

CELCIS REACH: Connecting Voices on listening to the voices of care experienced young people| Jim Lyon

Issue 11 | Autumn 2018

Jim Lyon, from East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership, talks about the importance of listening to the voices of young care experienced people as part of Connecting Voices, a participation group in Kilmarnock.

So, one of the things that we've really been interested in, in listening to the voice and the experience of young people, is to make sure that we actually do something about it. I think research tells us very, very clearly that professionals and young people have two slightly different notions of what listening means. For adults, usually professionals, then listening usually means that we give active signs of listening, we are quiet, we are intent, we listen very hard to what's been said, but from a young person's point of view what they really mean about being listened to by supportive adults, or by any adults, is have you actually heard what I've said and so what are you going to do about it? So, it's about making the difference between 'we've explained that experience, we've told you what some of these barriers might be, we now expect you to do something about it' and in terms of our culture that's something that we've been keen to absolutely have as part of our whole way of listening to young people. So, in terms of their participation, it hasn't just been about how can you help us in a wide sense, but it's very much about how can we learn through your experience and make the difference in our practice, the way that we do things, and actually come back to you and say well here's what we've done about it. Now, part of that is about being honest because it isn't always possible it make me full, wholesale change that might be required or at least there might be incremental steps to achieving that. So, rounding that circle for us has been really, really important - that you keep the dialogue open, that you're going back saying here's some of the things that were doing to act upon what it was that you have told us.

Another good example of that as in the work that were doing with a [Shannon](#) in particular in relation to the contact - the importance of contact maintaining existing relationships for children and young people who are being received into care, if you like, who are being accommodated. And it's about ensuring our and independent review

officers, who are responsible for what we call our welcome meetings, to get away from the jargon. And our young people have also helped us understand that if we call these things like a planning meeting or, as sometimes it is called, a LAC review then it's almost an immediate turn off for young people. So, we've tried really hard culturally to use much more everyday language care-based language, language that young people can actually relate, understand and can feedback to us. That hasn't been easy, because we can get stuck very easily in jargonistic shorthand terms that we all use. I have been in local authority work for an awful long time and I'm as guilty as anybody that's spoken in jargonistic terms and language. So, through actually the engagement process with our children and young people we've learned a considerable amount about ensuring that we act upon what they've said, but actually then feed that back to them, so that we can round the circle and continually keep updated. We've actually made a major difference in our culture when it comes to things like procedures, for example. Lots of our residential procedures start with poems that have been written by young people who've been on the receiving end, if you like, of that actual care system itself. So we do want to provide hard and fast examples of changes that have been made because that then increases the confidence that the more we speak, the more we say, the more likelihood that there is of change and that helps us as well, because we're all interested in providing the absolute best support that we can as supportive adults and caring for and raising our children and young people here in East Ayrshire.

©CELCIS