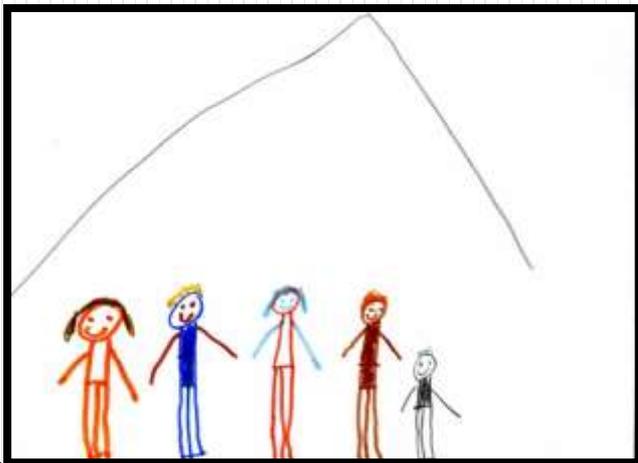


Towards Meaningful Participation

Learning from children and young people
Tim Moore & Morag McArthur



How are children and YP seen in the context of services/ policy / research?

The way YP are seen has changed remarkably over the past 20 years

- Adult centred perception of childhood means children were rarely consulted and informed about issues that affected them – for their protection and because of their perceived limited capacity
- CROC & the new sociology of childhood – has reconceptualised childhood and its place in society
- Children and young people as clients in their own right with needs and wishes that are sometimes different to their parents / families.

Past Practice Assumptions

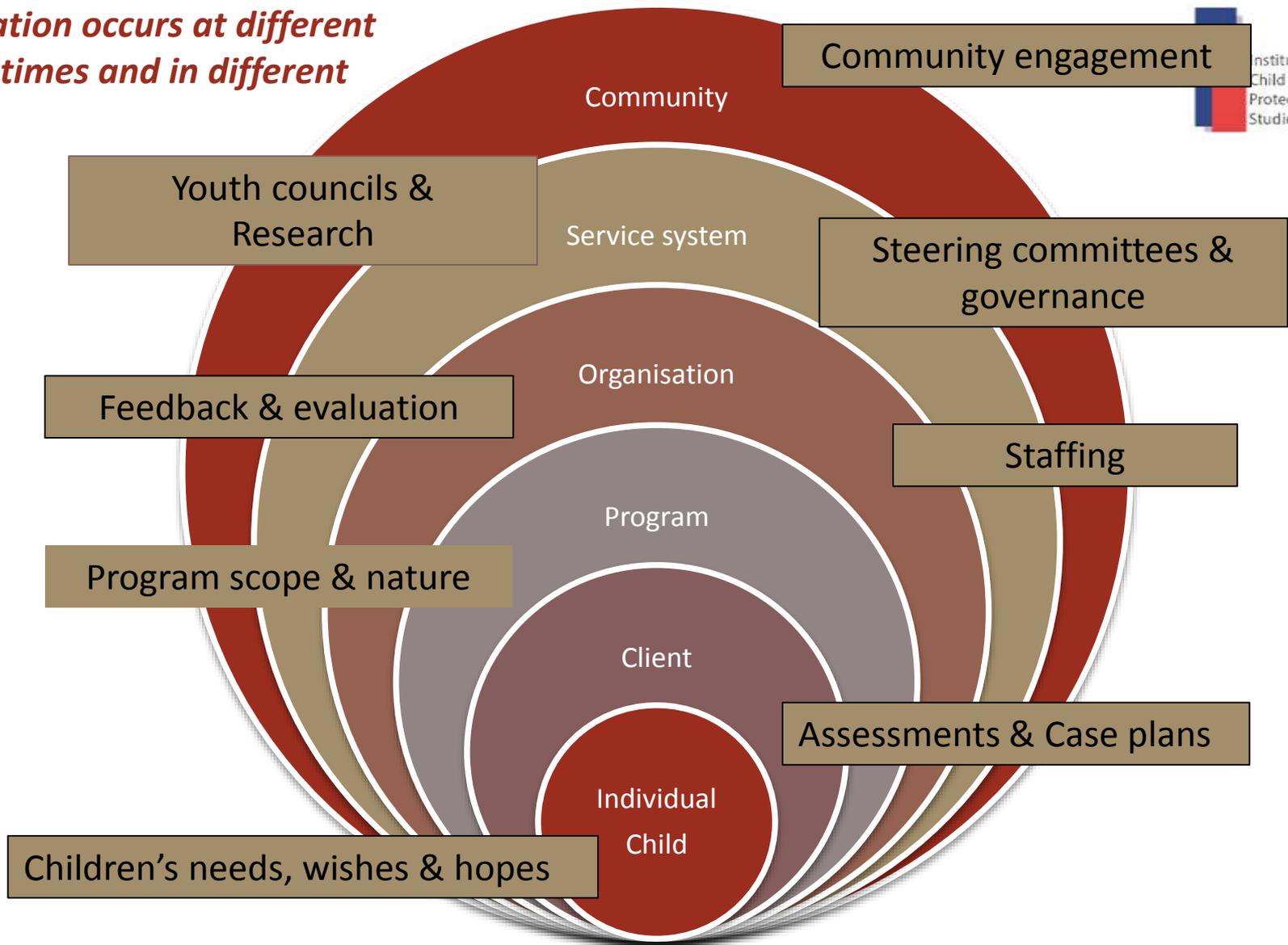
- Helping the parent = helping the child
- Adults are best placed to determine children's needs
- Parents are the client, not children

“Kids should be asked about stuff that’s got to do with them...They can tell you stuff you’d never think of – ‘cos you’re not a kid”

(11 yr old boy, FTWH)



Participation occurs at different levels & times and in different ways



Children want to be seen and heard

- *At [one refuge], the workers would talk to the kids as well as the parents but at others they didn't. It was good when they talked to you – treated you like a person. If they just ignored you it made you feel weird (Boy, aged 11, Finding their way home)*



A lack of information is scary

- *“We just got picked up from school and no one told us what was happening. It was scary. We didn’t know ‘em and we didn’t know what was happening... We couldn’t understand it because Mum never did anything wrong – we never saw it. So we didn’t know why we couldn’t go home”* (They’ve gotta listen)
- *“You need to know what’s going on. Where you’re going to stay, how long... Or you freak out cos you don’t know what’s going on.”* (They’ve gotta listen)

Children & young people want to participate

- “Everyone else gets a say. Your worker decides where you get put and your foster carer chooses if they want to keep you. They even ask their kids. But what about us? Who cares if we wanna stay or not?” (They’ve gotta listen)

Children sometimes want information and would like to feel like they are involved

- ***Children need to know that they and their families are safe***
- ***Children need to know that their situation is stable and secure to feel comfortable (Finding their way home)***

There should be stuff for kids: people they can talk to about stuff and not worry that people are going to think bad of their parents or get them in trouble. Kids won't tell unless they know people are safe and they're not going to help unless they think people are going to do something to help (Young man, aged 14, Who Cares?)



Children and young people recognise that kids should be protected from distressing information / processes but argue that most kids already know

- *Nah, that's crap. They need to feel safe but that's not gonna happen if no one talks to 'em or helps 'em know what's going on. Its gonna make 'em feel worse, kinda invisible, that no-one cares. Cos they've probably seen it all anyway but no-one's talked to 'em so they're probably thinking all this way out there shit like its there fault or something when its not. Nah, man, they're not protecting nobody. (17yr old male, What young people want)*

P A R E N T A L
ADVISORY
EXPLICIT CONTENT



*I can talk to myself
inside, I never do that –
but I could*

(Boy, aged 6, Finding their way home)

*I didn't really have
anyone to talk to*

(Boy, aged 11, Finding their way home)



*"[This is] Monkey. He is special... Sometimes
when [I'm] sad [I] cuddle him"* (Boy, aged 10,
Finding their way home)

Children need to be protected

- *I got Family Services involved, but they don't see there is anything wrong, but I do, I hate Family Services I call them 'Family Fuckers' ... When they came to the house to check up on dad I couldn't tell them what I know, [that things weren't OK], I couldn't say 'come back', because dad was walking in and ... so I went in a couple of days later, they don't see what happens after hours ... she said 'I know how you feel', I said 'no you don't, I am in a shit situation' ... I swore then the worker said she was not going to continue to talk to me because I was abusive. (Who Cares? 2009)*

Participation needs to lead to change



- Our stories are too hard, you've got to laugh about it or you're just gonna cry... But you gotta talk about it. And people've gotta listen... and do something about it! (They've gotta listen)



- "They expect us to put in so much effort, its such a drain, but then they don't do anything with it." (They've gotta listen)

Participation includes helping children & young people understand how their participation has influenced decisions

- “They expect us to put in so much effort, its such a drain, but then they don’t do anything with it.” (They’ve gotta listen)



Responding to children

It is clear that listening to children, hearing children and acting on what children say are three very different activities...

There have always been people who have listened, sometimes there have been people who have heard, and perhaps less often, those who have acted wisely on what children have had to say.

(Roberts 2000, p227)

