

Social Work Service

Enabling Service User and Carer Participation

A Good Practice Guide

April 2009



 The Highland
Council
Comhairle na
Gàidhealtachd

The Highland Council Social Work Service works in partnership with the adults and children who use its services and their carers. This is to ensure that the services provided for them are shaped to meet their needs and deliver the outcomes they are looking for.

Much good work has been done by the staff in the Service to ensure that engagement with service users and carers is meaningful and productive and I am delighted that we have been able to put together this document that seeks to further direct and support staff and provides examples of good practice drawn from across the Service.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Davidson'.

Margaret Davidson
Chairman, Housing and Social Work Committee

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1. Introduction

The Social Work Service in Highland aims to enhance the quality of life and experience of service users and their carers so they may enjoy better outcomes.

To achieve this goal we expect our staff to work in partnership with service users and carers; to engage with individuals, families and communities as active participants in the circumstances affecting their lives; and to ensure that people are given the most appropriate opportunities to participate as fully as possible in assessing and improving services so the help they receive is responsive to their needs and best able to help deliver the outcomes they seek.

This short document is a good practice guide which sets out some of the key factors that practitioners should consider as they seek to involve service users and carers as participants in assessing and improving the services we deliver.¹

1.1. Vision Statement

In the Social Work Service in Highland, we are clear that we want service users, carers and other stakeholders to participate in our work at every level. We aim to encourage and facilitate the participation of users and carers across all our policies, procedures, projects and practices. We believe that the participation of users and carers will mean involvement in the individual decisions which affect their own lives, as well as collective involvement in decisions which affect the shape and direction of the services that support them to live full and active lives.

1.2. Values and Principles

Our participation work is built on the following values and principles:

- a belief in citizenship;
- adopting a social model of disability which recognises that many service users are disabled by barriers in our society;
- recognising the importance of equality and diversity;
- having a commitment to taking positive action to tackle discrimination;
- promoting the things that empower people;
- believing that all stakeholders can contribute to our work;
- developing and using different approaches to participation;

¹ This document relies heavily on information contained in:
Begum, N (2004); SCIE Participation Strategy;
<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/corporate/participationstrategy.pdf>
SCIE (2006); Practice guide 6: Involving children and young people in developing social care;
<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/practiceguides/practiceguide06/index.asp>
SCIE (2007); Practice guide 11: The participation of adult service users, including older people, in developing social care;
<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/practiceguides/practiceguide11/index.asp>

- being clear about where people can be involved and where they cannot;
- ensuring that the Social Work Service's work is as accessible as possible so that people do not find obstacles to participation;
- using working approaches that are suitable for what is required;
- recognising that as an organisation, the Social Work Service can grow and learn by involving others; and
- that it will be necessary to adapt to changing circumstances and expectations.

1.2.1. Diversity

Equalities law and anti-discriminatory good practice are actively promoted in the work of our Service. We seek to ensure that a range of groups such as older people, disabled people, lesbian and gay people, black and minority ethnic people, children and young people are included in assessing and improving the work that we do and that the impact on equalities groups of our policies, procedures and practices is properly assessed for differential and negative impact.²

We are also committed to facilitating the participation of users and carers across the geographical areas and service types where our work takes place. We seek to ensure that irrespective of how and where people live, they have an equal opportunity to participate in assessing and improving our services.

1.2.2. Inclusion

Not all of our 'service user groups' consist entirely of people who actually use services. In some groups people may want to use services but cannot get access to them (because they do not meet the access threshold etc.) or some may not use services because they do not like them.

The Social Work Service in Highland aims to develop links with all the people who may be impacted upon by our current service delivery. We seek to enable the communities we work within and all of our stakeholders to have the opportunity to participate in assessing and improving the services we deliver.

1.3. Explaining Key Words

1.3.1. Service Users and Carers

The term 'service users and carers' or 'users and carers' is used throughout this document for ease of reference but is taken to include family members and other representatives e.g. guardians and advocates etc. The term 'carer' is used to mean people who look after a partner, husband or wife, son or daughter, relative or friend with a disability or illness. Many carers live with the person they care for but many others look after someone who lives independently in supported accommodation, in hospital, or in a care home.

² We do this through routine Equalities Impact screening and assessments.

1.3.2. Participation

We have found that a shared and consistent definition of 'participation' is difficult to achieve. For the purposes of this guide, we have chosen to define it as follows:

- service users and carers' involvement in individual decisions about their own lives, as well as collective involvement in matters that affect them. (This guide encompasses both individual and collective participation because we believe that the organisational principles that underpin both types of participation are the same.);
- a culture of listening that enables service users and carers to influence decisions about the services they receive as individuals on a day-to-day basis, as well as how those services are developed and delivered for all service users and carers who access them;
- not an isolated activity but a process by which service users and carers are enabled to influence change within our organisation. By viewing participation as a process, this guide acknowledges that different components of our Service can be at different stages of developing participation;
- not a hierarchy where the 'aim' is to reach the top of a 'participation ladder.' Instead, this guide accepts that different levels of participation are valid for different service user and carer groups and at different stages in our services' development.

2. Making Participation Work

2.1 Developing a Culture of Participation

There has been an increasing focus on collecting the views of service users and carers on the impact that our services have made. This is important in terms of understanding the extent to which we have been successful in delivering the outcomes that users and carers seek. The Highland Council Social Work Service has a commitment not only to the involvement of service users and carers in assessing and improving the services we deliver but also to developing a culture where the participation of users and carers in decisions which affect the shape and direction of services is increasingly recognised and valued.

This guide aims to signal and support the areas for service development that are needed to establish an effective culture for participation. These include:

- establishing a shared understanding of what participation is;
- ensuring that managers actively support and sustain the development of participation;
- ensuring that all our staff are committed to and engaging in participation;
- increasingly showing evidence of participation in organisational policies and documents (including Equalities Impact Assessments);

- more effective communication of our commitment to participation to users and carers; and
- developing this Good Practice Guide to assist staff to engage more effectively in participation.

We will work to ensure that our commitment to involving service users and carers is properly understood and shared by all our managers and practitioners, as well as by users, carers and a range of other stakeholders.

2.2 Developing a Structure for Participation

In order to understand the success that our services have in delivering the outcomes that users and carers seek, our focus is increasingly on collecting their views on the impact that our services have made. Their assessments of the effectiveness of our services and their views on how these might be improved need to be incorporated within a clear structure for performance improvement that is based upon:

- robust, honest self-evaluation;
- the identification of areas for development; and
- effective action planning.

The participation of users and carers can only create change or improvement where it is able to influence decision-making processes.

It is therefore essential that we plan and develop the structures necessary to enable users and carers to become active participants in assessing and improving service provision. We aim to take structured approaches to evaluating and improving the services we deliver by using the Performance Improvement Models of SWIA and HMIe and the self-assessment and grading process contained within the Care Commission's new inspection regime. By doing this, we aim to achieve users' and carers' collective involvement in decisions which affect the shape and direction of the services

The guide seeks to engage our organisation at all levels – unit, team, area, and service – in the following areas of service development in order to bolster the existing structures that support participation:

- development of participation strategies at the appropriate level;
- the use of partnership working to facilitate better participation;
- identification of 'participation champions'; and
- providing adequate resources for participation.

2.3 Developing Effective Practice for Participation

For service users and carers to become involved, our practitioners need to be able to work in an open engaging way which enables participation and ultimately affects change or improvement within the organisation. Practitioners and their managers' awareness of the benefits of participation will assist in this process. People are often motivated to work in social work and social care because they want to improve service users' and carers' lives

and a participative approach will help them to achieve this aim by ensuring that their ways of working are based on what is important to users and carers. It may also lead to improvements in their skills, knowledge and job satisfaction.

If users and carers have a positive experience of becoming involved on a day to day basis, they are more likely to feel increasingly confident and capable to affect change within the organisation.

Our service is rightly proud of the great deal of positive practice which has enabled the involvement of service users and carers. It is important that this practice is recognised and shared.

This guide provides the following key practice points so that service users and carers can be actively involved in both collective and individual decision-making:

- involvement is for all users and carers, which means involving people from different age groups - from young children to older adults - and people from specific groups, including those who are seldom heard, such as disabled and black & minority ethnic people; people with a sensory impairment or without spoken English; people who live in rural areas; people who are homeless, asylum seekers and refugees; and offenders;
- creating an appropriate and encouraging environment for participation (see section 3);
- using flexible and creative approaches (see section 3);
- understanding the different mechanisms for involving service users and carers in both the operation and the strategic development of an organisation, as well as individual decision-making processes; and
- providing opportunities for practitioners, service users and carers to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and experience.

2.4 Developing Effective Ways to Review Participation

In this guide, 'review' means the process of monitoring and evaluating the success of the participation of service users and carers. It is a way of recording how well users and carers have been actively involved and, more importantly, how participation has helped change or improve the services that we deliver.

We are at an early stage in being able to clearly evidence how participation has helped change or improve services and more work is needed in this area. This guide proposes that our organisation, at its different levels, needs to consider the following key elements when reviewing participation and its effectiveness:

- can we identify a set of outcomes that participative approaches may deliver?
- can we put in place clear measures of the levels of participation?
- how might we best evidence processes of participation?

Service users and carers may of course be the best people to participate actively and meaningfully in all these activities from start to finish. They should be involved in defining the aims, objectives, processes, outcomes and ways and means of measuring success.

We recognise also the expectation that the Care Commission is now placing on our registered services to provide evidence of how well service users and carers have participated in assessing and improving the quality of the service they provide. We aim to build upon the practice experience gained in this to better describe good practice in reviewing participation.

3. Participating with Users and Carers

Participation can take many shapes and forms. The goal of participation is to work together or in partnership with service users and carers and other stakeholders, so that these groups can play the fullest possible role in affecting the shape and direction of the services they receive and when they receive them. Of course, the methods of engagement and participation used need to be dependent, among other factors, on the area of work being covered; the groups who are being worked with; the time-frame in which the work must be done; and the resources that are available.

We aim here to provide some examples of the types of participation which may be useful to consider. We also give pointers to some of the issues which need to be thought about for certain groups to ensure that our participation processes are as inclusive as possible.

As stated above, an open and participatory culture within our Service – a willingness to actively listen to service users and carers and shape our activities to what is important to them – is a prerequisite to successful participation. Providing that we act in good faith to include and involve service users and carers, the methods we choose to adopt can be varied and refined.

Different people want to participate in different ways and there is widespread agreement that successful service user and carer participation is based upon having varied and flexible approaches that allow this to happen.

3.1. Types of Participation

3.1.1. Individual involvement on a day-to-day basis

It is easy for us to forget that, for many people, the most meaningful participation is being able to take more control over their everyday lives. One of our key aims is to provide a personalised service which is flexible enough to meet individual situations and requirements. Doing this effectively will involve the service users, for instance, in determining the kind of support they receive in a care home and engaging with them in the development of a personalised care plan .

Advocacy should also be considered by practitioners and will have a key role in supporting the work done with individuals.

3.1.2. Consultation meetings and questionnaires

Consultation through meetings, questionnaires and focus groups is probably the most frequently used model of participation. Properly targeted and accessibly conducted participation through these methods can be highly successful. However there can be concerns that certain consultation may operate according to a fixed agenda and there is often no guarantee or evidence that people's views will actually be used to change a service. Ways in which organisations have tried to improve the quality of consultation of this sort include:

- having meetings in which there is a formal system for accounting for decisions that have been taken and an opportunity for discussion and planning for the future; and
- using different ways of collecting information, such as focus groups and questionnaires, in addition to formal meetings; and
- holding meetings at different times and in a range of different venues.

The choice of venue is something that can make meetings simultaneously more inclusive for some groups and exclusive for others. For example, meetings in pubs can reach people who would not want to travel to 'official' locations such as the town hall but would exclude others who would not go to pubs on religious or moral grounds. This means that it is important consider carefully the choice of venue.

Do not assume a venue is accessible just because the person making the booking or the website says it is. Ideally, visit the site with a suitably qualified person to check the access:

- make sure the venue is easy to find, accessible and on an accessible bus route and near an accessible railway station;
- make sure car parking can be reserved for service users who are not necessarily Blue Badge holders;
- give plenty of clear and accurate directions to the venue; and
- ensure that there are enough accessible toilets. Many service users need to use an accessible toilet, not just those who are wheelchair users.

3.1.3. Forums

Forums for specific service groups, such as national and local older people's forums or local and regional forums for people with learning disabilities, may avoid some of the difficulties about power raised by consultations because they can often enable service users and carers to define their own issues and agendas.

Forums can be quite democratic in that they can develop a recognisable 'voice' and they have been able to effect changes to services, despite barriers persisting for some people. However the working relationship between forums and formal human services needs to be closely attended to. It is important that a clear structure is understood so that the participation of users and carers can influence decision-making processes. Highland Council Social

Work Service has strong links with the 'Highland Community Care Forum' (HCCF) and the 'Highland Children's Forum' and can evidence robust participative practice with these organisations.

3.1.4. User and Carer led Groups or Networks

Participation led by service user controlled groups or networks may have the advantage of being more firmly rooted in the actual aspirations and preferences of service users and carers.

Consulting directly with service user led groups and collective advocacy networks, or asking them to undertake consultations on behalf of the Service, can have greater credibility with service users and carers and can lead to better quality results because of their greater experience and expertise in identifying what is important to service users. We in Highland are working successfully with groups such as 'Highland Users' Group' (HUG), 'People First' and 'Health and Happiness' to give service users and carers collective involvement in decisions which affect the shape and direction of the services we provide.

3.1.5. Being Creative

Involving service users and carers is not always best achieved through meetings or postal questionnaires. Using other approaches to participation is based upon the recognition that service user participation should allow different forms of expression.

We are generally not very good at using straightforward language and terminology and so people are unlikely to relate to an official strategy document. By getting them to tell their story about their experiences and reflect back to them what they had said; this may provide a response which will be useful to us as service planners and providers. As well as avoiding jargon, we should also explore more routinely the creative use of photography or video. Examples such as providing disposable cameras to people with learning difficulties so that they could show what they thought about social and horticultural therapies or by helping people with dementia attending a drop-in centre to take photographs so that they can record what was important to them.³

'Highland Children's Forum' has been working to promote the involvement of children and young people at every level of service design and provision. This has included children and young people who may be harder to hear or more difficult to engage. The Forum has used children's pictures to creatively convey the experiences of children, for example, in relation to inclusion – one of the key outcomes that services seek to deliver.

³ SCIE (2008) *The participation of adult service users, including older people, in developing social care*, www.scie.org.uk



Picture courtesy of HCF

Technological advances are also able to support more creative types of participation, allowing people to respond to online surveys and take part in discussion boards.

Another development that we should like to develop further is the use of game show technology as a way of giving instant feedback to people taking part in consultation events.

3.2. Successful Participation for Different Types of People

3.2.1. Children and Young People

When asked, children and young people highlight the importance of organisations creating a 'young person friendly' environment so that children and young people feel able to share their views and contribute to decision-making processes. Environments that are either accessible or intimidating can be created by the physical nature of an organisation, as well as by adults' attitudes towards children and young people. Whatever participation activities are used, meaningful and successful participation happens in a supportive environment where there is trust and mutual respect between adults and young people.

A successful participation culture and structure acknowledges and attempts to address the power imbalances between adults and young people, along with identifying the value of involving young people, thus contributing to the development of positive relationships.

There are, however, specific issues that adults can tackle to ensure that children and young people feel able to develop trusting relationships with them. Young people themselves have identified the following:

- treat all young people as individuals;
- respect young people and their views;
- do not judge young people on their appearance;
- act on what young people say;
- make yourself available to listen to young people when they are ready and want to speak;
- respect young people's right to confidentiality;
- ensure that there are consistent members of staff so that young people have the opportunity to develop trusting relationships over time; and
- provide young people with sufficient time to voice their opinions and become involved.

It is also clear that where services encourage the participation of young people, there should be a written protocol to cover any meetings and events. This should include clear statements about the information that can and cannot be shared outside the room. Limitations on confidentiality must also be clearly spelled out and discussed and the complexity of the issues recognised. Practitioners need to understand that, when properly prepared and supported, children and young people are as capable of maintaining confidentiality as everyone else.

The provision of an appropriate physical environment can also dictate whether children and young people feel able to become involved. Even the way that adults arrange rooms, for example with chairs arranged around a table, can alienate or silence children and young people. The most effective way of ensuring that an environment meets their needs is to ask them what makes them feel comfortable. Issues to consider might include:

- are locations accessible for children and young people - for example, are they serviced by public transport?
- are buildings accessible for all children and young people, including those who have a disability?
- is the venue welcoming, comfortable and child-friendly? For example, are appropriate refreshments provided and does the environment enable children and young people to relax and not feel intimidated?
- is the environment safe for children and young people?
- are children and young people able to participate at times appropriate to them, for example, outside of school hours or at the weekend?

Of course, whatever activity practitioners may choose and however much time is allotted, one key concern will be the need to keep people interested. Creating an effective environment for participation goes some way to ensuring that young people remain involved. However, it is essential that

service providers think creatively about how to adapt the current adult-orientated decision-making processes so that they are more accessible for children and young people. Flexibility is an essential element in developing effective methods for children and young people's participation

Adopting a range of different techniques will ensure that all children and young people feel enabled to be involved. Remember, if you fail to understand them or engage the first time round, it doesn't mean that you're never going to understand them - it just means you may have to try another way!

3.2.2. Children and Young People who are Hard to Reach

Participation in decision-making is a right of all children and young people, no matter how great the challenge for practitioners to involve them. Every effort should be made to provide practitioners with the knowledge, time and support to involve all children and young people who access their services. Equally, children and young people should be granted the time, training and support to be able to participate. In Highland, significant efforts have already taken place in order that children and young people are meaningfully involved in decision-making processes. '[Highland Children's Forum](#)' has gained valuable experience and knowledge in the participation work they have done to date, experience and knowledge that they are happy to share: www.highlandchildrensforum.org.uk.

Children and young people are often seen as a homogenous group. However, different children and children of different ages may be able to participate in different ways and to different degrees - but then the same is of course true for adults! Research points to significant disparities between the levels of involvement granted to different groups of children and young people: groups including children and young people with communication impairments; black and minority ethnic children and young people; those living in rural areas; and disaffected children and young people. It is also the case that those who do not access education, training or employment often participate to a lesser degree.

Practitioners need to be aware of the barriers that groups of children and young people face and provide sufficient time, support and resources to enable them to be overcome. However there exists a wealth of resources about working with 'hard to reach' groups of children and young people which offer guidance relating to the specific issues that need to be considered. These include guidance about effective communication tools and techniques, venues, accessibility and support methods. A good starting point can be found in the Social Care Institutes for Excellence's Practice Guide.⁴ 6: [Involving children and young people in developing social care](#) published February 2006.

3.2.3. People who are Isolated at Home

The dominance of meetings-based models of participation means that people who find it difficult or impossible to leave their homes are often excluded from

⁴ SCIE (2006) Practice Guide 6: [Involving children and young people in developing social care](#)

participation. Some people may indeed prefer to be consulted in their own homes and can be identified through local media, newsletters and our own service providers. They may then be enabled to participate by telephone, questionnaire etc. or supported through technological means, such as teleconferencing, or through the help of volunteers or support workers meeting them in their home.

It has also been reported that some service users and carers are reluctant to attend public meetings or venues where they think that people will define who they are in terms of their experience as a user of social care services. Again, we should ensure that we provide a variety of means for people to participate.

3.2.4. People who have Dementia

We know that people who have dementia are seriously under represented in most systems for participation. This may suggest an assumption that involvement for this group is not possible. However, it is the case that only a small minority of people with dementia are unable to express their views as with enough time and thought put into the process, the majority are able to make a valuable contribution. A multiplicity of methods that can be used with people with dementia has been highlighted and include:

- interviews;
- observation;
- advocacy; and
- focus groups.

Also the consideration of certain factors can improve the involvement of people with dementia in different service settings, including:

- spending time before collecting any information so that the person with dementia feels more relaxed;
- using photographs as a prompt for discussion;
- supplementing formal discussions with informal conversations; and
- feeding-back to people with dementia about the results of discussions – people can comment on the content of what was said.

3.2.5. People who have a Communication Impairment

Many methods for consultation and participation are predicated on communicating with people who are able to do so without any difficulties. However loop systems, signers and communicating through a support worker are examples of some solutions people with communication impairments use to overcome barriers to participation.

The use of graphics, clearly signposted agendas and adopting straightforward language also seems to enable many people with communication impairments to play a fuller role in participatory processes.

In relation to the support and personal assistance provided to people with communication impairments the person should be:

- someone who gets to know the service user well;

- someone who is respectful;
- someone who recognises that it is the individual's right to communicate, and that they are responsible for facilitating that right; and
- someone who looks at the skills the service user already has.

3.2.6. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People

Attention to the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered service users and carers can easily be neglected in many mainstream participation initiatives. Indeed it has been suggested that until recently, equality on the basis of sexuality has been given less priority than other equalities issues.

One important issue, which appears to affect levels of participation among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered service users and carers, is that worries about homophobia and heterosexism among service providers, or other service users, may mean that they do not want to disclose their sexuality, even when it may have implications for the sort of services they would like.

It should be considered whether individual and/or group interviews are the best way to engage participants recruited from groups for lesbian and gay people.

3.2.7. Black and Minority Ethnic People

Many participation exercises are believed to have failed to engage effectively with people from black and minority ethnic groups. Research undertaken has suggested there may be steps put in place to improve this situation, including:

- raising awareness of how stereotyping among service providers can create a disincentive to participation;
- using minority ethnic and bilingual workers in participatory processes;
- providing transport and an accessible venue which can meet cultural needs and holding regular meetings/events;
- that account should be taken of religious and cultural preferences with the timing of holidays or periods of religious observance taken into account in planning participatory processes;
- building relationships with individuals and families, and having a dedicated role to develop the work with Black and Minority Ethnic people; and
- providing varied opportunities for involvement.

It may also help to use local organisations that already have credibility within black and minority ethnic communities and strategies for improving participation among service users from black and minority ethnic groups also need to recognise the diversity within them. While progress has been made in engaging with some communities, others remain under represented.

There is also evidence that participation tends to be less effective in reaching more newly arrived communities or very dispersed communities, such as those living in rural areas, such as those found here in the Highlands.

A further consideration is that interpreters may be necessary for some service users and carers whose first language is not English. However, the quality of interpreting services can vary and there are risks of over-reliance upon family members or interpreters who have not been trained to report accurately what has been said to them. It is therefore important to note that:

- good interpreting is about more than language proficiency and the literal exchange of words. It is about the interpreter being able to accurately put forward the user's view of their situation;
- interpreters' personal qualities and attitude may sometimes be more important than their gender, age and nationality for some service users; and
- people need to feel that they can trust an interpreter and this is why they sometimes prefer family and friends to professional interpreters, even though they may be less familiar with technical terms and jargon. It is therefore important that we are confident that individuals really do want members of their family and friends to act as an interpreter and need to be ready to offer and provide trained interpreters.

3.2.8. Adults With Incapacity

Assumptions are too often made that any adult assessed as having incapacity is unable to participate in making decisions about their own life or contributing views to inform service development. The Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 defines incapacity as:

- an Adult over 16;
- incapable of making decisions; or
- communicating decisions; or
- understanding decisions; or
- retaining the memory of decisions, by reason of mental disorder or inability to communicate because of physical disability;
- a person shall not fall within this definition if lack of capacity can be made good by human or mechanical aids to communication; and
- incapacity can be temporary.

While the definition makes clear that during the assessment of capacity there is a duty to ensure that any necessary communication aids are available. These may include the use of an interpreter or use of technical equipment such as video recorder. The Code of Practice for Local Authorities provides further guidance on ways to encourage participation. A variety of ways to enhance communication are suggested:

- ensuring that a member of the same ethnic or cultural group is available to communicate with the person;
- making use of visual aids appropriate to the needs of the person. This may include using sign language, pictures, photographs or video recordings; and
- making sure that the environment is conducive to effective communication, ideally being a quiet, familiar place.

The Act requires that the individual is given the fullest possible opportunity to participate in any decision being made about capacity and that an individual will not fall within the definition of the Act where additional communication supports would make good any lack or deficiency.

The General Principles of the Act underpin all interventions taken under the legislation:

- there should be no intervention unless it results in benefit for the person;
- any intervention shall be the least restrictive option;
- account shall be taken of the present and past wishes of the adult in so far as they can be ascertained;
- account shall be taken of the views of the nearest relative and primary carer;
- account shall also be taken of the views of any guardian, attorney and any other person deemed to have an interest in the welfare of the adult; and
- the adult shall be encouraged to exercise whatever skills he or she has, and to develop new skills.

Underlying every intervention under the Act, there is a legal duty for the present and past wishes and feelings of the person to be sought or ascertained as far as possible and taken into account. The use of advocacy is recommended as one way in which views and feelings may be obtained. Further guidance is given on effective communication with the adult which includes taking into account any non-verbal signs and signals, for example observing how the individual acts in different environments; whether they show signs of ease; happiness; or distress. Views of relatives and carers must also be taken into account and the Act states that encouragement must be given to the adult to use existing skills.

4. Some Good Practice Examples of Successful Participation

During the process of compiling this guide, many examples of successful good practice in relation to encouraging participation of service users and carers. It is only possible for us here to give a brief description of some of these. However we have included contact details of the individuals involved who would be very happy to share further information with you. We are also in the process of introducing a new area of the Council Intranet to post these examples of good practice and to encourage managers and practitioners to further share their experiences and successes.

4.1 Strathburn House and Lochbroom House

Residents at Strathburn House and Lochbroom House have recently been fully involved in a change process concerned with in the way that menus for meals are planned and agreed. Through individual discussion, written questionnaires and residents meetings a variety of new suggestions and

ideas were gathered. The cook was then invited to a residents meeting to discuss how the menu could best reflect the residents' tastes and choices whilst also meeting their nutritional requirements. The outcome has been that new, daily menus are now in place, with residents' suggestions fully incorporated, including detail as to the cooking methods preferred.

Lochbroom House residents are due to return soon to their newly refurbished accommodation and through a process of individual and group discussions at residents meetings, everyone who wished has been part of the planning process for new colour schemes and furnishings for their own rooms and communal areas. Families and carers of residents at both Strathburn and Lochbroom have been invited to attend all residents meetings and welcome the involvement and the process of keeping them in touch through the distribution of minutes of the meetings.

For further information, please contact: Jackie Hodges, Manager, Strathburn House, Strath, Gairloch, Ross-shire IV21 2BZ Tel: (01445) 712493

4.2 Northcote Children's Centre

Young people at Northcote Children's Centre in Wick are routinely invited to participate in staff recruitment, showing prospective applicants around the building, given a presentation and then observing the candidate's group exercise. The young people then provide feedback, which is then discussed with the other panel members.

Monthly meetings of residents are held to which young people are encouraged to come along to share their views. The atmosphere is informal; the 'Who Cares' worker attends; and the young people often share a takeaway meal. Some of the suggestions made at these meetings have been taken forward and resulted in changes to aspects of the service.

On a more formal basis, questionnaires are regularly sent to young people, their parents, carers, fieldworkers and professionals involved in their care to seek their feedback and views on the services they receive and invite suggestions for change or improvement.

For further information, please contact: Tracey Taylor, Unit Manager, Wick Children's Centre, 50 Northcote Street, Wick KW1 5QP Tel: 01955 604279

4.3 The Orchard

Thirteen children and young people of different ages, abilities and with a range of communication difficulties were asked about their experience of using services at The Orchard, a respite care unit for children with disabilities. A consultation plan was drawn up to meet the needs of each individual and this resulted in a variety of methods being used including a story told in the third party (a 'Scooby Doo' adventure); a magazine made by a young person

using photos they had taken; a slide show using photos and speech; a video made by a young person; story telling with the use of a switch; and an individual interview. The resulting report highlighted requests for some items of equipment that the service was able to obtain and the service has also started a newsletter to maintain the involvement and to include the children's and young peoples views. The report is now available to parents and children and young people who are prospective users of services at the Orchard.

Staff at The Orchard recognise that there is a need to continue to seek ways to ensure service user participation is actually achieved and to identify where particular skills and time commitment is required. This is of particular significance for children and young people at The Orchard because of the levels of support for communication that are required.

There are also ongoing efforts to encourage participation from parents and carers. In many ways, they are more than just stakeholders, since the respite service is directly set up to respond to their needs, as well as provide good quality child care. A reference group of parents is in the process of being established and it is hoped that this will act as a future forum for discussion about care issues, service capacity, etc.

For further information, please contact: Andrew Stevenson, Manager, The Orchard, 47 Broom Drive, Inverness IV2 4EQ Tel: (01463)-714165

4.4 Young Carers Strategy

'Highland Young Carers Project' has been chosen by a panel of judges as one of the recognised teams to be honoured by the 'Excellence Network' in London in May 2009. This is in the category of user involvement and relates to young carers' involvement in the development of the young carers strategy, "For Highlands Young Carers." Over a 12 month period, a broad range of activities have been offered to young carers from throughout all areas of the Highlands. These have included drama activities and a session with an artist who was engaged to represent the young carers' ideas, feelings and choices in a visual way. There have been days out to Landmark, with time spent on the mini bus used for exchange of ideas and some young carers also attended the 'Young Carers' Festival.' For other young carers it was more appropriate to provide opportunities for one to one discussions or completion of questionnaires. Using 'post its' for short messages/ideas and providing opportunity for anonymous contribution were also found to be effective at encouraging participation. A vast amount of information, views and wishes was collated this has had considerable influence on the shape of the new 'For Highland Young Carers' strategy, including a change to one of its main aims.

For further information, please contact: Frances Nixseaman, Highland Carers Project, Highland House, 20 Longman Road, Inverness IV1 1RY Tel. (01463) 723563

4.5 'It's My Journey'

As part of the development of 'It's My Journey,' consultation involved children and young people who were moving from children's to adult services and it shaped the new transitions protocol and guide. The participants were all young people in receipt of a Social Work service, from varied backgrounds and with many different support needs for the transition process.

A consultation framework rather than specific questions was designed so that the style of questioning could be adapted by the individual consulters to suit the needs of each young person. Topics included: identifying outcomes; understanding transition planning; meetings; information; and 'ownership' of the planning process.

Participants were offered a range of methods to tell their story around these topics: in writing either in essay form or answering open questions in a questionnaire style; making a video; using a disposable camera, commenting on the photographs and making a slide show; person to person interview at an appropriate place (at school, at home, or at an office) or interview by telephone, or by email. Two young people had significant learning and communication issues which meant they would have been unable to contribute their own story. Their parents told the story on behalf of these young people. One of them also had a film made of his life. A focus group discussion, which was also filmed, took place over a residential weekend with five young participants.

One young man expressed an interest in being involved in the filming and editing of his video. This young man is severely disabled and had left school with no support package or planned activities. Funding was sought from the transitions budget to acquire adapted equipment and involve this young man in training and then filming and editing of all the videos for this project.

Those who chose to use video were helped to plan a story board using the consultation framework. Arrangements were then made to visit them in their chosen locations and film there. Those young people who wished to make a slide show were also helped to plan what they wanted to take photographs of within the consultation framework. They were then given a note of this and given two disposable cameras each. The stories of the young people were completed and edited with their approval and are available in the multi agency report 'It's My Journey'.

For further information, please contact: Gillian Newman, Children's Consultation Worker, Highland Children's Forum, Unit 6, 15 Lotland Street, Inverness IV1 1ST Tel: (01463) 223000

4.6 'What's Important to Me'

The booklet 'What's Important to Me' has now been used for several years within adult learning disability reviewing services to encourage a person-

centred, participative process of review of current services and also future planning.

'What's Important to Me' is intended to help the person with learning disabilities engage with, and contribute to, the planning and review process. The person is usually helped to complete the booklet by someone whom they know well and trust to represent their views and opinions. Innovation is actively encouraged and it can be completed in any way that suits the person to include writing, pictures symbols, even videos have been used. There are no 'rules.' Often completing the booklet has provided the opportunity for the helper to engage creatively with the individual in order for the material to "come alive." It is, of course, important that the helper is very careful to record the person's thoughts feelings hopes and aspirations as accurately as possible. The completed booklet then forms the basis for discussion at the review meeting and if the person wishes to present further materials, then this is encouraged.

The booklet is generally self-explanatory and seeks feedback on whether the person is happy with different aspects of their life, for example daily activities; health; friendships and relationships; and also what aspirations the individual holds for their future.

For further information, please contact: Adult Care Review Team, Kinmylies Building, Leachkin Road, Inverness IV3 8NN Tel: (01463) 703434

5. Conclusion

Participation work is central to what the Social Work Service in Highland aims to do and there is a strong commitment to ensuring that it happens at each level of our service operation. There is recognition that as work progresses, we need to take to look at what difference participation makes, what results are achieved through further service user and carer participation and how things could be improved. Already we have engaged with our voluntary sector partners in looking at a possible range of effective tools to measure the impact of participation.

The Social Work Service will learn and grow through its participation work so we believe that as time goes by, different work will be needed. Therefore this guide is a starting point that will regularly be reviewed and developed according to changing needs and circumstances. Indeed our readers – that's you! - are encouraged to feedback their own experiences and ideas for best practice.