

Valuing Participation

The cultural and everyday activities of young people in care

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Valuing Participation: The cultural and everyday activities of young people in care

Introduction

This document reports on research focusing on the participation of young people growing up in care. The research was carried out as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project *Understanding Everyday Participation - Articulating Cultural Values*. In this work we wanted to understand the ways in which the 'facilitated' and 'everyday' activities of young people are valued by them, their immediate carers, and the representatives of the corporate parent.

Definitions

A **Corporate Parent** is an organisation or person, such as social services and social workers, who has special responsibilities to safeguard and promote the life chances of children being looked after.

In this research **we understand facilitated participation** as including a range of activities facilitated for young people in care such as special projects or groups, afterschool clubs, attending special annual events and so forth. We understand everyday participation as the informal activities young people choose to engage with in their free time (see definitions of 'domains of participation' on p.9).

The findings of this research are important in revealing some of the opportunities and barriers to the participation of young people in care in a broad range of cultural and leisure participation. We found that different types of participation are valued differently by carers, representatives of corporate parents, and young people in care themselves. Following this we found that the 'everyday participation' and preferences of young people in care are often overlooked. And yet our findings suggest that where facilitation is embedded and related to the everyday interests and activities of the young person there is an increased likelihood of engagement and participation leading to the established benefits of participation for wellbeing and personal development.

Context

'Participation' is at the centre of the debate about wellbeing. National policy, such as the DfE's *Care Matters* (2006 and 2007) green and white papers, concerned with the wellbeing, personal development and future outcomes of children and young people being 'looked after' have identified the significant role participation in 'positive activities' can have on the development of a happy and healthy child or young person. Such policies are underpinned by research which seems to show that participation assists young people in care to enjoy well-rounded childhoods, improve aspiration and their transition from care to independent living. English local authorities have responded to *Care Matters* by devising strategies to facilitate the participation of young people in care, including improving the availability and access of out-of-school social, leisure and cultural activities and facilities.

Findings from this research support arguments made in existing research and policy that participation in social, cultural and leisure activities can improve the wellbeing of children and young people growing up in care (Gilligan 1999; Säfvenbom and Samdahl 2000; Fong et al 2006; Gilligan 2007; *Care Matters* 2007, Hollingworth 2012; Murray 2013 and Quarmby 2014). Participation can have a number of meaningful and important personal and social values. From our research to date a picture is emerging that suggests that this might especially be so in relation to participation in cultural, rather than other kinds of leisure activities, due to the nature of cultural engagement and the opportunities it provides for the construction and reconstruction of life stories.

This report is intended to be useful to professionals working in social and health services, cultural practitioners, charities and the education sector, along with families, carers and foster carers.

By presenting these findings it is our aim to invite and initiate further research, to stimulate debate, and to effect the provision of culture and leisure services to young people in care.

Key Findings

1. Facilitating social and cultural capitals through participation

- Facilitated participation which encourages young people to share identities and experiences (known as *bonding capital*) can be an important way of providing young people in care with the opportunity to participate in formal culture as well as providing an opportunity for them to undertake life story work in social environments where complex life history work (looking to past experiences to help construct a life story in the present) can be supported.
- Facilitating participation that encourages young people to create wider social networks and experiences outside of the care system (known as *bridging capital*) is also important and local cultural and leisure services provide rich opportunities for these personal development opportunities.
- Young people negotiate their participation in different ways and may or may not share values with facilitators.
- Foster carer facilitation is imperative as this is what can impact most significantly on participation. Foster carers can experience barriers to engaging with, especially, local cultural services.

Policy and Practice Recommendations:

More provision to support young people in care's participation in cultural activities both facilitated and everyday (opportunities exist through the corporate parents culture and leisure services or through the Pupil Premium Plus fund, for instance) is needed. More specific pathways for the support and engagement of foster carers with the variety of culture and leisure service activities would increase the take up of cultural activities beyond those activities directly facilitated and, perhaps, positively affect the impact of those activities undertaken.

2. Valuing everyday participation, facilitating better participation

- The participation of young people growing up in care is constructed in binary 'positive' or 'negative' terms. This research has found that this perception can lead to facilitated activities being overvalued and everyday participation being undervalued. The self-expression found in some forms of everyday participation feeds into young people's sense of autonomy, yet this is not always recognised.
- Participation facilitated by the corporate parent and foster carers of young people in care has a positive influence on the choices young people make regarding their own everyday participation. But this works both ways and what they choose to do in their free time in turn influences their decision to engage with the types of participation on offer.
- Safeguarding the well-being of young people in care is a priority for social services and carers. Ensuring and upholding this priority affects and takes precedence in different aspects of the young persons everyday life, including their participation. The requirement to safeguard can interrupt or even prevent participation inside and outside of the home. This leads to young people in care being treated differently and at times can lead to their exclusion.
- Participation for young people exists in different geographical locations. However, when a young person in care moves placement, participation can be disrupted or even discontinued.

Policy and Practice Recommendations:

Policies outlining the participation needs of young people could include a requirement to acknowledge everyday participation in ways that value the choices young people make regarding their everyday activities, for instance:

- through recognising informal 'everyday' interests in the young person's care plan;
- better balancing concerns about safe guarding with an understanding of the positive gains of participation; and,
- supporting continued participation across boroughs and local authorities.



Young People in Care

As of the 31st of March 2014, there were 68,554 children and young people being looked after in England, 5,756 children in Wales, 2,858 in Northern Ireland and at 31 July 2014, there were 15,580 children being looked after in Scotland.¹ Children and young people can be taken into care under a care order that intends to safeguard their welfare or a parent or relative may voluntarily place them in care. Whilst in care they may live with foster parents, at home with their parents under the supervision of social services, in residential children's homes, in other residential settings like schools or secure units, or they can be adopted.

Children and young people face a number of challenges whilst in care and also when they become 'care leavers' aged 16-21 (Care Matters 2007; Stein and Carey 1986; Stein 1994; Biehal et al 1995; Biehal and Wade 1996; Stein 2005, Stein 2008). Experiences of care can vary; some young people experience stable and positive placements and continue to further study at college and perhaps University. With the support of carers such young people are able to overcome past traumas to become adults with fulfilling lives. However, it has also been established that young people in care are four times more likely than their peers to experience mental health difficulties², are more likely to suffer from poor health due to poverty (Care Matters 2007), are more likely to have poor aspirations and academic outcomes³, and to have 'higher rates of substance misuse and teenage pregnancy than those in the non-care population' (Care Matters 2007, p. 88). Such disadvantages can affect their transition to adulthood and lead to problems in adult life. For example, in 2015 The Prison Reform Trust launched an inquiry to consider why children and young people in England and Wales who are, or have been, in care are over five times more likely than other young people to become involved with the criminal justice system. In a 2013 survey of 15-18 year olds in young offender institutions, a third of boys and 61% of girls said they had spent time in care.⁴

1 Ofsted statistics (2015) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-placements-as-at-31-march-2014>.

Statistics from Scotland <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children/TrendLookedAfter>

Statistics from Wales <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After/ChildrenLookedAfterAt31March-by-LocalAuthority-Gender-Age>

Statistics from Northern Ireland <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/lookedafterchildren.htm>

2 <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-protection-system/children-in-care/>

3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/outcomes-for-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities>

4 <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/ProjectsResearch/CareReview>

Central and local governments set out to tackle this disadvantage and improve life chances through the pledges set out in *Care Matters* (2007). The pledges set out there were:

1. to review and improve the role of the corporate parent,
2. 'wherever possible, to support children within their own families' and 'to explore the potential for enabling children to live with or be supported by wider family and friends' (p. 7-8),
3. to improve the quality of placements by finding ways to make them stable,
4. to 'deliver a first class education', which included piloting the role of the virtual school head,

All local authorities must have a **virtual school head (VSH)** in charge of promoting the educational achievement of the children looked after by the authority that appoints them. Many VSHs are experienced teachers and some have been school heads.

Many schools are likely to have only 1 or 2 children in care on their register, and staff may be unfamiliar with their issues. The VSH's role is to:

- know how the looked-after children are doing
- help school staff and social workers to find out about the extra needs of these children and any additional support available to them

VSHs also work with the children's services department of the local authority and with all schools in the area on initiatives to promote the education of children in care (Department of Education, 2015).

5. to improve a young person's transition to adulthood,
6. improving the role of the practitioner in the day-to-day lives and experiences of children and young people,
7. And finally, and most crucially for this research, is the pledge to improve health and wellbeing by securing 'attachment, friendship and engagement in positive leisure activities' (p. 10).

The important role participation can have in improving the lives of children and young people in care has been identified. However little is known about the complexity and diversity of activities and everyday interests children and young people are offered, where and whom they participate with, and the values that influence their everyday choices.

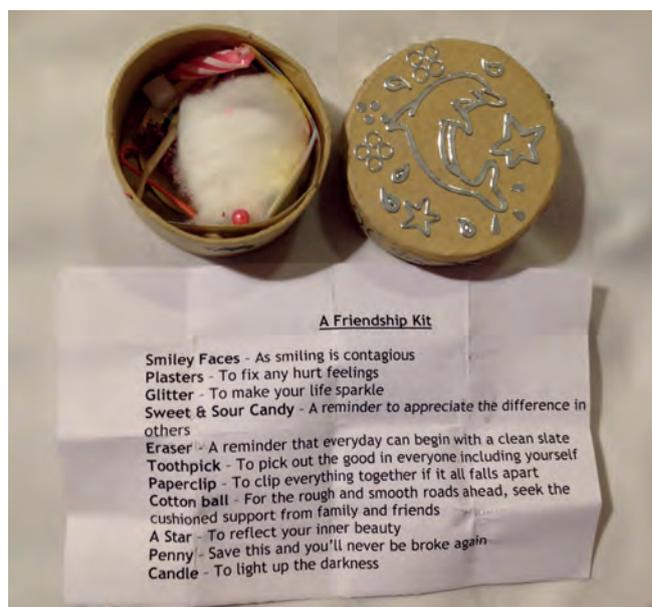
Research Methods

This research involved ethnographic work by and with young women living in foster care, focus group discussions with foster carers and independent visitors, and workshop discussions with professionals involved in delivering social and cultural services to young people in care. An auto-ethnography was carried out with and by three young women involved in a local authority run group for young women aged 12-19. Two of the young women (who we have named Leah and Charlotte) were foster siblings and the other (who we have named Sarah) was fostered part of the week and lived with her birth Grandmother for the remainder.

Ethnography typically involves the researcher participating in the daily lives of those being researched, as a way of getting direct and first-hand knowledge of everyday practices and meanings. Researcher participation can involve observation, photography, film, autobiographical diaries and formal or informal interviews. Safe guarding issues meant that this approach to ethnography was not possible, and instead we used auto-ethnography. The auto-ethnographic nature of the approach successfully

gave the young participants the freedom to choose what activities to document and share with us; thus providing evidence of the types of participation they considered most meaningful and important to them. Having spent a number of weeks at the group, we invited members of the group to explore, through film, using iPads we provided, their participation, whatever that was or meant to them. We facilitated a workshop with a professional filmmaker at the outset of the project, the filmmaker trained the members of the group on how to make and edit films using the iPad. The snippets of film were eventually edited by the filmmaker into a film, which was shown at a local government Achievement Awards in October 2014 and at the AHRC's Connected Communities Festival in June 2015.

Inclusion in the research allowed the young participants to learn and practice skills in film making and editing and photography. By collecting and creating an archive of their participation the girls talked about the ways in which their participation in the research had provided them with an opportunity to be reflective about their experience of care.



Domains of Participation

Unlike other young people who grow up with their birth families, this research has identified that the participatory provision for young people growing up in care occurs in a number of different domains:

- *Local authority facilitated participation* – These are activities organised by and involving the local authority. Activities can include weekly projects/groups, afterschool clubs, residential weekends, special events and day trips.
- *Independent visitor facilitated participation* – Independent visitor's (IV) volunteer through a charity and the charity works with the local authority to identify children and young people who they think will benefit from visitation. The IV visits one-on-one with the young person, usually taking them to places they have never visited before and introducing them to new experiences.
- *Carer facilitated participation* – These can be activities the carer (foster parent, children's home carer, special unit carer, kin carer) introduces and supports or participates alongside the young person.

- *Participation with birth family* - This participation takes place where the young person has a "contact" arrangement with members of their birth family. Such contact can be supervised or not, in a contact centre or not, and the activities which take place are usually the choice of the birth family or young person and thus are, usually, not 'facilitated', even though the contact may be.
- *Everyday participation* – The activities young people choose to engage with in their free time, such as, shopping, playing with pets, darts, board games, socialising, playing in the park, reading, crafting swimming, singing, membership based activities such as Girl Guides, and so forth.

Successfully negotiating these different domains can be challenging especially when those different domains of participation are also influenced by different cultural and social values. Young people in care are required to negotiate these different spheres far more than their peers who reside with birth families. This research suggests that better integration and communication across these domains is fundamental to enabling the wellbeing of and in guarding against the exclusion of young people in care.





Part 1: Facilitating social and cultural capital through participation

Participation facilitated for young people encourages the young person's accumulation of two types of capitals: cultural capital and social capital. It is understood that gaining these forms of capital has positive effects on children's and young people's wellbeing, personal development, aspiration and thus improves their life chances.

1.1. Facilitating cultural capital

Young people build cultural capital from their family through mechanisms such as parental facilitation of culture and leisure activities. For a young person growing up in care, access to such opportunities can be challenging. Therefore facilitating the participation of young people in cultural activities is perceived as an important way of tackling disadvantage, poverty and social inequality. The opportunities to build certain types of knowledge and capital for young people who may be fostered within families where such knowledge and capital does not exist can be limiting. For instance, carers themselves may have little familiarity with or the confidence to engage with the diversity of cultural activities available. In this context passive approaches to cultural service provision, such as the Max Card (a card which provides free or discounted

access to cultural institutions for young people in care and their carers <http://www.mymaxcard.co.uk/>), can have a limited or self-selecting take up. Our research found that the use of the Max Card differed across the foster carers consulted for this research. Some foster carers reported confidence in using the card to visit local cultural venues, whilst others rarely or never used it. The research suggests that while the Max Card is a useful resource providing many families with cultural opportunities, for some families, a more proactive approach to cultural participation is required, in order to achieve a wider take up of the opportunities and activities on offer. Supporting carers who lack confidence or experience of a wider range of types of cultural engagement would provide more opportunities for young people in care to build cultural capital through participation.

1.2. Social capital: Facilitating bonding and bridging capital

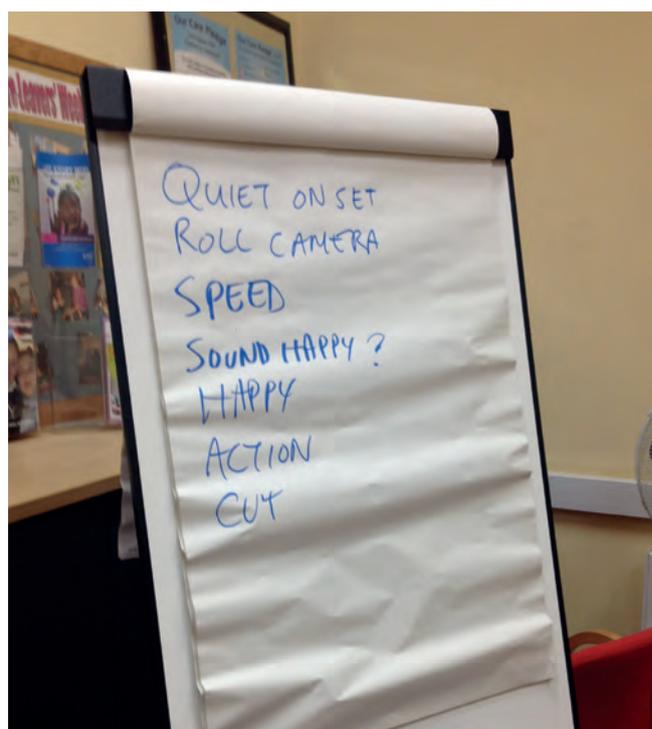
Young people in care are supported in the development of bonding and bridging capital through their facilitated participation. We noted that many of the weekly cultural and non-cultural projects on offer to young people in care provided opportunities for building bonding capital through participating in activities with others who were also in care. The peer-to-peer exchange which takes place during these activities is understood to be an important way to provide social and psychological support.

Bridging capital encourages young people to share participation and construct a network with others outside of the care system.

At the researcher's first visit to the weekly Group, there were three young women present. During the two hour session, as they made objects out of felt and painted their nails they were able to talk openly about their life in care and to share experiences with each other. They had all attended a dance workshop for young people in care over the school half term and were getting ready for a performance at the end of the week. Two of the young women expressed an interest in wishing to take their interest in dance further by joining a dance class. However they each commented that this would not be financially possible, aware that their carers would somehow have to find the money to pay for this. This bonding capital provides young people with a sense of belonging and community. However, some young people voice their dislike of participating in such activities to foster parents. A number of the foster parents shared with us that their foster children did not wish to attend cultural and non-cultural activities for care experienced young people because it reinforces the 'care identity', singling them out as 'different'.

One carer talked about how her 11 year-old foster daughter prefers to participate in Judo and dance class with her school friends rather than the activities organised for young people in care. Her daughter would feel she would be "missing out on something" if she was not participating with her school friends. Participating in these extra activities with her friends outside of school allows her to strengthen her bonds of friendship outside of the care system.

Being a Girl Guide, Ranger or participating in such extracurricular school activities are examples or types of participation which provide opportunities for building bridging capital. These activities allow young people to broaden their identities and link to wider social networks. This research has found an under-servicing of cultural activities which encourage the development of bridging capital. Projects or activities taking place within cultural venues are often provided with the purpose of bringing care experienced young people together. But for many young people in care, providing pathways and opportunities to participate in cultural projects offered to young people more generally would be socially valuable. Supporting the development of the skills to develop broad social networks will help young people keep and develop social bonds into the future, reducing the likelihood of social isolation when they leave care.



Part 2: Valuing everyday participation, facilitating better participation

The research identified five different domains in which young people in care participate (see p.5). These participation domains involve the support of different institutional structures and people, and are associated with different types of cultural value. Young people in care must negotiate and make sense of this variety of cultural values (some of which may be incompatible) associated with the different participation domains to which they belong.

2.1 Building on the value of young people's everyday participation

The everyday participation of young people growing up in care can be a source of worry for the services and in particular the youth and social workers responsible for them. Issues around safeguarding can sometimes be raised and used as a way of regulating behaviour outside facilitated activities. But our research found that everyday participation is an important domain through which young people learn about the social world, their place in it, and is a domain in which they feel empowered to express themselves.

Sarah spends a lot of time with her cat in her free time. The films she made during the course of the research showed her dancing and talking with her cat "at my house" (her grandmother's home rather than her foster home). She shared with the researchers that she likes to care for "Lily" (the cat). Sarah also enjoys caring for herself and documents herself straightening her hair and wearing make-up.

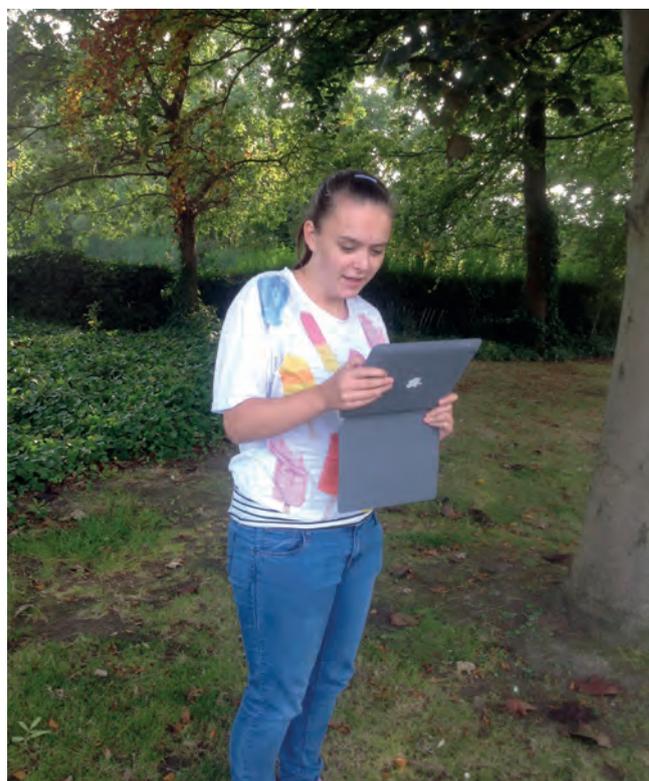
The nervousness felt about everyday participation from the corporate parent, carers or mentors can limit opportunities for self-expression of the young people they look after.

Everyday participation can often involve opportunities for building bridging capital. For example, being members of their local Rangers group gives Leah and Charlotte the chance to build relationships with other young people and adults outside of their care experiences. They included their Ranger leader, who they "liked" in some of their photographs. Being able to participate in this domain is particularly important for Leah and Charlotte as they expressed a dislike of being known as "girls in care", it's "no one's business" commented Leah. Being Rangers allows them to negotiate their identities and relationships in different environments.

Our findings suggest that everyday participation can have a 'positive' effect on the lives of young people in care, one which can get overlooked in practice or is simply unknown to the corporate parent. This report suggests that it is important to acknowledge the value of the young person's everyday interests and find ways of building on or developing such interests through facilitation.

2.2. Recognising the affiliation between facilitated and everyday participation

This research found that the facilitated and everyday participation of young people in care can be more affiliated than is currently recognised. Our research suggests that participation being facilitated with young people in care, for instance, in formal settings such as a weekly project with a social worker or creative practitioner or with an IV or carer in turn influences the choices



young people make about their everyday participation. Enjoyment of cultural activities carried out when attending weekly projects, such as singing can encourage young people to sing and dance within the home and in other informal everyday settings. In addition, some young people choose to engage with activities facilitated for them because of their everyday interests.

Sarah participates in a weekly arts programme for young people in care where she can sing and dance. Her films suggest that this is a form of participation which is important and which she gets enjoyment from in her everyday life. For example as well as dancing with her cat, she also likes to dance in her bedroom and sing; usually along to the pop music that she plays on her phone. Sarah has developed a wide range of interests that she draws from her facilitated participation in formal environments and applies informally in her everyday participation.

Thus, facilitated engagement can be an opportunity to further develop skills and interests already established in the everyday. It is the young person or their carers who can best define and identify such interests. For instance, Sarah's carer took her to an amateur dramatic and operatic performance. Contact details were exchanged with the amateur dramatic group after the performance, because Sarah, who has an 'everyday' curiosity and interest in performance, would perhaps join the group. Thus, Sarah received encouragement from her carer to explore her cultural interests outside those directly facilitated by the care system. This example of the carer taking note of the young person's everyday participation and facilitating her participation in these interests illustrates how cultural and social capital and cultural value can be fostered out of the young person's own interests.

Our evidence reveals the benefits of encouraging and supporting young people to articulate their everyday interests (even if they think they are 'unimportant'; a belief we encountered with some young people during group discussions) within the care setting and for such interests to be taken seriously and incorporated into care plans.



2.3. Safeguarding

As well as impacting upon everyday participation, concerns over safeguarding young people can affect participation in formal cultural activities. One of our young research participants described the disappointment she felt when she was unable to perform in a school drama production because it was being filmed and the school decided it was in her best interests for her not to appear in the film. Jessica told us that she needed positive experiences to include in her CV for the future, and that this experience of exclusion was for her another example of the disadvantages of being in care but in this case a disadvantage created by the system. However, Jessica demonstrated her resilience by exploring other ways of experiencing activities that she thought would “add to my CV”, such as participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Nevertheless, there is a need in this respect for benchmark practice and systems to be in place which allow young people in care who are subject to restrictions to be able to participate in such activities if they choose, and also to be able to capture their participation in such activities, recognising the importance of such documentation to life story work.

A great example of creativity in practices for capturing participation in cultural activities can be found in the **Loud and Clear** Early Years project in Gateshead. The **Sage Gateshead**, ‘a live music venue and a centre for music education in the North East of England’ has worked closely with social services and local authority fostering teams in Gateshead and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne to deliver and facilitate musical sessions and activities for foster carers and children in care aged 0-5. This programmes main objectives was to support the musical, social, personal and emotional development of young children living in care and to develop their abilities to build relationships with others, including bonding with their foster carers.

The project team were aware of safeguarding issues around protecting the identities of children and foster carers and yet wanted a way of recording the children and carers participating. Rather than use video and photography, participation was ‘visually recorded through the medium of illustrations’. This provided an innovative and safe way for capturing participation, and crucially also gave the children

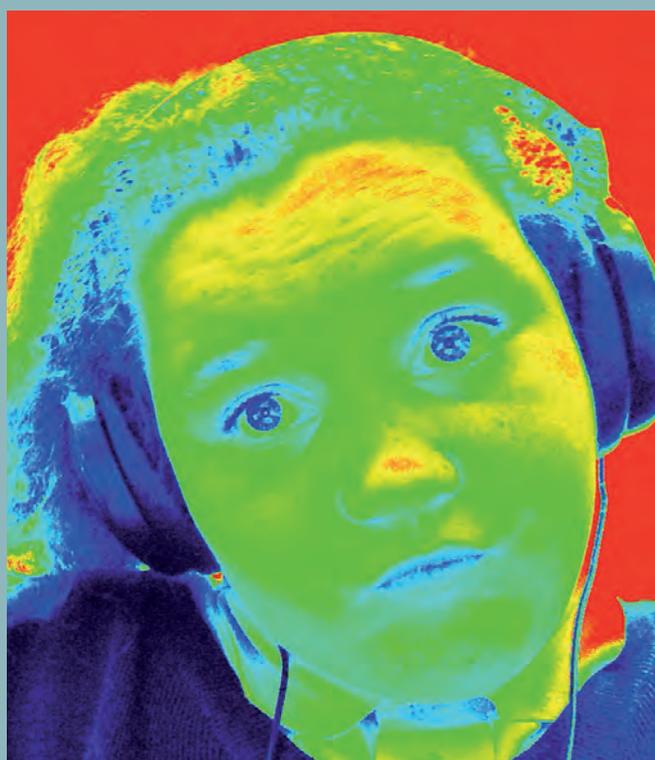




Image credit: Loud & Clear at Sage Gateshead
Illustrator Ditte Elly Gourd

and their carers an object to keep and which can be used for remembering, constructing and narrating their life story (Sage Gateshead, 2013).

Safeguarding can also limit young people in care's participation in everyday activities. One carer described how when his foster son began riding a bicycle they had a "legal obligation" to ensure that he wore high visibility clothing and a helmet. The foster son refused to wear them as none of his peers did and thus did not take part in bike rides with his friends around the local estate. The carer admitted that he would have been more relaxed with his birth children. This inevitably creates discrepancy in conduct and identity between how birth children and foster children are treated in families and the types of everyday participation they can engage in.

Local authorities also facilitate participation in formal non-cultural projects with a specific social and safeguarding focus. These projects are where young people can discuss their wellbeing with youth and social workers and workers can in turn educate young people about safeguarding themselves.





Due to their role in helping safeguard young people, participation in these activities is highly valued and therefore prioritised by the local authority. This report suggests that these activities are important for young people in care's wellbeing; they can also provide spaces for developing social capital and especially bonding capital- being part of a community. However, as previously discussed not all young people in care want or need to be a part of this community and do not wish to develop bonding capital. Practice must provide young people who choose not to engage in such activities the pathways and attendant support for them to participate elsewhere, where they can bridge friendships and feel a sense of wellbeing away from the care system.

2.4. Talking about participation amongst and between domains

There are numerous adults and organisations involved in facilitating the participation of young people in care. Different adults have different priorities and value different kinds of activities; this can lead to confusion and conflict amongst facilitators. Such conflict and confusion could be avoided if communication practices between facilitators and between facilitators and young people were improved and practices for exchange of information about participation were standardised.

2.5. The value of participating in new domains

The research uncovered some areas of relational conflict that can arise amongst facilitators of participation. Some young people growing up in foster care, children's homes and residential units also can have their participation facilitated by an independent visitor (IV). The role of the IV can involve encouraging the young person to participate in new activities and alongside this to facilitate the development of the young person's life skills through participation in everyday activities such as getting on a bus, going to new places and so forth. IVs are able to take on board the interests and values of the young people they visit, but are also encouraged to widen their interests by introducing the young person to new forms of participation that they would not otherwise get to experience. We found that such introductions can cause challenges for foster carers where IVs introduce young people to forms of participation that carers feel they are unable to facilitate. One IV talked about how she had taken a young person she mentors horse riding. The young

person enjoyed this activity and expressed an interest in continuing, but at a later visit she changed her mind and told the IV that she no longer wished to take part. After some investigation by the IV it was revealed that the young person had wanted to continue horse riding, but her foster mother had encouraged her to change her mind as it was not an activity the foster carer felt she could facilitate. This example suggests again the importance of improved practices for sharing information about participation between young people in care, carers, social services, and charities providing IVs.

2.6 The value of “contact”: participation with birth families

Young people in care can continue to share activities with members of their birth family, reminding us that participation for young people in care can remain attached to past places, experiences, values and other models of participation. Participation with birth family can take place because of being subject to a part-time care order or through “contact visits”. Sarah lives part time with her birth family documented participation with members of her birth family celebrating a cousin’s birthday at a restaurant. “Contact” can involve a supervised meeting at a local “contact centre” or a member of the birth family being allowed to take the young person out. However, contact with birth family was discussed as a point of contention amongst the foster carers. The foster parents who participated in the focus groups had each experienced contacts disrupting participation and family life. One foster mother shared how scheduled “contact” disrupted a scheduled musical group that her foster child participated in every week. We found that there was a significant lack of cultural and leisure activities offered which would enable contact to take place at the same time as cultural or leisure participation. Cultural and leisure organisations, especially those funded by or provided by the local government (corporate parent), could be important tools in providing pathways into cultural and leisure activities in the context of a ‘contact’ visit. Such programmes for birth families and children in care could simply provide a comfortable and stimulating environment in which to spend time during contact, such activities could also facilitate the development of cultural capital for both birth parent and child. Practices which enable the capturing of such activities without necessarily utilising photography or film would enable such activities and experiences to be captured in turn adding to the tools available for facilitating positive life story work.

Life story work and, as a part of this, memory boxes are important tools in the therapeutic parenting of care experienced young people. Life Story work is the process of helping children separated from their birth families to remember and make sense of their early lives. Children who have been through the care system often experience changes in social workers, carers and homes. Therefore this work, which usually includes making a Life Story Book and Memory Box, allows care experienced children and young people access to their heritage and past that may otherwise be missing, lost or forgotten (Watson, Latter and Bellew, 2015).

2.7. The value of ‘normalising’ activities

Participation in youth clubs such as the Rangers, Brownies or Scouts is known as a ‘normalising’ activity. The value attached to participating in such groups is that membership encourages socialisation with others outside the care system and a sense of independence; this assists with the development of bridging capital. Leah and Charlotte do not attend any of the cultural activities offered to care experienced young people. Charlotte made it very clear to the researcher that she does not like singing and “would never join” a performance group such as the ones facilitated for her. Her preference to engage with ‘culture’ in an informal rather than formal manner should not be viewed as disengagement with cultural participation, but a choice to engage in culture in her everyday and on her own terms. This is why it is important to recognise the value of her participation in other activities such as the Rangers. The Rangers have opened up a wider set of opportunities for participation for both Charlotte and Leah. One of the activities they chose to record during the auto ethnography was an organised obstacle course run that they took part in with their Rangers group. On the video Charlotte screams “I’ve had the best time of me life!”, because it was “so much fun”. Participation in the Rangers is normalising them as young citizens rather than just as “girls in care”, allowing them time away from care to construct their own identities.

Supporting such activities when a young person is moved to a different area can be difficult for the corporate parent, carer and mentor. One young person discussed how she enjoyed being a member of a running club in her previous placement because it provided great exercise and a way

to relax. This membership was discontinued when she was placed in care in a different local government area, despite this being integral to her 'positive' participation. However, she continues to choose to run by herself in her current placement, suggesting that she has incorporated what used to be a group activity into her own everyday participation. Such experiences are present within the care system throughout the UK and are acknowledged as a deficiency within national policy. Knowing and valuing a young person's everyday participation activities could help facilitators plan ahead for changes in placement and thus better enable continuity in interests and activities for young people throughout their time in care.

For the group of young women involved in this research, there were a range of activities being facilitated, such as Rangers, volunteering, drama, dancing, singing, arts and crafts, reading and swimming but there was a lack of certain kinds of activity such as dry sports for example.

2.8. Talking about participation with young people

Belonging to and negotiating different value systems does not always result in confusion and conflict for the carer, IV and young person. This research has found evidence that young people can accept and take on the values of the participation that is facilitated for them when that activity has some meaning for them. For instance, Leah

and Charlotte spend time at the weekend volunteering as dog walkers at a local animal shelter along with their foster family. When asked what they liked about participating in this, they agreed that they like "taking the dog out of the shelter" and "giving it a break from being locked up". It clearly holds a lot of value for them personally, as individuals but also as a larger family that they can share. Spending time with animals has become a significant part of their everyday participation. Charlotte and Leah's films were largely documenting their participation with animals. Charlotte explained that the guinea pig she is seen holding in one of her films belongs to her "carer's daughter". The film shows her cuddling and kissing the animal. Later in the research, they both shared images of themselves with a puppy called "Bella", who they referred to as the "family's dog". The activity itself is enjoyable, caring for – looking after – animals inside (family pets) and outside of the home feels worthwhile to them and creates a good sense of purpose and wellbeing. In addition, this activity, shared with the foster family, enabled these young women to feel part of a family, creating memories and identities and helping them to form bonds with their foster parents and siblings. We suggest that recognising the importance of everyday participation in a young person's sense of self and identity and sense of community is imperative for their wellbeing and self-development.



It was revealed in our discussion with IVs that there can be an over-valuing of participating in activities 'outside' of the home. The IV is expected to take the young person outside of the foster home, children's home or unit. One IV talked about her first visit with a young girl living in a unit and that this young girl wanted her visit to take place in the unit because she had activities scheduled outside most days of the week. The IV discovered the girl was "quite crafty" and that she liked drawing and during the next few visits they participated in drawing activities, making objects out of loom bands and the IV introduced the girl to origami. This is an example where what is deemed important and valuable in taking part for the young person is overlooked in practice. Recognising that participatory interests can be very individual, personal and singular is important. Local authorities need to find ways of capturing and exchanging this information from young people to reduce the risk of the 'one size fits all' approach in facilitating participation in different care settings.



Conclusion: Valuing Everyday Participation

Encouraging young people to participate in certain categories of activities can help academic attainment, aspiration and help them to overcome the loss and trauma of their past.

This report clearly shows that 'everyday participation' can be a way young people in care adjust to their experiences of living in and out of care, living between different places, values, value systems and identities. The challenge is to find structures which support and better understand the values of this participation.

Facilitators agree that the social, cultural, physical and emotional values attached to certain kinds of activities are beneficial to young people in care, in the present and later on in life. However, what becomes a point of contention is when the value of one activity takes precedence over another and whether this is in fact in the best interests for the young person at that particular time. The 'scheduling' of activities according to value can at times disrupt everyday life. In addition, little seems to be known by the corporate parent of the young person's participation as it exists outside of their facilitated activities. This report suggests that knowing the value of participation facilitated by foster carers, IV's and the young person's own everyday participation would help develop programmes that could be of more cultural, social and emotional benefit to young people. Carers and IVs revealed that when a young person comes into their care, they do not inherit any information about the young person's leisure interests. Collecting and sharing such information about the interests of young people during their stay in care with those directly looking after them seems important, but yet this is not happening.

Facilitated participation and the capitals built through these types of participation are recognized as beneficial to participation in society. What often gets ignored or undervalued however is the role 'everyday participation' has in this development. Our research demonstrates that there is an important continuum between the domains of participation. Above all the research has demonstrated the importance of everyday participation to young people in care and the particular complexities these young people experience in having their everyday interests supported and facilitated on an ongoing basis.

For the institutional structures of care our research with young people revealed that there should be better systems for taking account of these interests and facilitating them through time in care.

For cultural and leisure institutions the research clearly demonstrated the potential for supporting young people in care through facilitating participation which connects with and values young people's everyday participation.

What young people choose to do in their free time can be of great importance to how they see themselves and are the lived experiences from which they can and will construct their identities now, and in the future. This is a fundamental value of facilitated and everyday participation. Current social policy and practice is focused on enabling care experienced young people to create positive narratives and memories about the self, the importance of which is recognised in the focus on life story work. Cultural institutions such as museums and galleries, with their expertise in memory and identity work are currently underutilised as tools for the facilitation of participation amongst young people in care.

We suggest that the responsibility to facilitate the participation of young people in care lies not only with those directly looking after children and young people and social services, but also with the organisations and venues funded by the corporate parent.

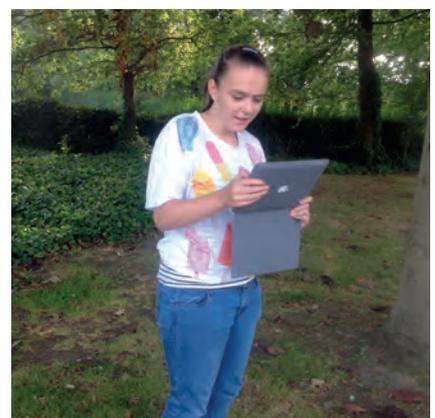
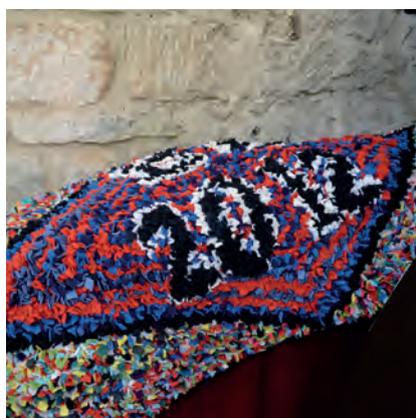
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UNDERSTANDING EVERYDAY PARTICIPATION

ARTICULATING CULTURAL VALUES