

Factsheet #8: Young Inspectors

What are Young Inspectors?

Young Inspectors are children and young people (C&YP) who 'inspect' services and provide feedback to the services based on their own experiences and/or the experiences of other C&YP to identify good practice and make recommendations for improvements.

There is no one 'right' way to run a team of Young Inspectors, however this Factsheet provides some general guidance on establishing a group and supporting members' skills development. The steps in this Factsheet are based on [Factsheet #3: The Participation Process](#).

Purpose

Establishing the purpose

Different bodies and organisations use Young Inspectors for different purposes. They may specialise in a particular type of service, such as health services or short breaks, or they may represent a particular demographic of children and young people (C&YP), such as disabled C&YP or looked after children. Equally, many Young Inspectors inspect a broad range of universal services.

When establishing your purpose, consider:

- Does the purpose reflect C&YP's priorities regarding services improvement?
 - We recommend involving C&YP in establishing the purpose of the group.
- Is there genuine scope for influencing the services identified, resulting in positive change for C&YP?
- Do other key stakeholders agree with and support your purpose? Think about:
 - Commissioning staff
 - Budget holders
 - Service Providers
 - C&YP

Building a case for support

C&YP participation groups such as Young Inspectors are often seen as 'nice to have'. However, it is possible to make a solid case for why Young Inspectors bring value to a local authority and individual services.

- Services better meet the needs of C&YP
- Meaningful Young Inspectors are valued by Ofsted inspectors
- Improved communication with services
- C&YP Inspections are a source of evidence
- C&YP have new opportunities to develop widely-applicable skills



Case study: [Camden Young Inspectors](#)

Camden Council's Young Inspectors programme receives consistently high praise from Ofsted:

"Children's and young people's participation in and influence of service development are deeply ingrained. The young inspector's programme, Children in Care Council (CiCC) and other forums demonstrate important improvements and changes to services, directly attributable to young people's proposals, supported by a highly committed participation worker."

[Ofsted, 2017](#)

Camden's Senior Participation Officer for Participation, Elzbieta Chandrasena's advice to others developing a Young Inspectors project is:

- Find what will resonate with senior management.
 - ◇ Is there a particular area for improvement identified by Ofsted or internally?
 - ◇ Are there elements of workplans or strategies which would benefit?
- Approach management at both the LA and services collaboratively.
 - ◇ Young Inspectors take many forms, so discuss how they would work most effectively in your context.
- Identify 'champions' in different teams who see the value of C&YP input.
 - ◇ Work with them to clearly define the support they are able to offer by linking their work with the project.

Recruitment

Your Young Inspectors team should reflect and represent the C&YP who use the inspected services on a regular basis. This is likely to mean that you will be recruiting from seldom heard demographics, and your recruitment processes should reflect this. Ensure that you are actively seeking to recruit C&YP with a broad range of backgrounds and lived experiences, and of different ages. For more guidance on this, see [Factsheet #4: Barriers to Participation](#).

Motivators

There are a wide range of motivators which are likely to encourage C&YP to sign up to be a Young Inspector:

- Making an impact: Giving clear examples of the impact that previous Young Inspectors have had, and/or the organisations that you hope to influence will encourage C&YP that their experiences can facilitate genuine change.

Example: [The Participation People, Dorset – Young Inspectors visited supported housing provision for children in care](#)

- Incentives/ Rewards: It is important to recognise the time and energy that busy C&YP give to groups like this. Acknowledging their commitment through vouchers or rewards in kind (trips, activity days etc.) shows that their work is valued.

Important: Check implications of vouchers for any young people receiving benefits.

- Recognising skills development: Highlighting the skills and experience that C&YP will gain as Young Inspectors and how these can support them in their wider lives and in the future.
- Social opportunities: being a Young Inspector should be fun! It is an opportunity to meet others and build new friendships.

My experience with the Young Inspectors has helped me make some new friends and helped me grow in areas such as confidence and teamwork... I can take away a lot from the Young Inspectors group that can help me throughout my life.
Rob, Plymouth Young Inspectors

Training Young Inspectors

Your Young Inspectors will probably have a lot of enthusiasm and be raring to get started, but C&YP have told us that it is helpful to have some training before their first inspection in:

- Using recording equipment and/or taking effective notes
- Conducting interviews
- Working as a team
- Managing their time
- Staying neutral
- Communicating clearly and confidently

Be precise with the questions you ask to get good answers.

Planning

Once you have recruited your team, you can work with them to plan the individual inspections.

The Participation People support Young Inspectors in a range of contexts, as well as other participation opportunities. Their advice for planning inspections is:

1. Find a service that is easily 'inspectable' and where the senior management is open to listening. The service needs to be tangible and something that young people use. Decision-makers must be open to feedback and being challenged.
2. Co-create a line of enquiry with young people and senior managers. Encourage decision-makers to think about what they are open to changing and what they deem to be "non-negotiables" right at the start. Make sure they have communicated the reasons for this to the Young Inspectors in order to manage expectations.
3. Agree the methodology, together. Give young people a menu of approaches for inspecting the service, ensuring that they understand and agree on the approach. It will also support them to develop research skills.
4. Work with both decision-makers and C&YP to develop the findings, making sure that they understand each other's perspectives.
5. Agree a timeline for a response and action. Ask decision makers to commit to actions they will take to implement changes and when young people will hear from them on what they have done, why and how effective this is or isn't.
6. Ensure that other local youth voice bodies and participation groups know about the inspection, as this helps scrutinise the actions decision makers take.

Delivery

Some C&YP will feel confident in inspecting services by themselves, whereas others may require additional support from a peer or adult. This should be acknowledged and taken into account in planning and training, however it also offers an excellent opportunity for personal development.

Methodologies

There is no 'right' way to conduct an inspection, and different approaches will be appropriate for different inspections. Some frequently used methods are:

- Mystery shopping
- Observation
- Questionnaires
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Desk-based research

Young Inspectors should communicate with service staff as well as other service users to get a thorough understanding of the service.

Ensure that safeguarding good practice is followed, including rigorous risk assessments and establishing protocol for C&YP before, during and after inspections.

Evaluation

After the inspection, Young Inspectors analyse their findings and develop reports and recommendations for service management. Reports need not be formal written reports, but could also be films, presentations, infographics or art-based.

Your Young Inspectors will improve their skills and techniques every time they undertake an inspection. They should have an opportunity to reflect on what went well and what could go better after each inspection, and share these reflections with the other members of their team. This also gives them an opportunity to identify any additional training they feel they need.

In addition, your Young Inspectors should be supported to recognise and articulate their own personal development in terms of soft skills and research techniques.

C&YP tell us that getting feedback on the impact of their work is a vital component of any type of participation work. Establish feedback timelines with the services that will be inspected, and ensure that Young Inspectors are informed of the changes that are (or are not) made as a result of their inspection, along with justifications for the decision made.

For more information on monitoring and evaluating participation work, see [Factsheet #7: Monitoring and Evaluation](#).

FAQs

- **How many meetings?**

It is up to you and your Young Inspectors to decide how frequently they meet as a group, but they should have regular opportunities to reflect on their work, share their experiences as a team and receive feedback.

- **How old are Young Inspectors?**

Children and young people of all ages have the capacity to learn the skills required to be a Young Inspector, however the most important thing is that your Young Inspectors reflect the ages of the C&YP using the services.

- **How many Young Inspectors should be in a group?**

It is up to you how many Young Inspectors you recruit, but bear in mind C&YP's time commitments and discuss with them how many inspections they can reasonably carry out in a given period, and how many Young Inspectors should work on each inspection.

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