

A report about how well

youth justice services

*work together*

with children



Messages from Peer Power Experts:

**To practitioners:**

“Involve the child/young person in ALL decisions that affect their life!”

“Keep your belief in young people. Have the trust and creativity to work with their strengths.”

**To children:**

“You are entitled to have your voice heard and make decisions about your life!”

“Feel free to ask about your rights and be open to voicing your opinion.”

Children have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them. These rights are protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UK has signed up to this.

We shouldn't expect or accept less.



## Children have the right to:

- Be listened to and have their views taken seriously.
- Have their best interests come first in all decisions and actions that affect them.
- Not be discriminated against because of gender, sexuality, race, colour, language, religion, ethnicity, or disability.
- Be treated with dignity and respect, including if you're accused of, or guilty of breaking the law.
- Privacy and legal help, and adults must take age and well-being into account..

## Words we use in this report

We say **children** because it's important to remind adults that children who come to services have protected special rights, especially if they're under 18 or have been in care.

When we say **youth justice services** we mean Youth Offending Services and Youth Offending Teams (**YOTs**).

**Peer Power Experts** are young people who work with Peer Power and have lived experience of the youth justice and other support systems.

**Practitioners** are adults working with children in Youth Justice Services.

We talk about **empathy** to mean being able to relate, connect and be curious about how someone else might be feeling and what their life might be like.

When we say **participation**, we mean children being involved in a meaningful way that creates change.

When we say **co-creation**, we mean being involved and creating meaningful changes together.

# What's the issue?

Lots of practitioners in youth justice services believe in listening to children and involving them in decisions. But, for many reasons, it's not always happening as well as it could, or in the same way in every service.

So the Youth Justice Board (YJB), who help all youth justice services across England and Wales, teamed up with the youth charity Peer Power to create a project about it and write this report.

Peer Power Experts were involved all the way through the project. They asked youth justice services in England and Wales some questions in a survey to find out more about participation.

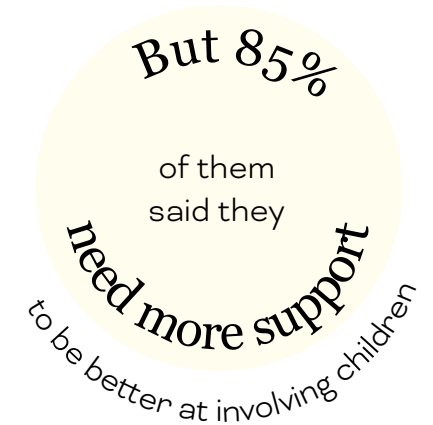
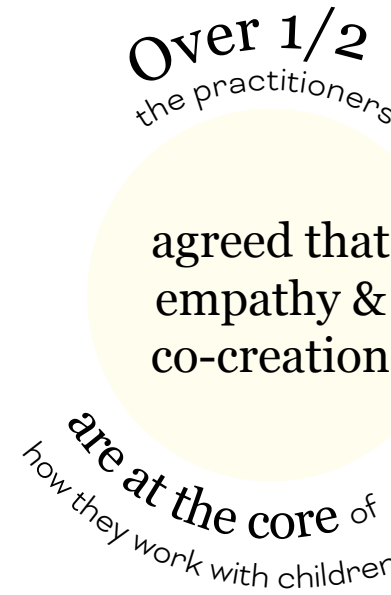
## We wanted to know:

- How are you involving children in your work?
- How well do you think you are doing at involving children?
- What do you need to do it better?

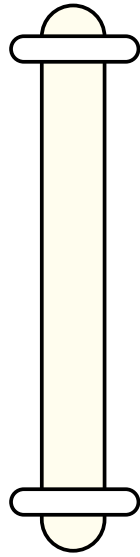
# What the surveys showed

This helped to inform our project to find out about what more needs to be done.

That's a good start...



**Over 1/3**  
of youth justice services said they  
**don't have a leader**  
in charge of participation



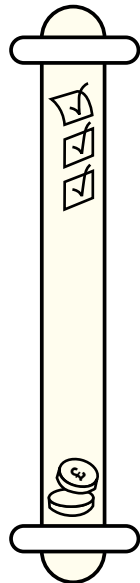
Almost all of the services said they mostly involved children on an individual level,

rather than involving them in how the service is run in general.

**Less than 1/2**  
of the services we asked  
**have a system to check**  
how well participation  
is doing and how it's changing things

We need to agree what participation is and how to measure it

**More than 3/4s**  
of youth justice services  
**described participation and co-creation differently from**  
the Peer Power Experts

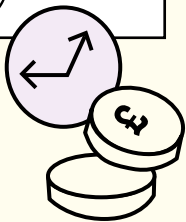


The top ways of getting children involved were surveys, consultations and interview panels.

Two of the least used ways were training and going to paid meetings.

**Over 3/4s**  
of youth justice services  
**said the power imbalance between practitioners and children**  
can affect how much, and how well children get involved

Things that get in the way



They said other barriers were lack of money and other resources, and children not seeing the value in getting involved.

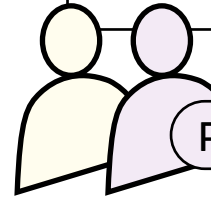
## A deeper dive

After the survey, the Peer Power team co-created sessions with a small number of youth justice services to find out more, called Deep Dive sessions.

These found that more support, including funding, will help children get involved. Giving practitioners training and coaching will help services to make participation and co-creation more individual, interesting and enjoyable, while making sure everyone gets something out of it.

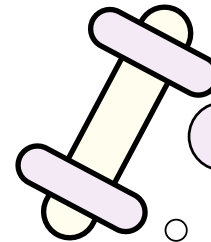
## Suggestions from the project:

Five main things came from our work that could help youth justice services and children work better together:



### Relate & Connect

- A trusted, caring relationship and connection between a child and practitioner is the most important thing and should always come first.
- Children who go to youth justice services shouldn't have to tell their personal story in case it's traumatic for them or others. They should have the freedom to talk about what they need to talk about.
- Practitioners should be trained to be aware and sensitive about trauma for children themselves and others.



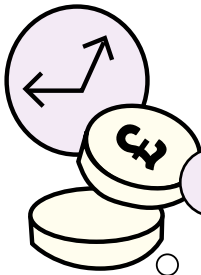
### Power & Inclusion that you see and feel

- All children should be included fairly and shouldn't experience discrimination.
- We can be open about the power imbalance between adults and children, and different groups in society. We can decide together what we can do about it.
- Children who have been in youth justice services should be given paid opportunities like being a peer mentor or apprenticeships when they are older.



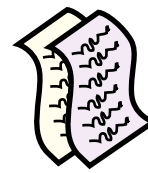
## Strengths & Positivity

- Practitioners should talk about children in a positive way about their strengths, skills and ability for positive change.
- Children who get involved with participation should learn about their skills and positive strengths, choose to do things they enjoy, and gain more leadership and life skills too.
- Practitioners and children should work together to decide how they can use their shared expertise and skills so that they can create positive change together.



## Resources (money, time and more)

- Everyone's experience is valuable. Youth justice services should have a budget to pay for children to be involved in participation, not just for their time but also the expertise and knowledge that they bring.
- There should be a range of incentives or payments when children get involved in different types of participation that help services.
- People who've been in youth justice services in the past, like peer mentors, can be brought in to help measure how well participation is going.
- Good links with local youth services, charities and projects can help children go on to other positive things when they leave the youth justice service.



## Rights & Readiness

- Children and youth justice service practitioners should have training and coaching about children's rights, empathy and participation to help them to be able to do it well.
- Youth justice service practitioners should make sure they are ready to listen and act on the views of children as equal partners.
- Youth justice service practitioners should be cared for, the same as children there are cared for and they should have their views listened and acted upon too as equal partners.



“A child is

not a problem to be fixed but

**a person –**

not to have stuff done to, but

**to work with.”**

Making the Change we want to see:

# What you can do next

The Peer Power Experts involved in this project put together their top messages and tips for children, youth justice practitioners and managers.

## Messages for children

- Ask about your rights and be open to voicing your opinion.
- Being part of an equal partnership means your concerns and priorities are important too. The adult has responsibility make sure your rights are respected.
- The professionals that work with you should be putting you at the heart of the service and supporting you in a way you feel is right for you.

## Messages for practitioners

- Remember that what you might see as bad behaviour can be a response to trauma, not about making your life difficult.
- Create a safe place for children to talk – just to connect.
- Always listen. Take every chance you can to ask for a child's view. And when you make an assessment of intervention plan, check where a child has had a genuine voice and choice.
- Assume that each child has the creativity and ability to come up with ideas that work.
- Acknowledge children can feel they don't have much choice or power in this situation. You can help change that. Report, read and feed back, so children can see how they've changed things.
- There's a difference between saving someone and helping them.



# Messages for service managers

- Invest in participation as part of your service and get the basics right. Have a dedicated participation lead. Making sure children are aware of their rights should be a basic standard in any Child First practice.
- Children and youth justice service practitioners need to know their rights as well as their responsibilities.
- Practitioners need to be supported, in themselves and in their work, to be able to develop participation and co-creation work with children. They need a safe space to 'be a bit more vulnerable and take the professional armour off' Peer Power Expert.
- Invest in lived-experience mentorship. And let children support each other. Getting peers together can help encourage participation.
- A common definition of participation should be created and shared across services. Participation should be built into performance management and quality-check systems.
- Look at the additional resources created as part of the project and read the full report from this project along with the data from the survey.

**If the suggestions in this report are followed, they can be an important step towards a fairer youth justice system. One where children are listened to, and things change for the better as a result.**

# Thanks for working on the project!

## Who is the Youth Justice Board?

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales oversee the youth justice system for England and Wales.

## Who is Peer Power?

An empathy-led charity that helps heal trauma and adversity through caring relationships and transforms youth service systems by supporting the young people they partner with to influence and inspire action.

## Who is Clearview research?

Specialists in gathering insights on diverse audiences, to assess the impact of services. They worked in partnership with Peer Power on this project.

## With thanks to:

Peer Power Team: Aaliyah, Bashiie, Alexys, Jack, Parishma, Yolanda, Joshua, Nic, Sarah, Colin, Ria, Anne-Marie, Laura, Samantha, Sean.

YJB Team: Mamps, Nicola, Sue and Steph.

ClearView Team: Burphy and Sandra.

Visual designers: Lizzie Reid ([lizzieslines.com](http://lizzieslines.com)) and Mandy Johnson ([sketchnotes.co.uk](http://sketchnotes.co.uk))

## Find out more:

The full report and resources created during this project at [www.peerpower.org.uk/youth-justice-board-participation-project](http://www.peerpower.org.uk/youth-justice-board-participation-project)

**“I hope from this work that organisations can see the value of co-production and how it can empower both professionals and young people to create a more empathic service and be more inclusive.**

Co-production can create long lasting change and organisations should **be proud to take that first step in making an equal ground.”**

Message from Peer Power Expert

