Guidelines and Toolkit are designed for those working with young researchers rather than advisors. But they can still be used to inform work with young advisors and young people's research advisory groups.

Further details on this approach are included in 'References and Further Information', including:

- eYPAGnet toolkit on setting up and running a young people's research advisory group
- Guidelines for researchers, written by a young people's advisory group (PEAR, 2010)
- NIHR guidelines on involving young people as advisors in health research (NIHR, 2021)

Brady and Graham (2019) include a chapter on involving young people in research.

4. What do young researchers do?

Be flexible and offer alternatives

It is not always necessary or possible for individual young researchers to be fully involved in all stages of a project. It can be more appropriate to create 'pockets of participation' (Franks, 2011), where CYP determines their involvement level according to their individual circumstances, interests, and availability. This is an important consideration when seeking to make young researchers' involvement as inclusive and accessible as possible (see 'working on sensitive topics and with diverse groups, page 21). Some aspects of the project may require particular skills or experience or present ethical challenges, which need to be borne in mind in planning. Young people-led research does not necessarily mean CYP doing everything: the important thing is to discuss with the young researchers what they would like and are able to do and if they would like to delegate any aspects to supporting adults. In practice, it will only become apparent once the young researchers are on board what aspects of the project and roles they want to and can pursue: some original project plans may need to be adjusted accordingly.

Top Tip: One size does not fit all

Develop young researcher projects in collaboration with children and young people so that they can be involved in ways that work for them. Be flexible, open and responsive.

4. What do young researchers do?

What does a 'good' young researcher project look like?

Research by and with young researchers is not and should not be a diluted version of adult research. When supporting young researchers, try and find a balance between adult expectations of what constitutes 'proper' research (e.g. rigour and quality) and the values of participation: CYP's rights and agency and what is meaningful and essential to them (Brownlie, Anderson and Ormston, 2006; Kellett, 2011). Where this balance lies in a particular project will depend on many things, including the nature of the research, budgets, and the CYP involved. The notion that research, particularly analysis and reporting, is an adult process which CYP lack the skills and experience to do 'properly' is unhelpful and risks young researchers participation being tokenistic (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster, 2005; Kellett, 2011; Lushey and Munro, 2015).
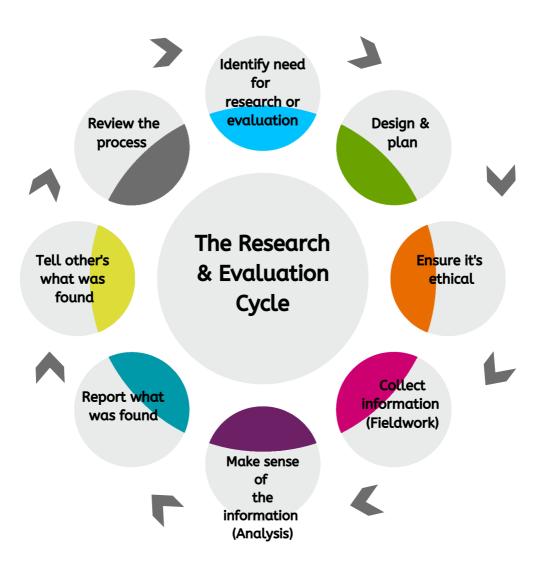
Some points to consider:

- Who and what is the research for? Is it primarily about enabling CYP to learn and use research skills and/or the potential value and impact of research for policy, practice and knowledge?

- Is it to help them research matters that are important to them (i.e. a form of participatory and political action), or is it in response to an adult-led agenda (e.g. a call for evidence)?

- What knowledge and skills do they need to do this?

- Is there a risk of pushing quality and rigour so much that CYP lose confidence or become disempowered? Or conversely, a risk of failing to recognise the pitfalls and limitations of a project so that the research and young researchers are set up to fail?

Involvement in different stages

Young researchers should, wherever possible, be involved in all stages of the research cycle – from deciding on the research topic to sharing the findings. If resources and time (professionals' and /or CYP's) are limited, you may need to consider with the young researchers where their involvement will have the most impact and add the most value to the research and what they are most interested in.

The Research & Evaluation Cycle

- Identify need for research or evaluation
- Design & plan
- Ensure it's ethical
- Collect information (Fieldwork)
- Make sense of the information (Analysis)
- Report what was found
- Tell other's what was found
- Review the process

5.Practical considerations

Who to involve

Before planning a young researcher project, consider what is most appropriate for the project in terms of numbers[1], roles and required experience. Young researchers may be self-selecting or nominated by others, targeted for a specific research study because of their lived experience or an existing group who want to do a research project.

It is essential to ensure that the options offered and ways of work are inclusive and support diversity. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child found that on the whole in the UK, 'children's views are not systematically heard in … policymaking on issues that affect them', and they recommended that 'particular attention should be paid to involving younger children and children in vulnerable situations' (UNCRC, 2016, p. 6-7). Many UK researchers have also noted that CYP who are already marginalised or in vulnerable situations are even less likely to be involved in participatory research (Kellett, 2011; Bradbury-Jones, Isham and Taylor, 2018; Brady et al., 2018). While working as young researchers can provide benefits for all CYP, the returns may well be greater for CYP in vulnerable situations (Bradbury-Jones, Isham and Taylor, 2018). Involving CYP with complex or additional social and communication needs as young researchers is an effective way of 'valuing and making visible their unique experiences and insights (Bradbury-Jones, Isham and Taylor, 2018, p. 81). Participatory research may work better for CYP with complex lives than youth forums or other models of participation. Research offers a flexible model for engagement and many opportunities to ensure CYP's ideas and experiences inform organisations' programmes and campaigns (Thompson, Lanchin and Moxon, 2015). Cuevas-Parra (2020) discussed participatory research with CYP during the COVID-19 pandemic and noted that even in times of turmoil, contributing their views can provide a way for young researchers to cope with the issues and problems they are facing.

5. Practical considerations

Useful ideas and examples of working with some groups of marginalised and 'less frequently heard' CYP can be found in the following research publications: [1]

- care-experienced young people (Lushey and Munro, 2015, Dixon, Ward and Blower, 2019, Kelly et al., 2020)
- young Roma children (Percy-Smith, Larkins and Bereményi, 2008; Larkins and Bilson, 2016)
- young people who run away from home or care (Thompson, Lanchin and Moxon, 2015)
- offenders in the community (Revolving Doors, 2016)
- marginalised young people (Walsham, 2020)

Examples of projects with disabled young researchers include:
- RIP Stars: a group of young people who lead 'research by young disabled people for disabled young people'
- 'Living Life to the Fullest': a project in which CYP with 'life-limiting or 'life-threatening' impairments are co-researchers.
- 'Making Connections' project: a Scope co-produced research project exploring the resources and relationships that support disabled young people to live the lives they choose

Top Tip: Don't pigeonhole

Children and young people may not only be interested in being involved in research directly related to their lived experience. For example, some with experience in care may be as interested in researching climate change or health as one about care service.

- Numbers and group size. Four to eight is a good number for a group. But your project may need more or less, depending on the type of project, its appeal to CYP, staff capacity and what is manageable. Some projects involve just one or two young researchers.
- How to recruit as diverse a team of young researchers as possible. Reach out to as wide an audience and as many different spaces and places as possible (Walsham, 2020).

5. Practical considerations

- Avoid dismissing CYP with previous experience of research or participation as 'too experienced' or professionalised. They also have a right to be involved and can bring beneficial expertise and ideas.
- Are there any specific considerations in relation to the service or project being researched (for example, do you need representation of CYP with experience of using a particular service, having a specific health condition, or lived experience, etc.?)
- Who will benefit most from involvement?
- What training and support might different CYP need to be able to participate? Can you provide inclusive opportunities and any additional support required?
- At the same time, recruit those 'who have the skill and capability (with appropriate support and training) to contribute to the process' in ways that are meaningful, ethical and safe, so that they are not 'set up to fail' (Lushey and Munro, 2015, p. 525)
- Sometimes, you need to be pragmatic and go with who you can get. Training and honesty in reporting (i.e. reflecting on any challenges with recruitment and retention) is essential.
- If possible, involve CYP in developing recruitment materials/approaches for young researchers to help make sure that they are accessible, relevant and interesting.
- Consider whether a formal recruitment process (see Toolkit: 'Getting Started – Recruiting young researchers') with a role description, formal application form, etc., may be helpful. This can help present the role formally, allowing the selection of CYP from a range of backgrounds/specific lived experiences. However, in some projects, this approach would put some off or only attract those who are more confident.
- An alternative may be to work with an existing group of CYPs who already use a service and/or know each other and support developing their own research project (e.g. Cuevas-Parra, 2020).
- Some young researchers may need to reduce or stop their involvement partway through the project. Plan for this. If new people join later, it can be a good idea to assign them a 'buddy' young researcher to help them settle in and provide some 1:1 support to bring them up to speed.

5.Practical considerations

Top Tip: Anyone can be a young researcher

All children and young people[1] who want to do should have the opportunity to be involved in research. If you think a project is too 'difficult' for some children and young people to understand, maybe you're approaching it in the wrong way! Try developing your ideas in collaboration with some children young people, for example, those with relevant lived experience and/or previous research experience.

Working with gatekeepers

Involving CYP in research often means engaging with parents, carers or professionals, who act as 'gatekeepers' and can enable or potentially limit young researchers' involvement. Gatekeepers will need to give consent for most under 16's to be involved as young researchers. They need to know what the role involves and be kept updated as the project progresses. They may have concerns about CYP's involvement or, conversely, push them to be involved in research when they are not that keen. Many CYP may need adult assistance to be actively engaged (for example, accompanying them to project meetings, passing on information, accessing and navigating online systems and so on). It is essential to be aware of and address such issues and consider how and when you need to engage gatekeepers to support the engagement and retention of young researchers in a project (Brady and Graham, 2019).

Top Tip: Find your champions

Often recruitment can hinge on one person in an organisation 'getting' the project and the opportunities it presents for the children and young people they work with. With some excluded groups, a trusted service or professional can be the key to getting and keeping children and young people involved in a project (Thompson, Lanchin and Moxon, 2015; Brady et al., 2018; Dixon, Ward and Blower, 2019)

5. Practical considerations (cont)

Resources:

From the outset, it is important to consider what time and resources you will need. Moreover, these might change given the responsive and flexible nature of work with young researchers. Potential costs include:

- travel and other expenses (e.g. for the young researchers, and any parent or carer who needs to accompany them; or for you to go to them; child-care)
- staff time (to recruit, support, meet with, train and manage the young researchers and their research work)
- room and equipment hire and refreshments if the young researchers are meeting in person and any venue costs for the young researchers' fieldwork
- technology or other support for remote working (e.g. providing hardware and software, dongles for internet access, paying for wi-fi use, etc.)
- possible payment for the young researchers' time and input (see Payment and recognition)
- stationery, printing, creative and other practical materials

5.Practical considerations

Timing

Respect CYP's time. '*Children are busy people... and their time is a precious commodity*' (Kellett, 2011, p. 208).[1]

Find out from your young researchers when they are likely to be available and how much capacity they have to be involved in the project. Most have commitments, such as school, college, work or childcare, or a health issue or disability which dictates optimal timings. In other words, plan the project training, meetings and other sessions around their availability. For example, if working with a group who are in education, it's essential to avoid the school day and exam periods, and best to offer evenings, weekends or school holiday periods. As discussed above, not everyone has to do everything. Some CYP may have to dip in and out of the project at busy times or when other aspects of their lives need to take priority. You may well need to adjust the project timelines to take into account young researchers' changing availability or capacity.

Working with CYP living in complex circumstances requires a high degree of flexibility, especially in relation to practical challenges regarding their capacity and availability to be involved in a project on an ongoing basis (Thompson, Lanchin and Moxon, 2015; Brady *et al.*, 2018).

A month can be a very long time in the life of a child or young person. The project needs to progress quickly enough to remain meaningful. This may be a term or a school year, but probably not longer. It is essential that the children can see a project through to completion, including dissemination and, ideally, any implementation of recommendations.

Top Tip: Plan and regularly review project timelines with children and young people

Agree with young researchers at the start how much they will commit and when their involvement will end. Setting clear targets together throughout the research process will help maintain momentum and foster shared decision-making. Revisit timeline and targets as the project progresses, and things change.

6. Ethical considerations when working with young researchers

The main ethical considerations when conducting a research or evaluation project are covered in the Toolkit - in a way that can be shared with the young researchers **(Young Researcher Session 3: Ethics)**. In addition, engaging young researchers raises some ethical points for the project, which are covered here. These are informed consent, confidentiality and working on sensitive topics and with diverse groups.

Informed consent

It is important to explain the project thoroughly to prospective young researchers, ensure they understand fully what involvement might entail, and regularly review it as the project progresses. In addition, the young researchers need to provide signed consent to take part, and for most young researchers under 16, you also need to get signed permission from a parent or carer. Examples of forms and wording to use are given in the Toolkit (Appendix 1). These can be adapted to suit each project and role. The consent form must make clear that this consent is for the duration of their involvement in the project. Specifically, request permission to photograph or film them while working on the project and use them in reports, presentations, or other outputs.

Top Tip: being a young researcher should be an informed choice

Be mindful of power dynamics and work to create an environment where children and young people really feel that they can choose whether, when and how they want to be young researchers - with the choice to opt-out and change their minds.

6. Ethical considerations when working with young researchers

Balancing confidentiality and anonymity with recognising young researchers' input [1]

Young researchers doing research in their area or in a service which they have used may find themselves in situations where they know the people who are interviewees or focus group members, etc., for the research project. Sometimes this helps, for example, in easing communication and introductions. But these interactions need to be carefully managed to protect the privacy of both the researcher and participant. Both need enough information to make an informed choice of whether or not to proceed or to reschedule with a different interviewer (Kelly et al., 2020)

It is seen as good practice to credit young researchers, e.g. by including them as co-authors in research reports and other outputs, and acknowledge their work in planning or conducting the research. But there is sometimes a balance to be struck between crediting young researchers for their role and contributions and protecting their identities. If the research covers sensitive topics or is related to the young researchers' lived experience, naming them may have future, negative repercussions. For instance, if a child or young person has a criminal record and/or has spent time in custody, this experience might be beneficial to a project researching those subjects with other young people. But it could prove detrimental to the young researcher later in life when looking for a job if, for example, their connection to the project comes up in an online search by a potential employer. This needs to be decided on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the young researchers.

There are ways to allow different degrees of crediting and protection. For example, young researchers could choose to use their full names, or first names only, or initials, or a pseudonym, or just be credited as a team or any combination of these. It is helpful to include a short footnote explaining how young researchers chose to be acknowledged.

6. Working on sensitive topics and with diverse groups

The different groups that Barnardo's work with will have different needs. The advice in this document and the materials in the Toolkit have been designed to be adapted as needed to be relevant to different groups.

As discussed earlier, CYP have a right to be involved in matters that affect them, but this has to be balanced with their right to be protected from harm. If you involve young researchers in research on sensitive topics, including private, stressful, or potentially expose stigmatising or incriminating information, be aware of potential triggers and the need to be trauma-informed.

Benefits for the project and those being researched

Peer research by those with comparable lived experience can provide a shared perspective and language and an 'insider' view or standpoint, which can help generate unique insights (Thompson, Lanchin and Moxon, 2015; Bradbury-Jones, Isham and Taylor, 2018; Cuevas-Parra, 2020; Kelly et al., 2020). Young research participants may also feel more 'comfortable being interviewed by a peer in tune with their life experiences' (Kelly et al., 2020, p. 110) and be more likely 'to express dissent or dissatisfaction [than] during interviews conducted by adult researchers' (Lushey and Munro, 2015, p. 523).

6. Working on sensitive topics and with diverse groups

Benefits and considerations around sharing their own backgrounds

[1]

Becoming a young researcher may require some acceptance of their own lived experience, potentially sharing information about, it and a willingness to be identified as someone with that experience (Brodie et al., 2016). Participation can be perceived by CYP who have had adverse childhood experiences and the practitioners working with them as part of a process of recovering their sense of self and agency. It can also help others. In a project working with young people who had used drug and alcohol services, the young people spoke about wanting to be involved to improve services for their peers. They valued being able to use their own difficult experiences to create positive change. But doing so safely required building trust and being sensitive to individual circumstances (Brady et al., 2018).

Consider carefully the safety and safeguarding of both research participants and young researchers. If compromising or traumatic issues are anticipated, discuss how best to address these with the young researchers, and be observant and responsive as work progresses. Options include having additional support available from an adult, and developing the research tools but asking an adult researcher to do the interviews or focus groups.

6. Working on sensitive topics and with diverse groups

Limits and support

However, as mentioned already, some CYP may be less willing to share sensitive information with their peers rather than with adults. Also, it may be problematic for young researchers if they are exposed to upsetting or emotive information and/or are expected to keep the information anonymous and confidential (Brownlie, Anderson and Ormston, 2006). The Toolkit provides more information on the limits to confidentiality in fieldwork (p.28). The key point here is to establish clear guidelines and protocols, to balance concerns about keeping young researchers safe with their rights to be involved, and to provide them with sufficient debriefing, support and reassurance. Involve the young researchers in developing these policies (Lushey and Munro, 2015; Dixon, Ward and Blower, 2019; Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra, 2019):

"[When researching sensitive topics with 'vulnerable' young researchers there is a need for] … careful balancing of autonomy and protection in the inclusion of CYP… [with] strategies to promote safety and protection, including debrief and the presence of a known and trusted support worker" (Bradbury-Jones, Isham and Taylor, 2018, p. 88)

Top Tip: not everyone wants to be a young researcher

Children and young people have a right to be involved in matters that affect them, but they need to be able to do so in ways that feel safe. They also have a right not to be involved and not be treated any differently because of their choice, e.g. access to services or treatment by staff).

While it is good practice to provide opportunities for any children or young people who want to be young researchers and to do so in ways that work for them, it is also essential to acknowledge that the when and how their involvement is ultimately their individual choice.

7. Supporting young researchers

The role of adult supporters

Throughout the project, it is important to consider, and explore with CYP, how the adults involved can best support young researchers. This role can include being a co-researcher, facilitator, trainer, adviser, project coordinator, budget holder, administrator, mentor and supporter. Whatever is needed by the project and the young researchers! Young researchers may have limited experience of research or of working on projects and require tailored training and support. They are also more likely to get and stay involved in a project if they feel supported, respected, and encouraged by the adults involved (Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra, 2019). Graham, Simmons and Truscott (2017) found that relationships between facilitators and young people were vital to enhancing young researchers' wellbeing, "in particular the facilitators' patience, flexibility and respectful approach".

Top Tip: support don't manage

The role of the facilitator is to support and engage young researchers to do research, develop their capacity and provide opportunities for them to make decisions but not manage or 'do' the research (unless, of course, the young researchers as you do manage some aspects of the research or associated processes).

Facilitators have an important role in providing knowledge and advice on matters such as feasibility, ethical considerations, research design and access to information and resources. The role involves being an ally, to "stand back, let the young people do the work and make the decisions, but provide essential information as needed so they can make informed decisions" (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster, 2005, p. 15).

7. Relationship building & communication

Sharing power

Being aware of and striving to equalise power differences is a key consideration when working with young researchers (Bradbury-Jones, Isham and Taylor, 2018). The project's scope and limitations for involvement also affect which elements and decisions each child or young person is involved in. For example, if the research has been initiated by adults, e.g. as part of service or organisational initiatives, as a result of a policy driver, through academic or other adult-led research or in response to a funding call. Be honest and open with young researchers about this and agree with them which decisions and aspects of the project will be led by adults (e.g. decisions about ethics and safeguarding, project and budget management), and which will be collaborative or led by CYP.

Relationship building and communication

Invest time in building relationships with and between CYP before and during the project and research-related content, providing time and space for young researchers to socialise. Create an inclusive and supportive environment where everyone feels engaged; Agreeing group ground rules, icebreakers and warm-up exercises can help with this (see Toolkit: Appendix 2 for examples).

It is important to keep young researchers informed and engaged throughout the project, including between meetings and other project activities. The training outlined in the Toolkit is only one element; in between meetings and training sessions, young researchers may work on their own or in sub-groups on things like the design of research tools, undertaking data collection etc. Some may be more eager to do this than others, and some may need more support, so you'll need to manage and plan for this too.

Agree with the young researchers on how best to communicate with them (each may have a different need or preference) and what communication channels would work best to enable the team to communicate with each other. Social media or email can be helpful but remember that not all CYP use these or have adequate access. For some, sending material in the post with SAEs may work best. Others may prefer texting or phone calls.

7. Relationship building & communication

Reward and recognition

Young researchers' work should be recognised, and, as a general rule, they should be rewarded appropriately for their involvement. There are many ways to do this, including:

- payment of money or vouchers
- accreditation or using existing training awards
- certificates or personalised acknowledgement of involvement with details of key activities and achievements
- references, e.g. for college, university, or employment
- formal acknowledgement, e.g. being named as a co-author or a contributor on a report
- social activities, such as meals out, outings or group leisure activities.

Whether and how you pay young researchers depends on policies and processes, available budget and, most importantly, the preferences of the CYP involved. But it is generally good practice that young researchers are fairly recompensed for their time, either as a temporary employee or as a 'reward' (i.e. vouchers or an hourly rate) for some or all of their time working on a project. Kelly et al. (2020) suggests that, for some young researchers with limited incomes and juggling other work or college commitments, a part-time contracted research post may be better than being paid on a sessional basis.

7. Relationship building & communication

Relationship building and communication (cont)

But others may prefer sessional work as this enables them to pursue ongoing studies or employment alongside their young researcher role[1]. Be aware that under 16 can undertake paid work. Also, if CYP and/or their parents and carers are in receipt of social security benefits, you need to seek specialist guidance on how earnings might affect different benefits.

Further information, including a section on reward and recognition for CYP involved in research, is available in Section 8 of the National Institute for Health Research guidelines on payment for public involvement. See also (Walsham, 2020, pp. 21–24) on remuneration for young researchers.

Top Tip: payment and recognition is not one size fits all

As always, check with the young researchers' about what works for them and be prepared for different things for different children and young people. Some young researchers may prefer to receive vouchers, others money directly into their bank account if they have one. You may have some on contracts and some on a paid sessional basis. Others may opt to be paid and to be involved voluntarily.

Ending

Plan for the end of the project and of the young researchers' involvement in a formal and social way. Avoid cliff edges. Contact young researchers who appear to have withdrawn from the project. This might be even more critical for CYP who got involved in a project because of their lived experience and emotional investment in the topic and any outcomes (Kelly et al., 2020). At the end of the project, ensure that young researchers get a full debrief, copies of the report and other key project outputs, and updates on what will happen next. A celebration (such as an outing) and information and advice on further opportunities can also be beneficial.

8. Training young researchers

The toolkit outlines tools and ideas for involving young researchers at key stages in the research or evaluation. But first some general guidelines:

- Think about the knowledge and skills young[1] researchers need to adequately prepare them for each stage and their expected roles in this project.
- Adjust these as you go along, collaboratively with the young researchers. Review and discuss with them which activities they find most valuable and enjoyable.
- As much as possible, make the training a mandatory part of the project that all young researchers are adequately prepared for the role and have a chance to learn and work as a team.
- Keep training accessible, enjoyable and focused on the task at hand. Provide a general introduction to research and/or the project at the start and then train the young researchers as required for different roles and activities as you get to each stage. (Stuart et al., 2021) provides an excellent example of how young researcher training can be piloted and co-designed with CYP.
- Rather than focusing on the 'right' answers, facilitate exploratory learning – prompt and guide rather than tell.
- Prioritise what the young researchers will need most. Add what would be 'nice to do or know only if you have time.
- Balance 'heavy' sessions with something lighter; the Toolkit includes examples in Appendix 2. Give plenty of breaks and informal opportunities for CYP to chat and get to know each other. Provide food.
- Consider the time you have for training. Short and frequent sessions work much better than doing one long intensive block of training before starting the research project. It also allows more opportunities to reflect and adjust things as you go along.
- While the young researchers need an overview at the start, some sessions might be best timed to happen just before the young researchers need that information, e.g. run the interviewing skills session just before they do interviews. The analysis session after data has been collected.

8. Training young researchers

Top Tip: it's about learning together

Training and supporting young researchers should be less about adults 'teaching' young people how to 'proper' (i.e. adult) research than facilitating a process of collaborative learning and shared decision-making. Be open with young people about this from the start. Go into it with an open mind and a willingness to learn and listen and get feedback from researchers on what they like and need.

- If you come up against unexpected issues during the project, for example, during fieldwork, plan an extra session to discuss these together and agree on how they can be dealt with. This is an important part of the learning process, which can be written up in the project report.
- Learning and training does not always have to be in a group, and different young researchers may have different needs and/or levels of experience. Sometimes individuals may be working on different aspects of the research, e.g. reading interview transcripts or developing information sheets alone or in sub-groups. In such cases, they can come together to share what they've done and get feedback from their fellow young researchers.
- During the COVID19 pandemic, a lot of participation and young researcher projects moved online or used other remote approaches. Training can be in person, or online, or a combination of the two. Discuss with the young researchers what works best for them.
- Have more than one facilitator wherever possible so that you can have smaller breakout groups and/or support individual young researchers if needed. This is also really important for online meetings to manage the chat, waiting room, virtual breakout rooms, etc.
- Be flexible. Allow more time than you think you will need, both within training sessions and meetings and for extra sessions as the project progresses, e.g. reflective workshops and refresher training to facilitate shared learning, re-negotiation of roles and ongoing skills development.

8. Training young researchers

Standalone training and resources programmes

As well as the tools and materials in the Toolkit, you may also want to consider some standalone/ self-contained programmes and approaches for training and supporting researchers. For example:

- Developing Children as Researchers (Kim, Sheehy and Lucinda, 2017). A book which sets out a detailed course of 10 session plans and materials developed by researchers from the Open University Children's Research Centre, mainly working with children in schools.

- My Shout! website also developed by OU Children's Research Centre (free but requires a password to access). Designed to be used by young researchers as part of a blended learning approach, with adult-led training sessions introducing key research concepts, followed up by young researchers working on MyShout! Independently at home to plan and develop their research projects.

- Youth-led Participatory Action Research Hub. Training and resources, including session plans and materials, 'in which young people are trained to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them' Berkeley (2015)

- 'Little Voices' training manual outlines a programme developed to train children aged 7-11 as researchers and contribute to policy and decision-making on issues that are important to them (Dale and Roberts, 2017).

- Young People as Researchers Save the Children training pack for workers training CYP in participatory research (Save the Children, 2000)

- Child-led data collection manual developed by Save the Children to support CYP and organisations with child-led research which 'takes the reader through a series of simple steps, training activities and resources needed to get started' (Esterhuizen, 2012)

8. Training young researchers

Standalone training and resources programmes

- Agenda Days: An approach developed and supported by <u>Investing in Children </u>in which large groups (15-30) of CYP are supported to come together, explore issues that affect them and create an agenda for change in an adult-free environment. The days are facilitated by CYP with previous experience of the approach. These often lead to young people-led research where CYP collect evidence and refine arguments before engaging with adults who have the power to make a change (Cairns et al., 2020).

- <u>The Magic 6.</u> A manual was developed to support participatory action with CYP who face discrimination. It outlines a six-stage model in which CYP identify an issue they wish to learn about and change, and then they influence how they reflect on and learn about the issue and act to try to make the change happen (Larkins, Bilson, 2016).

Key points for training and supporting at different stages of the process

Note: the Toolkit (Introduction: How to use the Toolkit) outlines different approaches to organising training. As a rule, it is best to train the young researchers just before each stage of the research rather than doing one intensive course at the beginning, as points can easily be forgotten and have less relevance.

Planning and set up (Toolkit: YR session 1)

- The initial stages focus on developing an understanding of what research, or evaluation, is and agreeing on roles and ways of working.
- It is important not to overpromise at this stage: be honest about what you think is achievable within the available budget and time (both young researchers and adults), as well as the levels of knowledge and expertise available. One research project may not change the world, but it can be a step towards doing so.
- Introduce the research cycle (see p x) and initial plan and explain that you will be looking at each stage in turn and reviewing what is needed as the project progresses.
- Discuss how best the adult facilitators and individual young researchers can keep in touch, both one-to-one and as a team.

8. Training young researchers

Research Design (Toolkit: session 2)

- Focus on supporting young researchers to decide the research topic, questions and aims and choose the best sources and methods for their project.
- At this point, you may also want to do an evidence/literature review to see what existing research and other evidence is available on your topic.
- The most important consideration at this stage is for the research questions and aims to be set by or with the CYP as much as possible so that they feel a sense of ownership for the project.

Ethics (Toolkit: session 3)

- Use the exercises and resources in the Toolkit reassure and equip everyone with the necessary understanding, processes and skills and provides examples of exercises and tools that can be used to teach different aspects
- Getting it right from the start ensures that the young researchers and the people being researched are safe, and the research is conducted to an acceptable standard and runs smoothly.
- Keep training on ethics practical rather than theoretical. The key focus is to ensure that the research does not harm anybody in the short or long term.
- As well as thinking about the ethical implications for the research participants, consider with the young researchers any ethical implications of their involvement, such as re-traumatisation, through having to handle sensitive issues related to their own lived experience (Walsham, 2020). In preparation, here and in methods, discuss what difficult issues and situations might arise and how they would handle them. Be alert to the young researchers becoming upset as issues are discussed and/ or the project progresses. Mental health first aid training may be helpful for staff as well as the young researchers.
- Ensure that they know what support is available (both from within the project and the wider organisation), what to do should a safeguarding issue arise and that adults working on the project can take on areas of work which the young researchers find too difficult or distressing.
- Handle all these things with care and sensitivity: young researchers must understand the importance of doing research ethically to keep themselves and participants safe. But there is no need to worry them too much by going through every conceivable 'what if?'. Ultimately the responsibility for ethics and safeguarding rests with the adults and agency responsible for the research.

8. Training young researchers

Methods and data collection (Toolkit: session 4)

- Start with a discussion about the pros and cons of different methods (e.g. a survey can be a relatively quick way to reach a more significant number of participants but does not give them opportunities to probe and explore the 'whys' and 'hows', in the way that qualitative interviews or focus groups can. One to one interviews can be more private but also more intense than focus groups, which provide an opportunity for groups to explore issues together.
- Discuss what role the young researchers want adults to have in data collection and what they want to do, e.g. sampling, setting up interviews/focus groups, developing tools, facilitating interviews and focus groups or observing/taking notes? What support will they need to do this? Make sure the roles of young researchers and adults are clear and agreed upon in advance.
- As well as designing the tools (surveys, interview schedules, focus group topic guides), get the young researchers to practice collecting data during the training (e.g. trying out the questionnaires, role-playing, facilitating interviews and focus groups).
- Some examples in the toolkit highlight how training can also be 'on the job' – e.g. you may decide with the young researchers that they first observe an adult doing one or more interviews and then debrief, then do one themselves with an adult observing, and gradually doing some alone or in pairs.

Analysis (Toolkit: session 5)

- Young researchers' roles in data analysis can include commenting on the research process, coding, categorising and interpreting the data, selecting quotations and verifying adult researchers' analysis.
- Analysis helps make sense of data and present it in a more digestible and accessible way. For example, if your project involved hour-long qualitative interviews which have been transcribed, each transcription could be about 30 pages of text. So, 20 interviews would be 600 pages of text. Or, if you have run a survey with 200 people, using a questionnaire with 15 questions, some with 2- 3 sub-questions, that's a lot of data.

8. Training young researchers

Analysis (Toolkit: session 5) - Continued

- Analysis can be a harder sell to young researchers, and it is possible that some or all of them will be less interested in being involved at this stage, or not have the time to do it. Analysis is also something that can be seen as too complicated, intimidating or overwhelming. So some CYP or the adults will therefore presume they can't do it, Be sensitive to this and provide reassurance and encouragement as needed.
- Alternatively, if the young researchers are not that interested in analysing all the data, you can approach this task in a less intense way. For example use group discussions to generate initial themes and ideas. Then adult supporters can carry out some initial analysis and present emerging findings to the young researchers, and use their feedback to inform further analysis, in an iterative process.

Reporting and dissemination (Toolkit: session 6)

- There is a balance to be struck between something which meets the expectations of the adult policy and research world of what a rigorous research report should look like and sharing what is meaningful and important to CYP.
- Discuss who the research report or other outputs are for: funders, service providers, policymakers, the general public, other CYP?
- Remember that this is as much about the process as the outcomes and outputs of the research. Include a discussion of the learning from the research process in the write up **(see 'Evaluating work with young researchers', Toolkit, page 62).**
- Writing up research may or may not include a report. It can also be in the form of web pages, films, comics, drama and more. Be as creative as possible and, if you have the budget, it can be great to involve professionals (e.g. filmmakers or artists) in this stage.
- Plan how you will share your research findings, e.g. a launch event/webinar, a conference, via social and/or traditional media?

9. Evaluating work with young researchers

While the references below indicate the growing body of knowledge about work with young researchers, there is still a lack of evidence on the practice and effectiveness of research led by CYP (Cuevas-Parra, 2020; Kelly et al., 2020).

When planning a project with young researchers, think about how you will evaluate that part of the project, document the processes, impacts and outcomes and share the learning from the start. This is important to help develop and improve work with young researchers in Barnardo's and more widely.

This could include:

- **Getting feedback from young researchers as you go along**

Evaluation activities at key points such as the end of training sessions can help to improve the training and support provided to young researchers and improve the ways in which the group and project are working. It can also contribute to the next stage. See examples in the Toolkit (Evaluating young researcher projects). The following also have some really helpful tools and resources:

- Evaluating Participation Work: The Toolkit and The Guide (Mainey, 2008a, b)
- Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation (Lansdown and O'Kane, 2014)
- The checklists and feedback forms in the Hub na nÓg Participation Framework
- The National Youth Agency Hear by Right Framework

- **Formally evaluating the project**

An evaluation of the processes and outcomes of the young researcher work could be another 'project' in itself. Ideally, this would be conducted by an external, independent evaluator, with some young evaluators also involved. This would link to the initial recruitment process too, for example where you find out what the young researchers hope to gain and their baseline skills and confidence on certain measures. If it is a small project and commissioning formal external evaluator is not possible, you can still do a small evaluation as part of the project.

9. Evaluating work with young researchers

Formally evaluating the project (continued)

- Collecting data at the start of the project on young researchers (and supporting adults) motivations and expectations. At the end, explore what transpired and how well these expectations were met.
- Use session evaluation and monitoring data as above
- Collect primary data from young researchers and adult stakeholders such as project staff. Use focus groups, interviews or a survey in which the group/stakeholders critically reflect on the research process, impact and outcomes.

Share any learning from the evaluation within your organisation to improve future work with young researchers. You could also write a journal article, a blog or similar about the project, with CYP as co-authors, and/or share learning at a conference or other event.

10. References and further information

- Berkeley, University of California (2015). Youth-led Participatory Action Research Hub. http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/
- Bradbury-Jones, C., Isham, L. and Taylor, J. (2018) "The complexities and contradictions in participatory research with vulnerable CYP: A qualitative systematic review," Social Science and Medicine, 215(August), pp. 80–91. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.08.038.
- Brady, L.-M. et al. (2018) "Involving young people in drug and alcohol research" Drugs and Alcohol Today, 18(1). doi: 10.1108/DAT-08-2017-0039.
- Brady, L.-M. and Graham, B. (2019) Social research with CYP: A practical guide. Bristol: The Policy Press. Available at: https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/social-research-with-children-and-young-people
- Brodie, I. et al. (2016) The participation of young people in child sexual exploitation services: a scoping review of the literature. Available at: https://www.alexiproject.org.uk/publications
- Brownlie, J., Anderson, S. and Ormston, R. (2006) Children as Researchers. Edinburgh.
- Cairns, L. et al. (2020) "Investing in Children: respecting rights and promoting agency," in Brady, L.M. (ed) . Embedding young people's participation in health services: new approaches. Bristol: The Policy Press, pp. 205–230.
- Checkoway, B. and Richards-Schuster, K. (2005) Facilitator Guide-Participatory Evaluation with Young People. Available at: https://www.participatorymethods.org/resource/facilitators-guide-participatory-evaluation-young-people
- Coad, J. and Evans, R. (2008) "Reflections on practical approaches to involving CYP in the data analysis process," Children and Society, 22(1), pp. 41–52. doi: 10.1111/j.1099-0860.2006.00062.x.
- Cuevas-Parra, P. (2020) "Co-Researching With Children in the Time of COVID-19: Shifting the Narrative on Methodologies to Generate Knowledge," International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19, pp. 1–12. doi: 10.1177/1609406920982135.
- Dale, H. and Roberts, A. (2017) Training Manual: Lleisiau Bach, Little Voices. Swansea. Available at: https://www.lleisiaubach.org/home
- Dixon, J., Ward, J. and Blower, S. (2019) "'They sat and actually listened to what we think about the care system': the use of participation, consultation, peer research and co-production to raise the voices of young people in and leaving care in England," Child Care in Practice, 25(1), pp. 6–21. doi: 10.1080/13575279.2018.1521380.

10. References and further information

- Esterhuizen, L. (2012) A guide for young people to learn how to do research and create positive change. Available at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/child-led-data-collection-guide-young-people-learn-how-do-research-and-create-positive
- Graham, A., Simmons, C. and Truscott, J. (2017) "'I'm more confident now, I was really quiet': exploring the potential benefits of child-led research," International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 30(2), pp. 190–205. doi: 10.1080/09518398.2016.1242803.
- Groundwater-Smith, S., Dockett, S. and Bottrell, D. (2015) Participatory Research with Children and Young People. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Kellett, M. (2011) "Empowering CYP as researchers: Overcoming barriers and building capacity," Child Indicators Research, 4(2), pp. 205–219. doi: 10.1007/s12187-010-9103-1.
- Kelly, B. et al. (2020) "'I haven't read it, I've lived it!' The benefits and challenges of peer research with young people leaving care," Qualitative Social Work, 19(1), pp. 108–124. doi: 10.1177/1473325018800370.
- Kim, C.-Y., Sheehy, K. and Kerwalla, L. (2017) Developing Children as Researchers: A Practical Guide to Help Children Conduct Social Research. London: Routledge.
- Lansdown, G. and O'Kane, C. (2014) Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's participation. Save the Children: London. Available at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document-collections/toolkit-monitoring-and-evaluating-childrens-participation
- Larkins, C. and Bilson, A. (2016) The Magic 6 Participatory Action and Learning Experiences with Roma Youth: Training Manual. Cluj-Napocca, Romania. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/research-roma-children/?publications/165/
- Lushey, C. J. and Munro, E. R. (2015) "Participatory peer research methodology: An effective method for obtaining young people's perspectives on transitions from care to adulthood?," Qualitative Social Work, 14(4), pp. 522–537. doi: 10.1177/1473325014559282.
- Mainey, A. (2008a) Evaluating Participation Work: the guide. London: Participation Works. Available at: https://eypagnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Participation-Works-_evaluating-participation-guide.pdf

10. References and further information

- Mainey, A. (2008b) Evaluating Participation Work: the Toolkit. London: Participation Works. Available at: https://eypagnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Participation-Works-_evaluating-participation-toolkit.pdf   [1]
- NIHR (2021) Involving CYP in research: top tips and essential key issues for researchers. Available at: www.learningforinvolvement.org.uk/?opportunity=nihr-involving-children-and-young-people-as-advisors-in-research
- Partnership for Young London (2021). Involving Young Londoners: A toolkit for peer research. Available from: https://www.partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk/post/involving-young-londoners-a-toolkit-for-peer-research
- PEAR (2010) Young People in Research: How to involve us. London. Available at: https://www.ncb.org.uk/resources/all-resources/filter/bullying/young-people-research-guidance-researchers-pear-young
- Percy-Smith, B., Larkins, C. and Bereményi, Á. (2008) Supporting the Participation and Empowerment of Young Roma A Participatory Practice guide for professionals. Cluj-Napocca, Romania. Available at: www.clok.uclan.ac.uk/16848/1/PEER_guide_Profesionals Dec 15_for publication.pdf
- Revolving Doors (2016) Running a peer research project with offenders in the community: A handbook for staff. London. Available at: www.revolving-doors.org.uk/involvement/peer-research/noms-toolkits
- Save the Children (2000) Young People as Researchers. London. Available at: www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/young-people-as-researchers.pdf
- Stuart, K. et al. (2021) "Learning How To Support National Online Youth Led Research," Practitioner Research. Available at: https://www.socialpublishersfoundation.org/knowledge_base/learning-how-to-support-national-online-youth-led-research/
- Thompson, J., Lanchin, S. and Moxon, D. (2015) Be real with me : Using peer research to explore the journeys of young people who run away from home or care. Sandbach, Cheshire. Available at: https://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/media/37981/be-real-july-2015-peer-research.pdf
- Tisdall, E. K. M. and Cuevas-Parra, P. (2019) Child-led Research: From participating in research to leading it, addressing inequalities in decision-making. Available at: https://www.wvi.org
- Walsham, M. (2020) Involving Young Londoners: A review of participatory approaches in the youth sector. Available at: https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/involving-young-londoners/