

Falkirk Children's Planning Partnership

Participation and Engagement Strategy



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1. Forewords

Foreword - Written by Young People

This foreword and strategy are based on our experiences and what young people have told us matters most.

Being included and listened to really matters to us. When adults actually listen, it feels like they are taking us seriously and not treating us like a wain. It makes us feel respected and like what we say matters. When adults don't listen, it's annoying and it makes us stop wanting to talk. Sometimes we just stop talking altogether because it feels pointless.

Young people should have a say because this is about us. It's a young person's strategy. Adults aren't going through school and our experiences the same way we are, so they don't always know what we're dealing with. Sometimes we get treated like we know nothing, when actually we're living it and we know more than people think about being a young person today.

We want adults to stop thinking they know more than us just because they're older. We also want them to stop patching us and not giving us time. What helps is when adults actually listen to our questions, care about what we're saying and are patient when it's hard for us to explain things. When adults listen properly, it helps because we matter and we should be heard. It makes us feel more motivated and more confident to speak about what we think.

Good relationships make a big difference. Building a bond, being able to have a laugh and actually talking with us instead of talking at us helps us trust adults more. We want adults to care about what's going on with us as people, not just schoolwork or problems. When someone shares something hard, adults should care, ask how we're coping and ask if we want help. They shouldn't just tell us to deal with it or share things without telling us first.

We're growing up in a different time and things are different now. We're dealing with school, home, social media and the world changing all the time. It's a lot. We aren't perfect and we will get things wrong, but we need adults in our lives to help us learn by listening to us and understanding what we need, not just what they think we need.

If this strategy works the way it should, more young people would feel confident, respected and listened to. Self-esteem would be better, more young people would get involved in things and more would open up about how they're feeling. This could really help young people's mental health and make us feel like our voices actually matter.



Falkirk Children's Planning Partnership response to the words of children and young people

We want to begin by thanking the children and young people who contributed so openly and honestly to this strategy. Your words set the tone for this work in the most important way by reminding us what truly matters.

You told us clearly that being listened to, taken seriously, and treated with respect makes a real difference. When adults give you time, show patience, and build genuine relationships, you feel more confident and more able to share your views. When this doesn't happen, when you feel dismissed, ignored, or "talked at", it affects your willingness to speak and erodes trust. We take this seriously.

You also reminded us that you are growing up in a fast-changing world, and that adults cannot assume we always know what you need. Your experiences, challenges, strengths and insights are unique, and important. You are the experts in your own lives, and our role is to listen, understand and work with you, not make decisions for you.

This strategy is our commitment to doing that. We will create more opportunities for children and young people to influence decisions, shape services and be genuine partners in the work that affects you. Participation will not be an add-on or a token gesture, it will be a core part of how we work across Falkirk's Children's Planning Partnership.

If this strategy does what it is intended to do, more children and young people will feel heard, valued and respected. Your voices will guide us, challenge us and help us keep improving. We are grateful for your honesty and leadership, and we are committed to acting on what you have told us.

On behalf of Falkirk Children's Planning Partnership.



In Falkirk we are proud to have signed up to the Forth Valley and West Lothian Youth Voice Charter.

Forth Valley and West Lothian Youth Voice Charter

This charter was created by the children and young people of Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Stirling and West Lothian. It was shaped by representatives from youth voice structures and informed by the views of over 650 individuals across all four local authorities.

These statements are the principles on how children and young people wish to be engaged with, and consulted on, their views and opinions.

Treat us with respect and fairness - Speak to us calmly and don't shout. Politely and patiently. Nicely and kindly. Remain balanced and calm, taking into account our feelings and frustrations.

Personalise your approach - Give us all of the information that we need. Be clear on what you are saying and double check that we understand. Consider the setting and environment where you speak to us, is it a positive space where we feel comfortable and welcome?

Consider our needs - Speak to us in a way that we understand, don't use confusing language. Make sure we can take part fully, thinking about those less confident or who have additional support needs.

Value us and show interest in our opinions - Recognise that all opinions are valid and valued. Involve us and give time to share our opinions, don't dismiss our ideas. Show you appreciate our opinions, speaking to us as you would another adult. Treat us equally and not differently or inferior.



Actively listen - Listen to us as we listen to you. Fully listen, waiting until we finish what we are saying. Don't talk over us and don't interrupt. Don't seek some options over others and don't ask the same people all the time, look to get the views from as many as possible.

Be understanding and take us seriously - We are all individuals, try to understand our point of view. Put aside your own bias and don't make judgements because your opinions are different to ours. Don't make assumptions about what we think and consider our perspective. Be aware of our gender / background / race / beliefs and circumstances.

Give us time to think and share - We need time to understand and work at our own pace, give us different ways to share our opinions and the chance to do so. Find out what works for us, sharing views individually or with others, privately or publicly. Don't overwhelm us but don't limit the information you give us either. Plan to speak to us and don't leave things till the last minute.

Make it meaningful - Give us realistic expectations and tell us why something can/cannot be done. Be encouraging and praise our involvement. Explain how our views make a difference and what can change.

Take action and give feedback - Act on what we have told you and tell us what has happened as a result. Explain it in a way that makes sense and share this in places which we go to or in things that we look at. Give us real feedback and allow us to do the same.

We are collaborators not consultants - Work with us as a partner in a genuine and equal way. See all our opinions as the same and don't let yours as the adult be the dominant one. Allow us to make decisions and be involved in actions taken.

Forth Valley and West Lothian Youth Voice Development Group

Forth Valley and West Lothian Youth Voice Charter

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Treat us with respect and fairness



Personalise your approach



Consider our needs



Value us and show interest in our opinions



Actively listen

Forth Valley and
West Lothian
Youth Voice
Charter



UNCRC symbols from
www.cypcs.org.uk



Be understanding and take us seriously



Give us time to think and share



Make it meaningful



Take action and give feedback



We are collaborators not consultants

2. Introduction

Falkirk Children's Planning Partnership is committed to ensuring that the voices of children, young people and their families & carers are central to the planning, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their lives. This Participation and Engagement Strategy sets out how we will work collaboratively with children, young people and their families & carers to ensure their views shape decision making at every level, at the earliest opportunity.

Our approach is grounded in the principles of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), our [Corporate Parenting Duties](#) and The Promise, which emphasises listening to children, young people, families and carers, building trusting relationships, and creating opportunities for meaningful participation. Central to this strategy is a commitment to Children's Rights, recognising that every child has the right to have their voice heard and taken seriously in matters that affect them, as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

As Professor Laura Lundy asserts, "Just because you can't do it as well as you would like to, does not mean you shouldn't do it at all" [Child & Youth Friendly Governance Project](#). This perspective underscores our commitment to continuous learning and progress in involving children, young people and their families & carers in the decision-making process.

Through this strategy, Falkirk Children's Planning Partnership aims to embed participation as a core part of our culture, ensuring that children, young people and their families & carers are not only consulted, but are active partners in shaping the services and support they receive.

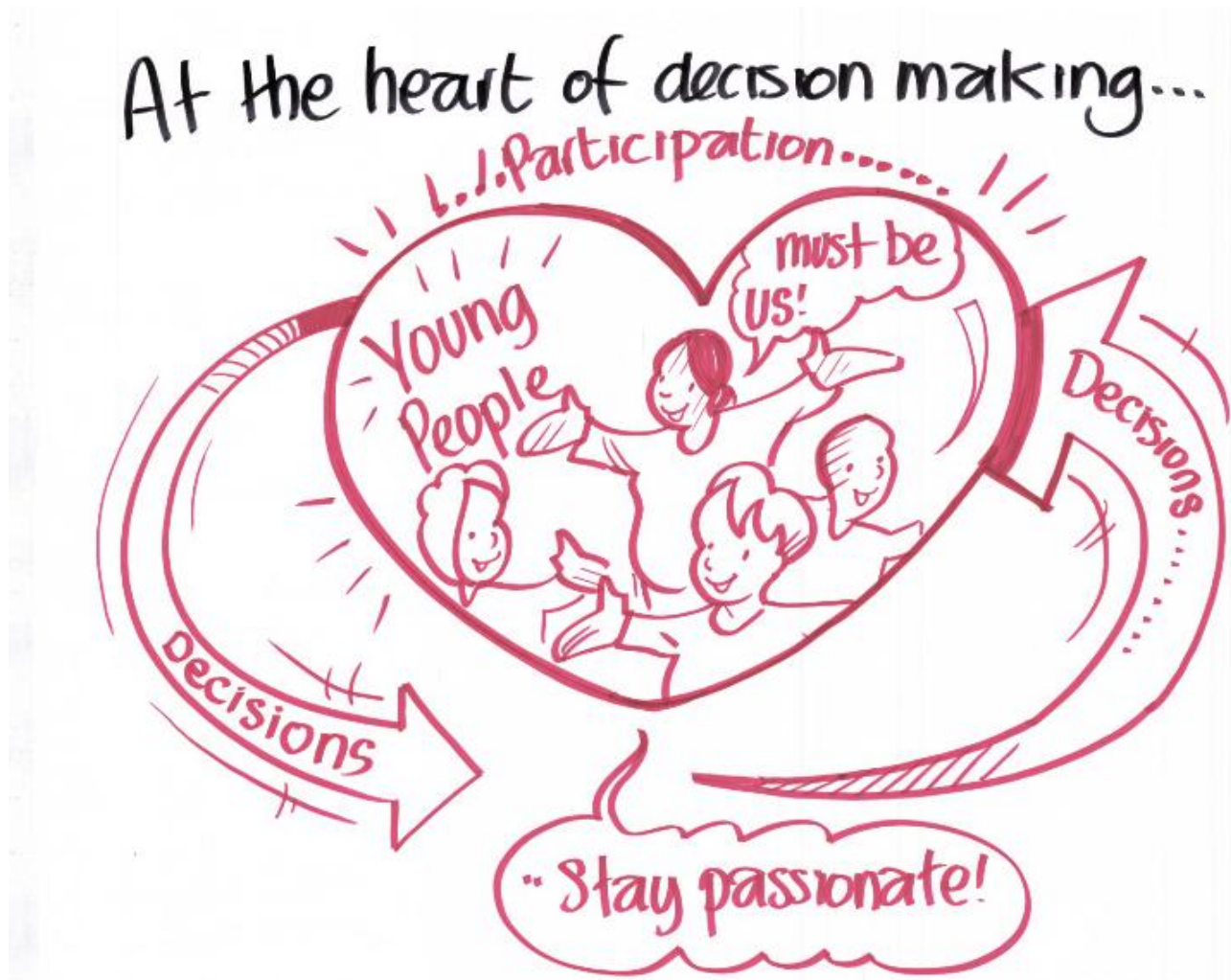
Our Falkirk Champs, along with other young people across Forth Valley and West Lothian collaborated to produce the [Youth Voice Guidance Framework](#), and [Youth Voice Toolkit](#). This can support practitioners to implement meaningful and consistent ways for children and young people to have their voices heard across the region, in all settings.

3. Why Engagement with Children and Young People is so important.

Children and young people have the right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. This is supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – including:

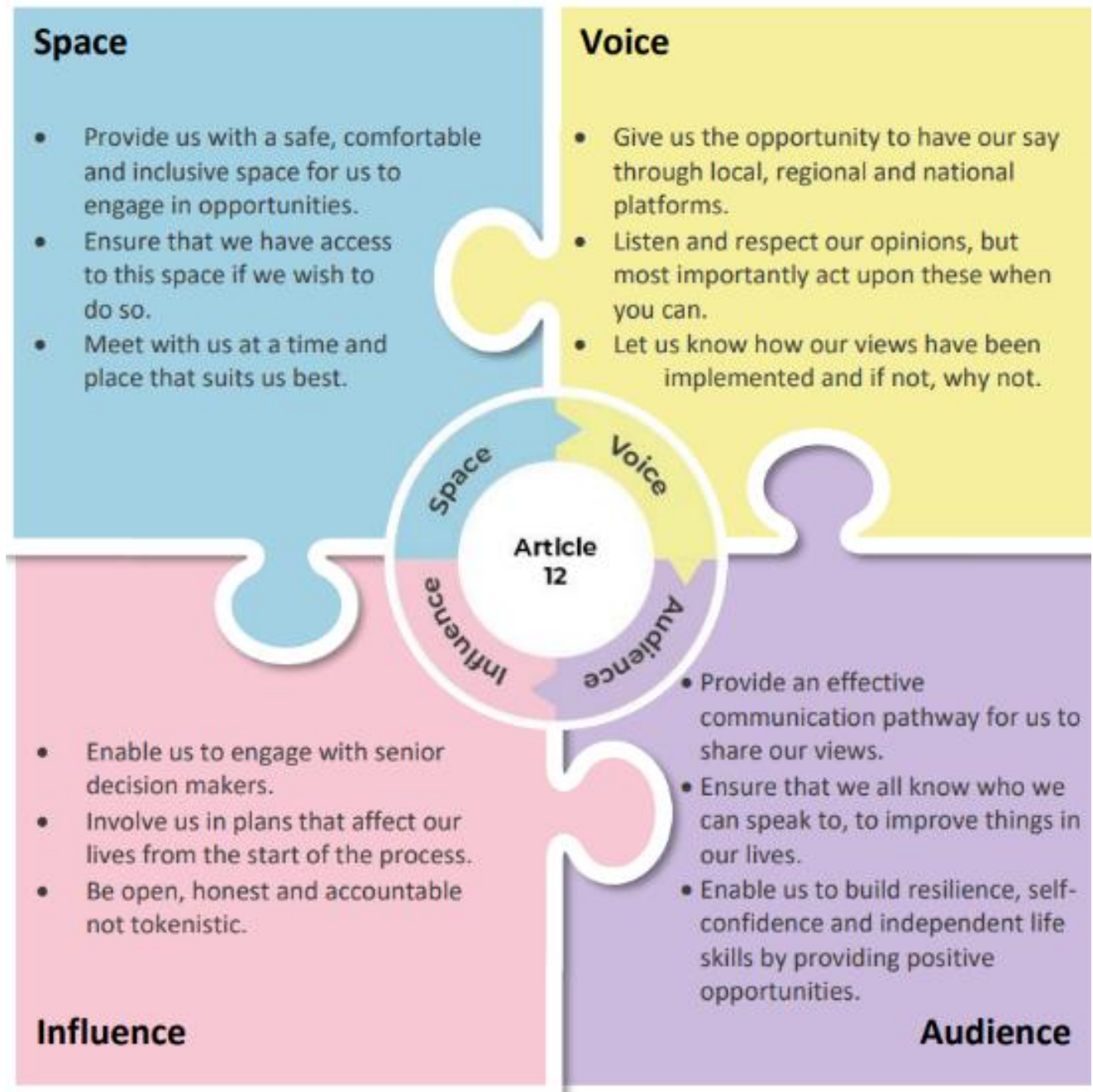
- Article 12: Right to be heard
- Article 13: Freedom of expression
- Article 17: Access to information
- Article 2: Non-discrimination
- Article 3: Best interests of the child

Falkirk Council is committed to making these rights real in practice.



Using the Lundy Model of Participation, we recognise that meaningful participation requires:

- **Space** – creating safe, inclusive opportunities to be heard
- **Voice** – supporting children and young people to express their views
- **Audience** – ensuring the right people listen
- **Influence** – acting on what is said and feeding back the outcome



When there are meaningful opportunities to participate, services become more effective, fair and relevant. Children and young people bring personal insight and fresh ideas that adults may not see. Involving children and young people early leads to better planning, problem-solving and outcomes across Children's Services and beyond.

Participation also supports wellbeing, confidence and inclusion. When young people see using their voice makes a difference, it builds trust, leadership skills and a sense of belonging. It helps them become active citizens who feel valued and heard.

For Falkirk Planning Partnership, engaging children and young people strengthens decision-making, improves use of resources, and ensures services reflect the diversity of experiences across the area.



4. Recognising babies and young children as active participants.

Even our youngest children have views, preferences and feelings about their lives, and it's our responsibility to listen and respond to them. Babies and young children communicate in many ways. Through their actions, emotions, play, facial expressions, body language, sounds and such like. In Falkirk, we recognise the rights of our youngest children in our commitment to the UNCRC, which states that all children have the right to express their views in matters that affect them. The Scottish Government have recently published guidance to help us do this as meaningfully as we can: [Voice of the Infant Best Practice Guidelines and Infant Pledge](#).

To make this pledge a reality Falkirk Children's Planning Partnership, we will:

- Recognise babies and young children as active participants in their own lives and learning.
- Support staff across services to develop the skills and confidence to listen to, observe and respond to early communication.
- Create nurturing, inclusive and relationship-based environments where young children feel safe, secure and able to express themselves.
- Work collaboratively with parents and carers, valuing their insights as key interpreters of their children's experiences and voices.
- Ensure that the perspectives and lived experiences of our youngest children is included to inform planning, service design and continuous improvement across Falkirk.

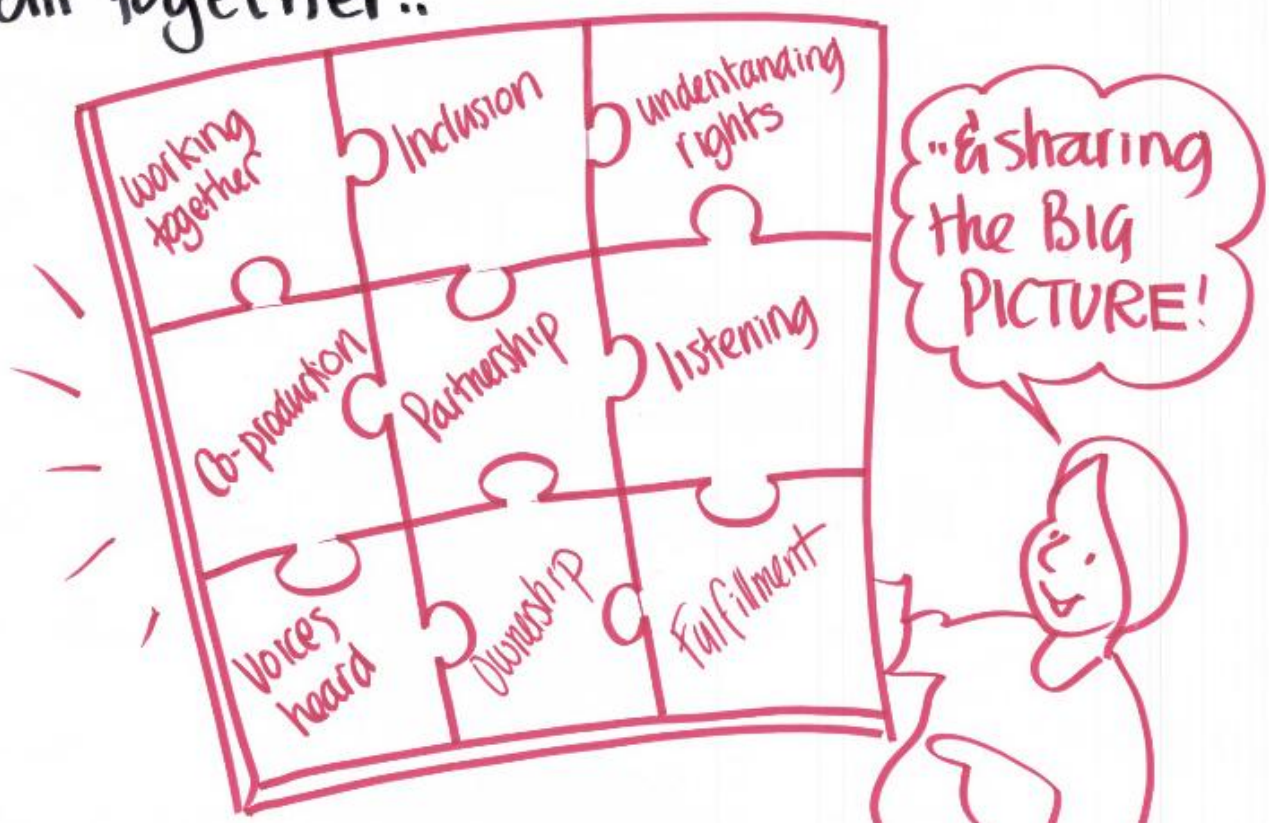
By listening to and acting on what babies and young children communicate, we build stronger, more responsive services that truly place the child at the centre.

5. Why engagement with families, parents and carers is so important.

In Falkirk, we recognise that children thrive when they are supported to stay connected to their families, schools and communities. Therefore, meaningful engagement and participation of families, parents and carers is fundamental to improving outcomes for children and young people across Falkirk.

Children and young people are supported best when the important adults in their lives feel included, listened to and respected. Families, parents and carers bring insight, experience and care that no service can replace. When they are involved in decisions, planning and service design, support becomes more meaningful, more effective and easier to access.

Participation is about bringing it all together..



Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) sets out how everyone working with children should involve families. GIRFEC highlights the importance of:

- Listening to children, young people and the adults who care for them
- Making decisions together, based on strengths and needs
- Providing help early, in the right way and at the right time

(Scottish Government, Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) Policy Statement, 2022)

The Promise asks Scotland to make sure children feel loved, safe and respected. It recognises that most children grow up best in their families and that support should be built around family strengths. It calls for services to:

- Treat parents and carers as partners
- Listen without judgement
- Remove barriers to involvement

(The Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020)

In Falkirk we want to do this by:

- Removing barriers to participation and ensure engagement is accessible, trauma informed and respectful.
- Work with families, not to them or for them
- Recognise parents and carers as

Children's Rights

Scotland is committed to children's rights, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This means children must be supported to have their say and families should be involved in decisions that affect them. Listening to parents, carers and families helps make sure children's rights are respected in practice.



6. What do we mean by Participation?

Participation means more than asking for opinions. It is about partnership and influence. Guided by the aforementioned Lundy Model, participation for Falkirk Children's Planning Partnership means that children, young people, families & carers:

- Have the space to take part in ways that feel safe and comfortable.
- Have informed consent.
- Are supported to use their voice, with communication methods that meet their needs.
- Are listened to by an audience with the power to take action.
- See their views have influence, with feedback on what has changed or why it can't change.

Participation can happen at individual, group and community levels and must include those who face barriers.

Types of participation

- ✓ **Consultation** - The project is designed and run by adults, but children, young people, families & carers understand the process and their opinions are gathered and valued.
- ✓ **Co-Production** - Adults, children, young people, families & carers working together to influence the support and services on offer during the design, delivery and review stages.
- ✓ **Child or Young Person Initiated** - Children and young people plan and select their own activities and adults participate rather than lead on them.
- ✓ **Child or Young Person Led** - Children and young people lead on projects and events. Adults may observe and assist, but they do not interfere with the process or play a management role.

Participation is not

- X **Tokenism** - Adult-led activities in which children and young people may be consulted but with minimal opportunities for feedback, or feedback is not considered.
- X **Direction** - Adult-led activities in which children and young people do as they are asked without understanding the purpose of the activity.
- X **Communication** - Just sharing information with children and young people e.g. no input.

What Are the Benefits?

For children and young people:

- Feeling respected, included and taken seriously
- Increased confidence, leadership and communication skills
- Better wellbeing and stronger sense of belonging
- Real opportunities to influence change

For services and decision-makers:

- Better understanding of needs and lived experience
- More responsive and accessible services
- Earlier identification of issues and solutions
- Stronger relationships and trust with young people

For communities:

- More active, engaged and confident young citizens
- Fairer decision-making and reduced inequalities
- Stronger connections between generations and services

7. The benefits of good participation and what this looks like?

Good participation, in line with the Lundy Model, has these qualities:

- Safe and respectful space – children and young people can take part without judgement
- Support for voice – communication is accessible, inclusive and flexible
- Listening audience – adults with responsibility and influence are involved
- Real influence – children and young people see the impact of their views
- Inclusive – participation reflects diverse backgrounds, needs and abilities
- Voluntary and safe – no one is forced to take part, and support is available
- Ongoing and meaningful – not a one-off, but embedded in how services work
- Clear feedback – young people are told what has happened with their ideas

Examples of participation in Falkirk

There's a trauma-informed "Breathing Space" project in Falkirk that was co-designed with young people - especially those who are care-experienced or involved with justice/social work services - and it's being used as a supportive environment during crisis situations. Young people helped shape this space and how it should operate so it better meets their needs rather than just being a service for them.

Our Falkirk Champs, along with other young people across Forth Valley and West Lothian collaborated to produce the Youth Voice Guidance Framework and Youth Voice Toolkit. This can support practitioners to implement meaningful and consistent ways for children and young people to have their voices heard across the region, in all settings

Young people from Langlees and Bainsford in Falkirk co-created the Children's Neighbourhood Festival - planning activities, designing promotional materials, and organising events to celebrate their community and promote play and active travel. This was supported by Falkirk Council and partners, with youths leading on what happened and how it happened.

8. How to get involved in participation groups

Children, young people and their families & carers across Falkirk have a variety of ways to share their views, influence decisions and help shape the services that affect their lives. We offer children, young people and their families/carers the opportunity to take part in a number of participation groups. We are committed to making participation accessible, engaging and meaningful for everyone. The following groups and opportunities provide different opportunities to get involved:

Participate+

Participate Plus offers young people a platform to discuss issues that matter to them, work alongside professionals, and help improve local services. Members take part in meetings, projects, consultations and events where their voices help inform change. Young people involved often contribute to training staff, shaping policies, or giving feedback on new initiatives.

PARTICIPATE 

Falkirk Champs

Falkirk Champs is a group for care-experienced children and young people who want to speak up about their experiences and make improvements for others in care. Champs members work with social work, education, health and other partners to challenge stigma, promote rights, and ensure care-experienced voices are heard at every level.



The Get to Focus SCIO

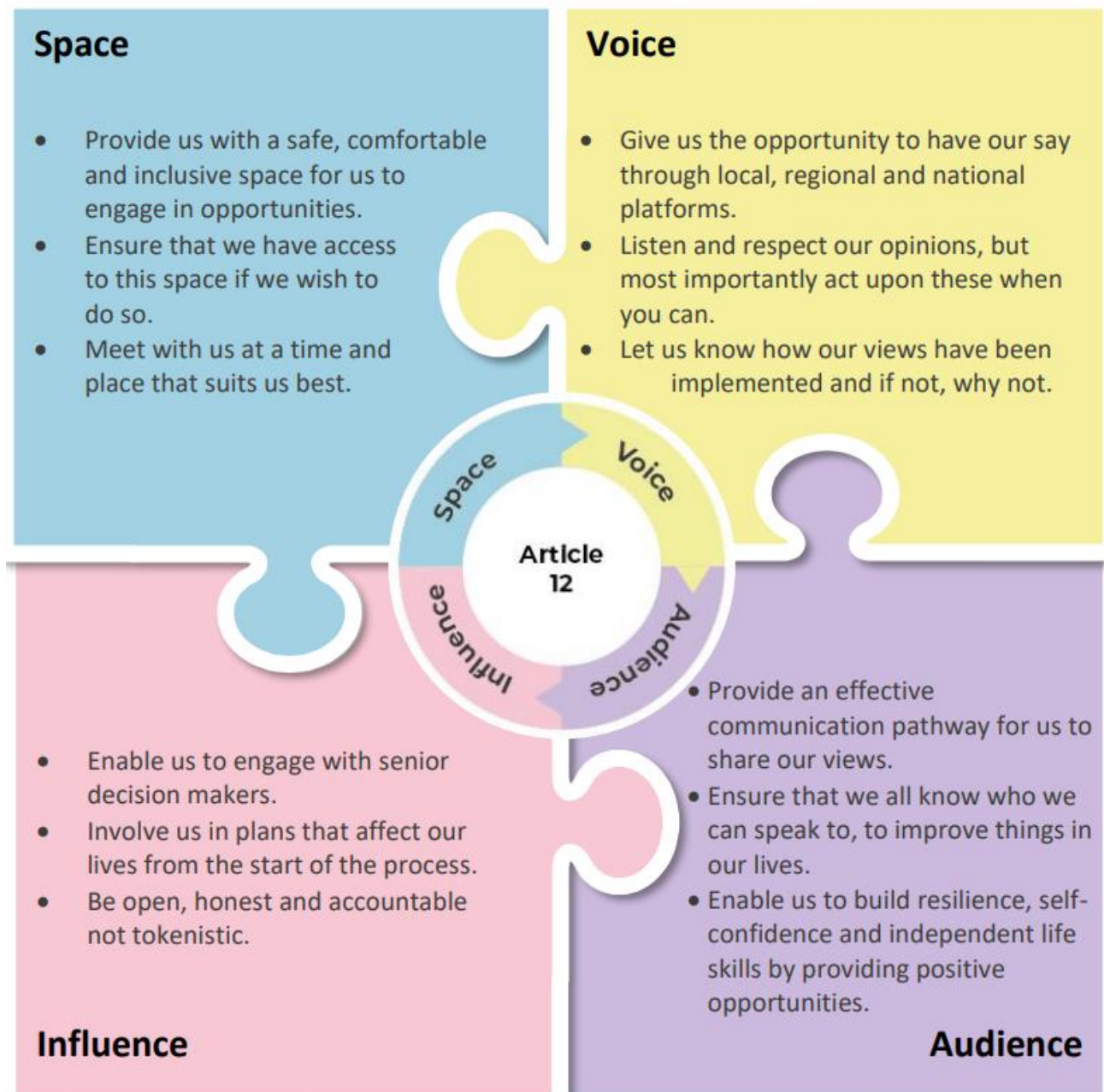
Get to Focus are a group of passionate people who have lived experience. The group want to help humanise systems, learn together and be part of the solution to making things better and not be seen as part of the problem.

We will ensure that children and young people receive the support they need to take part, including help with confidence, transport, accessibility, or communication needs.



9. Our Engagement Model, Strategies and Plans

Our participation and engagement strategy sets out how Falkirk Children's Planning Partnership involves children, young people, families and partners in decision-making, service planning and improvement. We are committed to collaborating with people as early as possible in processes and projects.



It is built on the following principles:

1. Rights-Based Participation

- Engagement is grounded in the UNCRC, GIRFEC and The Promise
- Children and young people have the right to be heard, included and involved.
- Participation is voluntary, meaningful, inclusive and appropriate to age, stage, and capacity.

2. Co-Production and Collaboration

- Children, young people and families are partners – not just consultees.
- We work with schools, youth services, social work, health partners and the third sector to co-design improvements.
- Lived experience informs service change and delivery.

3. Inclusive and Accessible Approaches

- A mix of methods is used: digital tools, face-to-face sessions, forums, surveys, creative activities, youth councils and targeted outreach.
- Extra support is there to ensure that seldom-heard groups can take part.
- Communication is clear, child-friendly, and accessible.
- Engagement will be meaningful, valued and supported for everyone who wants to participate. We will make opportunities as inclusive as possible to all abilities, languages and communication style.

4. Feedback and Accountability

- Engagement includes clear feedback on how views influenced outcomes (“you said, we did”).
- Participation is embedded in service planning cycles and review processes.
- Data from engagement is monitored and reported to senior leaders and elected members.

Here are some tools practitioners can use to support participation and engagement work, some have been co-produced with Falkirk children and young people.

[Voice of the Infant Best Practice Guidelines and Infant Pledge](#)

[FVWL-Youth-Voice-Framework.pdf](#)

[Youth Voice Toolkit | Resources | Education Scotland](#)

[Home - Our Hearings, Our Voice](#)

10. How we will know we are making a difference.



We will know we are making a positive difference when children and young people across Falkirk tell us that they feel listened to, respected and involved in decisions that affect their lives. Children's views, experiences and ideas will be valued and used to shape planning, services and support across the partnership.

Listening to Children, Young People and Families

We will use a range of inclusive and age-appropriate ways to listen to children, young people, families and carers. This will include:

- Surveys and questionnaires that are clear, accessible and suitable for different ages and needs
- Focus groups and group discussions
- Creative and participatory approaches, including arts-based and digital methods
- Opportunities for children and young people to share their views as part of everyday services and support

We will be clear about why we are asking for views and will make sure children and young people understand how their feedback will be used.

Showing That Participation Leads to Change

We will ensure children and young people can see how their views make a difference by:

- Clearly demonstrating how feedback has influenced decisions, priorities and service design
- Sharing "you said, we did" examples across services and the partnership
- Providing feedback to children, young people and families about what has changed
- Using participation evidence to support planning, improvement and commissioning activity

Inclusive Participation and Fair Access

We are committed to ensuring that all children and young people in Falkirk have opportunities to take part. We will:

- Monitor who is participating in engagement activities
- Identify gaps and take action to improve inclusion
- Make targeted efforts to reach children whose voices are less often heard, including care experienced children, disabled children and young people, and those experiencing inequality, disadvantage and/or cultural barriers.
- Work with trusted practitioners, schools and community partners to reduce barriers to participation

Building Confidence and Consistency Across the Workforce

We will support staff and partners to involve children and young people in a meaningful and consistent way. This will include:

- Encouraging reflection on participation practice
- Auditing how children's views are gathered and used across services
- Supporting learning and development to build skills and confidence
- Sharing good practice across teams and services

Understanding Impact on Services and Support

We will track how participation and engagement improve the support provided to children, young people, families and carers by:

- Reviewing changes to services informed by children's views
- Linking participation activity to service improvement and outcomes
- Considering feedback from families and carers on how support feels and works in practice

Sharing Learning and Ensuring Accountability

We will ensure learning from participation is shared and acted upon through:

- Regular reporting to the Children's Planning Partnership and relevant governance groups
- Partnership reviews and self-evaluation activity
- Ongoing learning, reflection and improvement across the partnership
- Clear accountability for ensuring feedback leads to real, visible change

Our Commitment to Children's Rights and National Priorities

This approach supports Falkirk Council's commitment to:

- Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) by placing children's wellbeing and voice at the centre of decision-making
- The Promise by listening to lived experience and building trusting, respectful relationships
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by ensuring children's right to be heard and taken seriously

Through this work, we aim to ensure children and young people in Falkirk know that their voices matter and that participation leads to positive change.



11. Appendix 1

Meaningful & Genuine Participation – Practitioner Checklist *Children, Young People, Families and Carers*

This checklist supports reflective practice and self-evaluation. It aligns with Care Inspectorate Quality Indicators and should be used before, during and after participation activity.

Purpose and Planning (QI 1.1, 2.1)

- I am clear about why children, families and carers are being involved
- The purpose of engagement is explained clearly and respectfully
- People are involved early enough to influence decisions
- I am honest about what can and cannot change

Choice, Voice and Inclusion (QI 2.2, 3.1)

- People have choices about how they take part
- Different ways to share views are offered
- Language and information are accessible and inclusive
- Barriers to participation have been identified and reduced
- Extra support is offered to those whose voices are less often heard

Listening and Respect (QI 2.3)

- Views are listened to without judgement
- Different perspectives are valued and respected
- Views are recorded accurately and sensitively
- Adults do not dominate or steer responses

Influence and Feedback (QI 3.1, 3.2)

- Views have genuinely influenced decisions or planning
- Feedback is shared in a clear and accessible way
- Changes, or reasons why change was not possible, are explained honestly
- People know what will happen next

Reflection and Improvement (QI 1.3, 4.1)

- I have reflected on what worked well
- I have considered the experience of children, families and carers
- Learning has been shared with colleagues or partners



- Participation has informed future practice or service improvement

Aligned with the Care Inspectorate Quality Framework, Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), The Promise and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

