

The Eastern Region Sector Led Improvement Programme and Research in Practice Voice of the Child Change Project: Final Report

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The appendices listed in the report can be viewed and accessed via the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/home/VOC%20Appendices>

Introduction and background to the project

The Children's Services Sector Led Improvement Programme for the Eastern Region runs a programme of regional activity based on shared improvement themes. In spring 2014 the Programme Manager approached Research in Practice to co-develop a programme of support in relation to the theme 'the experience of the child within child protection'. Self-assessments completed by the 11 Local Authorities had noted a lack of 'the child's voice' in case recording and a lack of evidence of children and young people's input into service design. This linked with an emerging strand of Research in Practice work focused on developing methods to engage with the voices of children and young people.

It was agreed that the RiP [Change Project](#) method of collaborative enquiry would provide a strong process for engaging colleagues from all 11 authorities in investigating this topic and developing approaches for regional improvement. Engaging the RiP network, we invited the Principal Social Worker and Participation Manager from East Sussex to co-facilitate the project alongside the RiP Change Project coordinator. East Sussex have been working over a number of years to improve the organisation's approaches to eliciting and responding to the voices of children and young people and had valuable experience, learning and reflection to share.

The Change Project method

A Change Project is a method of intensive engagement designed to enable participants to find evidence-informed solutions to specific challenges. Change Projects give participants the opportunity to:

- explore evidence around a problem or topic.
- bring together professional knowledge and research evidence.
- improve practice through the application of evidence-informed approaches.

The method is a dynamic process in which participants work together to design practical resources or approaches to build evidence-informed practice.

The project focus was the voice of the child in child protection: building an evidence-informed approach to collating and evidencing user feedback from children and young people involved in the child protection system.

Development Group recruitment and project work

Two places were offered to each local authority with guidance that the participants should have roles in practice improvement, quality assurance, workforce development or as group managers ([appendix 1](#)). A full complement of 22 participants ([appendix 2](#)) from the 11 authorities was recruited to participate in four Development Group (DG) meetings which took place between November 2014 and mid-April 2015 (outline agendas [appendix 3](#)). The sessions were co-developed and led by the RiP project coordinator and East Sussex colleagues, in discussion with the RiP Research and Development Manager. Participants were given 'takeaway tasks' between sessions. A [Wikispace](#) was set up to enable participants to upload materials and aid knowledge exchange and discussion. Participants were supported in using this or in disseminating information through other means by the RiP team.

From the start, all participants were engaged and motivated and remained engaged throughout the project. Participants demonstrated good baseline knowledge of key research messages in relation to the topic, and their identification of local challenges and barriers echoed the national picture. Some authorities in the region are further along a journey with this issue than others and some seem better resourced to take this work forward. But overall there was a clear sense of a shared journey to undertake. 100% of participants at the final group meeting evaluated the project as 'excellent' or 'good', both as a professional development opportunity and in terms of building new and rewarding networks (see summary feedback stats at p.33 below and [appendix 4a](#), and full evaluation report at [appendix 4b](#)). They described the project as having:

"Increased [my] confidence in developing this area; huge learning and resources from sharing with others"

"Definitely increased my enthusiasm, which was already strong, about contributing to development in this work in [my authority]"

"Reinforced in me a desire to continue to change the practice culture of my organisation"

The information sharing and exchange of ideas and tools which took place during the Development Group phase of the project was highly valued by the group. The discussions on local approaches and information emerging from exercises were scribed by participants and facilitators and additional written information was shared by many participants to flesh out ideas/tools or approaches raised in meetings. East Sussex contributed practical resources and provided detailed information from the processes they had used, including the 'participation toolkit' they developed and the questions (based on outcome measures) they devised for user feedback questionnaires and focus groups ([appendices 5](#) and [6](#)). The learning from this knowledge exchange process will be highlighted within this report and the tools and resources mentioned will be available in the accompanying Dropbox: <https://www.dropbox.com/home/VOC%20Appendices>.

Informed by the evidence and emerging themes in early group discussions, two areas were agreed for project work. The group divided into two working groups:

- exploring and developing a working model for 'participation champions' (later renamed 'practice champions')
- developing principles and guidelines for creating more child-centred Child Protection Plans.

At the end of the DG meeting cycle (April 2015), all participants reflected on their 'vision' for utilising the learning from the project to implement change within their local authorities. Support from colleagues and local senior managers will be essential in order to take this learning forward.

Challenges and barriers identified

Whilst there was diversity of local experience, the following key themes emerged regarding common challenges and barriers:

- A lack of qualitative information about the experience and views of children and young people (CYP) receiving child protection services. The available qualitative information tends to be focused on looked after children (LAC).
- Progress generally in terms of eliciting and responding to the voice of CYP seems to be further advanced in relation to LAC - with more mechanisms

and embedded methods of supporting this than with children in receipt of child protection services.

- Quantitative data (such as stats on numbers of CYP attending CP conferences) does not provide information on CYP's *experience* of a conference or why they did not attend.
- Local authorities do not appear to do much with the information that is collected about child protection services and the voice of CYP in relation to this.
- Many local authorities commission advocacy services to support children to attend or contribute to conferences. Participants identified these services as an underused source of qualitative information. One local authority which no longer uses advocacy services has found that social workers now take more ownership over the need to consult with and support children in relation to the conference. There is a need to ensure role clarity between advocacy services and social work teams rather than compartmentalising skills or roles in an unhelpful way.
- It was apparent that there is much good practice happening but that recording, evidencing and building consistency and quality require work.
- The extent to which children and young people are involved at a strategic level with service planning, commissioning and in shadow safeguarding boards is variable and needs building upon. In some local authorities CYP have collaborated on planning for discreet areas of service provision, such as in developing a Child Sexual Exploitation strategy, but this needs to be more routine, so that CYP involvement is part of everyday 'nuts and bolts' service planning.

Positive and promising practice

A great deal of positive practice and progress within local authorities was shared throughout the project; there was also a sense of ongoing local improvement and progress with the project itself a factor in some of aspects of this.

For ease of reference and to avoid duplication, examples are included at appropriate points in this report. We have structured the report around a suggested 'staged process' for eliciting and responding to the voices of CYP in

child protection. Improvements at an individual practice level feed directly into service level development.

A Staged Process for building on the voice of children and young people in child protection.

The following sections draw out themes and set out points in relation to CP work at individual, service development or strategic service planning levels. Examples, materials and challenges raised by participants are collated thematically. The sections are set out against the broad chronological order of the journey an organisation may take with this work and the journey of a child through the system. Some aspects of this - such as direct work with children - are of course relevant throughout and at every stage.

Clarify a starting point

In any local authority various activities take place in terms of information collection, user feedback, measuring outcomes and performance in relation to the voices of the children and young people in child protection. However, this is rarely collated and analysed systematically to inform understanding of strengths and gaps in practice and indicators for service improvement.

After the DG session one, participants were asked to complete a form ([appendix 7](#)) in order to understand their own authority's current position and inform a baseline upon which to build a meaningful action plan. Pulling all of the required information together involves engaging colleagues across services - practitioners, managers, quality assurance and complaints, participation workers, service user representative groups etc.

This information gathering includes reviewing:

- quantitative data to identify what is/not available (and what use is/not made of data)
- qualitative information is/not available
- the possibilities of undertaking a thematic analysis to inform service development and improvement.

Reflection tips from East Sussex (ESSC):

- A more sophisticated focus on what the organisation needed to know at the outset would have helped. With hindsight they would move away from seeking generic feedback about CYP's experience of the service to more targeted and focused approach, for instance, analysing what complaints, audits and serious case reviews indicate need strengthening and starting with that. In ESSC this analysis raised the issue of involving fathers (especially absent fathers) in assessment and intervention.
- Involve key people from quality assurance, operations and complaints along with Principal Social Worker (PSW) to develop hypotheses about what is and is not working. Use service user feedback activities to test those hypotheses in a conscious and systematic way.

Involve practitioners and managers from the start

Early engagement of practitioners and their supervisors is essential to bring about whole scale change. Failing to do so risks these colleagues experiencing any development as something 'done to' them, and a concomitant failure to ensure practice information as the essential bedrock of this work.

Reflection tips from East Sussex:

- engage managers at an early stage in understanding the value of gaining service user feedback (showing value is of course dependent on seeking and using feedback effectively)
- start from the bottom up in order to embed cultural change in direct practice - effective use of practitioner and manager input and 'service user feedback champions' across the service were some of the most effective levers for the success at ESSC.
- engage Principal Social Workers (whose position is designed to provide both strategic level access and leverage and engagement with front-line practice), 'practice champions' and social worker forums.

In the course of the project it became apparent that many of these local authorities already have 'participation champions' or similar groups:

Norfolk: participants have approached the 'Signs of Safety practice leads group' to champion the work in a way which filters into practice.

Cambridgeshire: Social care staff contribute to service development through practitioner groups which complement the work of the Improvement Board. Practitioner groups are held monthly in locations across the county, chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care. Invitation is open to all social care and enhanced and preventative staff in that area. Agendas include themed discussions and 'Have Your Say' time where staff raise any issues.

Senior leadership ownership and drive

The Assistant Directors instrumental in planning for this Change Project identified the importance of building collaborative engagement across corporate and practice leads in relation to this work. This was echoed by participants who strongly endorsed the need for clear sign-up and an accountability structure for the work with key senior managers providing momentum. Senior leadership and 'push' was also identified as key to the success of East Sussex's work. Some authorities have this senior level ownership and drive in place. Others are hoping

Norfolk: The AD for Performance chairs an Involvement Strategy Implementation Group to take forward the Change Project learning in tandem with the practitioners group mentioned above. The strong message from the senior leadership team about the child's voice has resulted in a marked shift in individual casework, evidenced through case audit.

The leadership team introduced the concept of a regular colloquium for staff, and there are frequent presentations about voice of the child initiatives. Sponsorship for engaging Signs of Safety came directly from the interim DCS and is expected to contribute greatly to developments regarding the child's voice.

that the project will elicit the leverage to take the work forward.

Expectations for the role of participation workers need to be realistic. They may be seen as driver, owner and leader for this work and can play a key role; nevertheless senior level drive and ownership is essential.

Research indicates that organisational support for social workers to do direct work is essential. Senior leaders need to value relationship-based practice and communicate this effectively, 'giving permission' for this essential foundation to the work to take place. (Cossar, Brandon and Jordan, 2014).

A project participant (a senior manager) described a social worker showing them a letter they had drafted for a child in which they had used very careful language and child friendly presentation. This heartened the participant that the message was coming through to practitioners that senior managers value relationship-based direct work and would be interested to see this example.

Build a strategic approach

To build momentum around the voice of CYP in child protection requires specific drivers in service plans and/or a specific strategy in place to drive this work. A wide range of coordinated activities and mechanisms will need to be in place to ensure the work is coherent, complimentary, effective and efficient. A steering group or similar will need to map the activity and prevent duplication.

Essex: have an annual strategy and action plan ([appendix 8](#)) for the involvement of children and young people in child protection services' which is comprehensive, details the activities they are undertaking to achieve the objectives of the strategy and the thinking behind it.

Children and young people as collaborators

The strategic approach should be underpinned and directly influenced by CYP collaboration. Examples of this are in Shadow Safeguarding Boards or CYP groups looking at specific issues.

Reflection tips from East Sussex:

In East Sussex, the Principal Social Worker chairs a steering group of practitioners, operational managers, children and family groups. Concurrently a reference group (which developed out of CYP child protection focus groups) meets quarterly with the PSW and a representative from the advocacy service to

support the development and review of CP practices. This feeds directly into the steering group who take a strategic lead on the work.

SMART action plan

A 'SMART' action plan will map out multiple activities being undertaken – from workforce development to creating case file audit tools or setting up focus groups. The action plan should be 'dynamic' with mechanisms to review and hone it over time in light of progress and emerging evidence.

If major changes or multiple activities are not realistic, it may be better to start in manageable ways, for example piloting new approaches with a single area of service and planning for how they can be implemented more widely.

Reflection tips from East Sussex:

An example of a planning tool (the Project Initiation Document (PID)) used by East Sussex at the early stages of initiating projects is provided as [appendix 9](#). It prompts those using it to identify the criteria for success of the project, consider and mitigate the risks which may impede its progress and to plan for keeping stakeholders sufficiently informed throughout.

Norfolk: outline project plan is included at [appendix 10](#). Establishing the steering group and taking forward the work streams identified has been agreed by the Involvement Strategy Implementation Group (chaired by an AD) which will provide the governance for the project.

Building the approach into the 'every-day'

A resounding message to come out of the DG meetings was the importance of building this work into the everyday experiences of children in receipt of CP services and into the everyday work of those providing them. Taking opportunities to affect everyday practice will give out the strongest message (at the time when it is needed) to children and young people that their voice is valued and build their trust in sharing their thoughts and feelings. A number of themes emerged in DG sessions:

Develop accessible services

Initial impressions will influence expectations for children, young people and families. Building accessible, equitable, relationship and strengths-based service provision, dealing with stigma, negative media coverage and other barriers will influence people's attitude to working collaboratively and accepting support.

Norfolk: have created a wall board around 'the voice of the child' in one of their offices. In public areas they have changed the reception environment with child friendly furniture and pictures - more like a school and less corporate. They have also set up an 'early years best practice room' for people working with young children to utilise.

Essex: a leaflet ([appendix 11](#)) is provided to children and young people to explain the child protection conference, its purpose (including what it is **not** i.e. it does not make decisions about removing children from their homes) and children and young people's options for being involved, contributing and having their views heard.

Design services to build engagement

Cambridgeshire: adopting the 'Reclaiming social work' model is increasing practitioners' ability to provide consistency and build relationships with children and families. Unit meetings provide a forum to bring CYP views into the forefront of thinking and decision making. The recording of CYP views is explicitly required in unit meeting minutes, not just within the assessments. The unit clinician's role is not just to provide a systemic practice lens but also help social workers think about communicating with CYP in different ways. The unit clinician can assist with observations.

Norfolk: have been working on 'transitions' - trying to address the impact on CYP of changes of staff and build improved systems. Local research in 2012 identified that the division between children in need and child protection services was impeding consistency for CYP and a service redesign is in process to address this.

Whether or not local authorities go as far as fully redesigning services, all need to ensure handovers do not require CYP to repeat themselves to new teams of staff.

Direct work with children - consistent but not 'standardised'

A trusting relationship between CYP and the key person/people working with them is critical to the extent to which their voice will be heard (Cossar, Brandon and Jordan, 2014).

Reflection tips from East Sussex:

- Maintain a clear focus on the basics: using chronologies, genograms and eco-maps as tools to engage with children and to understand their situations; regular visits with social workers seeing children on their own; decent social work assessments, analysis and plans; permission (and resources) for social workers to be creative in forming and maintaining relationships with children.
- Direct work as the norm: In East Sussex this was aided by the 'participation toolkit' providing numerous direct work tools. The design of

the toolkit reflects the journey of the child and provides tools for different stages - engagement, assessment, planning, intervention and review as well as life story work.

- The next step planned in East Sussex is a social media equivalent of the participation toolkit with recommendations on use of Apps at different stages of the child's journey.

Hertfordshire: as a result of taking part in this project the participant gathered tools and ideas and shared these locally and has observed an increase in direct work with CYP.

Luton: the 'Three Houses' tool is used with children following a strategy meeting by the person deemed most appropriate and the completed tool is fed into conference minutes.

Central Bedfordshire: also trialling the 'Three Houses' tool for child protection conferences. An impact analysis will be undertaken to identify the effectiveness of this.

Peterborough: a toolkit has been put together by managers and is soon to be introduced to social workers in a workshop session. Additionally the social workers are being introduced to MOMO (Mind of my own) - an online resource that encourages CYP participation. In the past it has been more LAC focused but a CP focused version is now being rolled out. They are also working to ensure that an easily accessed box of direct work resources is available to teams.

Essex: have developed an 'All about me Sparky booklet' (for pre 8 year olds and where applicable, disabled children) which is an interactive direct work tool for use with CYP in obtaining their views ([appendix 12](#)).

Norfolk: Children with Disabilities Teams have a range of tools which they use with children with limited communication. This 'tool bag' has recently been adopted by one of the child protection teams.

Many of the DG representatives in the Change Project were using a range of direct work tools or were developing a toolkit and others expressed a wish to do this.

Change Project Development Group Tips:

- It is vital to take an individualised approach in direct work with CYP to reflect the varied ways in which children communicate and their diverse needs. While standardised processes can increase consistency in ensuring direct work tools are used, practitioners and people seeking service user feedback need a range of tools at their disposal and the permission to be creative.
- The best communications with CYP often happen outside of forums designed 'to get information out of them'. The 15 day window prior to conference can limit opportunities for informal communications, but this can occur further down the line.
- Communication is a two-way street. Just as important as seeking information is the need for professionals to communicate a holistic understanding of their involvement in CYP lives and to keep updating them as new information or decisions emerge.
- Spending time with CYP in less formal settings can be helpful in building trust - at the individual case level and service development level. In East Sussex a yearly residential is held, at which children (who are receiving or have received child protection services) share rich information which informs service development.
- CYP use online communication methods - social media, Apps, texting, Skyping and messaging – as primary methods of communication. In general local authorities working with CYP do not utilise these methods.

NSPCC and Childline have developed communication methods using interactive websites and social media for direct support to children, disseminating helpful information and links for children to find help when they need it and for polling children about their views. They have undertaken detailed risk assessment to underpin this work and are happy to share this with those who are interested. ([appendix 13 from NSPCC Participation Unit](#))

Recording CYP voices in auditable forms

Reflection tips from East Sussex:

- Good case recording, the presence on files of chronologies and direct work tools provide evidence and allow CYP voices to come through.
- A key factor in the positive evaluation of ESSC by Ofsted was the strong sense of the child in case records. These include an in-depth profile of the child including their likes, dislikes, hobbies and personality type; clear information on who they are/are not close to; notes on what they are worried about and what they want to change. The record also needs to make clear what has been done in response to the child's expressed view. There was also evidence in some cases of co-production - where the social worker sat down with a CYP to draw their own Child's Plan, either in the form of a 'mind map' or with clear bullet points and images.

Hertfordshire: through her experience of scrutinising case files in recent months, the project participant has noted improvement in CYP input to the development of their plans, with their words presented separately from the written analysis. Hertfordshire are also using Innovation Programme funding to develop 'a workbook focus' which includes a Family Based Model where children can input information into their own file.

Luton: once new tool kits are launched social workers will be asked to record as an action the tool used and where it has been stored. Analysis of the tool will be recorded separately.

Norfolk: the Signs of Safety tools are used and although not kept directly on the child's electronic record, the approach is to reflect the outcome of using the tools on electronic forms. At least one team has established a portfolio of good examples of 'Child Seen' recordings.

Maximising CP conferences

Many DG participants were trying to increase CYP attendance at conferences, often through use of advocacy services.

Norfolk: all CYP aged 10 or over are eligible for an advocate to help them attend their CP conferences or to represent their views should they not wish to attend. The referral rate in February 2015 was 88% and, of those referred, there was 100% take up. The introduction of the service has made a major impact on the participation of children and young people in their conferences.

Cambridgeshire: the National Youth Advisory Service is commissioned to provide an independent visiting and advocacy service to young people receiving social care services. NYAS reports on feedback from users on a quarterly basis.

Hertfordshire: there has been an increase in CYP attending initial CP conferences and contributing to the development of their plans. Guidance has been issued to support the capture of 'what the child is saying' at points in the decision-making process prior to and including the conference.

Essex: a pre-conference form ([appendix 14](#)) is used. CYP give their views about:

- their relationship with the social worker
- the extent to which they understand the point of the conference and the role of the Chair
- how they would like to be involved (given a range of options)

The form gives brief explanations of the process and choices and is an information-giving as well as 'eliciting' tool. (This is alongside the fuller information provided in Essex' 'What is a Child Protection Conference and how does it affect me?' leaflet ([appendix 11](#)). The form provides helpful 'auditable' information that can be included a child's case record and aggregated with other responses for wider service planning purposes.

Several authorities have adopted Signs of Safety or other Strengths Based Approaches to conferences and were positive about the impact of these.

Suffolk use Signs of Safety and present information from direct work at conferences using a whiteboard. They are also trying to get Conference Chairs engaged with cases earlier (rather than only for a 15 minute pre-conference discussion with the child).

Luton use a Strengthening Families Approach in conferences which has been positively received by parents who previously felt that they faced a series of negative comments in the meetings. The Chair records everything on an electronic screen with everybody present, including the child's view; 'child's world'; risks; dangers; grey areas; family strengths and protective factors. The Three Houses tool, completed with the child in advance is presented and included as part of the minutes and has been found to shift parents' understanding of the impacts of experiences on their children. An 'information gathering form for children' ([appendix 15](#)) is given to CYP in advance of conferences to help them prepare their thoughts.

Essex also use a Strengths Based Approach (SBA). Conference participants consider (with the use of a board that they can all see and contribute to):

- What are we worried about now? (Or in the case of review conference, what were we worried about?)
- What is going well?
- Grey / Complicating factors?
- What needs to change – the plan?

Essex's Strategy ([appendix 8](#)) includes guidelines on the inclusion of CYP in the conference process, and includes the option of a Young Person only CP conference. These are instigated by CYP through discussion with a social worker. The CYP meets with the CP Chair and another professional of their choice (could be an advocate/SW/teacher etc.). The young person completes the SBA boards with the Chair's support and agrees with the Chair how the information will be shared. It is used as an option for all young people or when young people have requested to attend a CP meeting but it is considered inappropriate for the child to be in the meeting (e.g. due to age or level of understanding/capacity).

Cambridgeshire use a Strengthening Families Conference Model (for a brief see [appendix 16](#)). The evaluation they use shows better family understanding of the conference purpose and process; a sense of their voice being heard and improved engagement of parents with the CYP plan.

Suffolk Conference Chairs have midway meetings with social workers to review progress of plans and there is potential for Chairs to be involved in building Signs of Safety goals at the point of the investigation and before the conference so the process and planning are more integrated.

Conference planning and preparation

There was some discussion among DG participants about the scope for Conference Chairs to be more like an Independent Reviewing Officer role, with Chairs meeting CYP before and after a conference, not necessarily to extend their role to monitoring the case, but to enhance their relationship with (and understanding of) the CYP. In Cambridgeshire the Chair was described as taking a more proactive role than is often the case. Others were concerned that this might confuse the role of the team manager and the Chair.

Conference Chairs' role is key in ensuring the voice of CYP is sufficiently present at conference and in subsequent plans. Developing meaningful CP plans requires engaging CYP's networks to assist them to feed into the CP Plan. Several of the DG participants are taking work forward to develop child friendly or 'co-produced' child protection plans.

Culture change

As has been stated in earlier sections of this report, the DG participants were clear about the importance of change being developed from the 'bottom-up' in tandem with top-down leadership and steer. Change should be directed to building a culture in which evidencing the voices of CYP is part of everyone's 'bread-and-butter' work not an added 'extra'.

Change Project Development Group Tips:

- Practice or participation champions across the service, who champion the importance of service-wide user feedback and a focus on the voice of the child are significant enablers. This was the experience of Bedford and East Sussex among others.
- However, participation workers (or similar) should not be seen as the person 'doing the voice of the child'. Rather they should build methods for practitioners to engage and record and for managers to aggregate and analyse data and information.
- Having young people on interview panels for social workers (Peterborough) or IROs (Norfolk) sends a clear message about the status of the voice of CYP.

- Compliments gathered through reviewing CYP views during and at the end of the CP process should be fed back to practitioners and teams and compliments sent to Compliments and Complaints Teams can be collated and fed back to build strengths-based development.

Cambridgeshire: social workers operate to eight practice standards which include:

- We will always ask for the views of the parents, children, young people and family members we work with, and consider these views in our work with the family.
- We will always strive to communicate with families, children and young people in a way that enables them to fully understand the purpose of our work with them, and so that they understand why we make decisions that impact on their family.

Reflections from East Sussex:

- 'Retelling successes' enthuses practitioners and managers and helps motivate engagement in additional drives to obtain user feedback. E.g. Statements made by young people about how social work has made a difference to them gathered in focus groups were shared at staff conferences and on World Social Work Day.

Peterborough: involvement in this project has led to plans to use the existing social work forum to aid culture change and include workshops on the voice of the child and service user feedback. With a child protection version of MOMO (mentioned earlier) about to go live and the social work forum now engaged in the work, one of Peterborough's participants said there was '*a sense that there is enthusiasm and 'everything is primed and ready' to take forward improvements*'.

Building staff skills

Key competencies for driving this culture change include knowledge about children's rights; child development; good communication skills; equality and diversity.

Change Project Development Group Tips:

- The importance of prioritising CYP's voices should be embedded in staff inductions.
- Local authorities need to consider whether social workers have the knowledge, skills, time and support to engage with CYP in meaningful ways and if not, address this.
- Supporting creative practice in the use of direct work tools and providing a resource bank or tool kit to be used in individualised ways will bolster these skills
- Obtaining meaningful feedback and responding effectively at individual or service development levels should be seen as essential elements of CPD and reflected in Performance Development Reviews.

East Sussex and Norfolk: teams are developing portfolios of good practice to share.

Hertfordshire: the NQSW academy is developing newly qualified staff with 'the voice of the child' at the forefront of and underpinning their practice. NQSWs are influencing teams which is reinforced by team and service managers, and the DG participant saw these as the key reasons for improvements they were observing in the voice of CYP in case work,

Reflection tips from East Sussex:

- Social workers can embed feedback loops into practice, asking children and families what is making a difference and what is not. In East Sussex there is an expectation that such feedback is evidenced in NQSW portfolios.
- Service user feedback is one element of a strong learning organisation culture. Integral to this is a focus on identifying and sharing expertise.

Developing clear and meaningful outcomes

In focusing on individual CYP, 'desired outcomes' might focus on their experience and how things would look for them if their circumstances were changed for the better. The same principle applies to setting outcomes at the service level.

Change Project Development Group tips and East Sussex tips:

- Setting meaningful service outcomes has to be underpinned by a 'theory of change' – i.e. what is the service trying to achieve? What do CYP say it should be doing? What does theory, research and practice experience tell us is the best journey to achieving this? In light of this, developing indicators or 'outcomes' both short and longer term to monitor whether the service is achieving change.
- New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) has developed validated well-being measures which relate to: feeling safe; being able to cope; progress and achievement at nursery/school; enjoying community activities; health and behaviour. These can provide a helpful basis for developing service outcomes. East Sussex; Participation Unit honed these measures in consultation with different parts of the service. In relation to child protection the PSW and those consulted felt that the well-being measures were not always applicable but did provide a basis on which to 'start the conversations' and form questions. The DG found the honed list ([appendix 6](#)) used by East Sussex within their questionnaires useful and applicable to their services.
- Outcomes and measures against which a service charts its progress should evolve in response to its growing knowledge. In East Sussex the data obtained from the first round of questionnaires indicated areas of concern (such as social workers not having a strong relationship with the child) and this then influenced the measures that were subsequently used within focus groups to evaluate progress.
- Standards and outcomes relating to listening and responding to CYP at practice and service development levels should be built into Performance Indicators. This strengthens and helps drive the work. Some DG participants of the DG are taking this back to their authorities to develop.

Cambridgeshire: the Safeguarding Quality Assurance Framework is based on evaluating four key outcomes:

- Have we kept children, young people and vulnerable adults safe?
- Have we improved outcomes for children and young people?
- Have we done this efficiently?
- Have children and families had positive experiences of the support they have received?

Building evidence of impact

There will be a range of opportunities for checking in with CYP on outcomes, most of which will occur in every-day practice. Some periodic activities such as interviews, feedback forms, questionnaires, face-to-face interviews and focus groups can provide additional information about the impact of the work.

Change Project Development Group tips:

- Use meaningful outcome measures and find opportunities to elicit information 'before' and 'after' intervention to monitor change.
- Be prepared to capture CYP's perception of change using a range of qualitative and quantitative methods.
- When designing feedback activities be clear on the purpose. Is the purpose to know more about the child or young person's experience in various areas of their life or their experience of your service specifically in order to inform service development? Although there may be overlap, they are not the same thing and the methods need to reflect this.
- Plan in advance for how the information gleaned will be analysed – e.g. transcribing interview recordings and analysing hours of transcription is a very labour intensive activity and requires research methods skills.
- Seek feedback at different stages of the work, not just the beginning and the end. Value and evidence the steps in between achieving desired longer term outcomes. It is possible to demonstrate 'positive moves' towards better outcomes. A well-defined Theory of Change will aid this.

- Consider carefully who is best placed to undertake face-to-face consultation with CYP. DG participants had mixed views, with some questioning whether social workers were best placed to evaluate their own service. All agreed that consultation needs to be carried out by trained staff with good skills in working with CYP and good understanding of child protection.
- Feedback to children and young people is essential, explaining what was gleaned from consulting with them and what will you do with this information. Make feedback available to those consulted and to CYP more generally through posters, leaflets or other means.
- Consider sharing your findings. In Thurrock, recent success in eliciting the views of asylum-seeking children at risk of being trafficked led to consideration of the implications for training and placement planning locally, and involvement in the 'national conversation' about these issues.
- Undertake large-scale sampling of existing information (for example Contribution Forms completed by CYP for conferences, Child Protection Outcome Forms (See [appendices 17](#) and [18](#) for ESCC examples) or similar if this is not already aggregated and analysed).
- Using 'soft data' such as descriptive and qualitative information within case files to identify themes and inform service improvement is a challenge due to the potential enormity of the task. Sampling can provide useful information. Audits are a good method for extracting this information (see examples below).
- Providing evidence against service outcomes (and ideally Performance Indicators related to listening to CYP) will involve triangulating data from individual case work, quality assurance and user feedback activities.

Reflection tips from East Sussex:

In East Sussex the findings of questionnaires, focus groups and interviews with families (conducted by a group of practitioners from outside Children's Services who had been trained in these methods) were analysed, leading to the following activities:

- Reshaping practice development opportunities relating to communicating with children
- Introduction of relationship-based practice with a focus on partnership working
- Procurement of a new case management system
- Focus on 'proportionate assessments' freeing up social workers to spend more time with families
- Review of LAC and Child Protection Contribution Forms.
- Direct feedback from service users delivered to teams to reinforce the importance of seeing child alone
- A focused push on retelling stories of success

The following year, further questionnaires and focus groups demonstrated that social workers relationships with children and young people had improved. All CYP reported knowing why Children's Services were involved in their lives and there was evidence of effective use of chronologies. (For more detailed findings and recommendations arising out of them see [appendix 19](#)).

As a result of this work so far:

- A strong sense of the CYP comes through in case records
- CYP tell others (inspectors, PSW, Chairs and carers) about their good relationship with their social worker and describe how this makes a difference
- Social workers convey a deep understanding of the child through supervision, audit and inspection.

East Sussex is now seen by Ofsted as evidencing:

"The development of meaningful relationships with children and families, good quality assessments and the effective use of chronologies result in social workers knowing their children and families well. Social workers are confident and skilled in protecting children. Children and young people told inspectors that they both feel safe and are safe, and that they enjoy good relationships with their social workers" Ofsted 2014

Norfolk: have a simple but comprehensive Young Person's Feedback Form which explores CYP understanding of children's services' reasons for being involved in their lives; their understanding of aspects of practice such as assessment; whether they were seen alone; how well things were explained to them; to what extent they felt their opinions and feelings were heard and to what extent the service is helping them make progress in their life - see [appendix 20](#).

East Sussex gained rich information about their service from 162 completed questionnaires. These were sent only to parents/carers (including questions about their perception of the child's experience and views) because CYP had fed back that they preferred face-to-face communication and did not like questionnaires.

Reflection tips from East Sussex:

- When designing the questions minimise bias as much as possible. Draw on colleagues such as local universities or an applied psychologist to support with this if needed.
- A big push for all social workers to take the questionnaires out to families over the course of the survey month resulted in good take-up.
- Social work students can also be tasked with telephoning families to go through questionnaires.
- Consider a prize draw for parents completing the questionnaire.
- Consider sending out 'survey monkey' questionnaires to families along with the more traditional end of service questionnaires.

Essex: - 'Tell us about what Child Protection in Essex means to you'

provides an opportunity for children and young people aged 8–17 years who are or have been subject of a CP Plan within the last year, to give their views on defined themes relating to CP services in Essex:

- Feeling Safer
- Meetings about Me
- Being Involved in Decisions
- Making Child Protection Plans
- People that help me

CYP are asked to provide their views however they choose. For example, they could write a story, write a letter, write a rap or song, make a video or draw a picture. They are supported to do this by an allocated key professional - social worker, teacher, family support worker, for example. A checklist is provided to professionals to ensure all appropriate steps are taken in relation to consent and confidentiality.

CYP who contribute receive an accredited certificate. Anonymous contributions may be published or displayed within Essex. They are also analysed to provide a report to the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Team, Involvement Team and Professional Standards and Auditing Service. This report will feed into the development of the 2016/17 Strategy and Action Plan, for the involvement of children and young people in child protection services.

Children and Young People's Focus groups

In East Sussex focus groups with CYP provided rich and visually interesting data which fed directly into recommendations and actions ([appendix 19](#)).

Reflection tips from East Sussex:

- Set up or use a practitioner group to help design age-banded focus groups. They can work alongside the PSW and a representative from the local advocacy service.
- In addition to broad open questions about their experience of CP services, frame questions around areas raised as concerns in adult questionnaires or other user feedback processes.

- Rather than a blanket request, take-up will be better if children are randomly pre-selected and individual social workers are approached directly by a senior lead such as the PSW and asked to approach CYP direct.
- Having a senior staff member such as the PSW directly involved in designing, organising and running focus groups aided take-up and supported the utilisation of the findings. The PSW was able to feed CYP views directly into discussions with senior and strategic leaders and this had a powerful impact.
- It is highly likely that CYP might say things in the focus group sessions that need further exploration - checking on their welfare and ensuring issues of concern are 'in hand' and known about by their current worker. Therefore the presence within groups of someone with CP expertise was essential.
- Practitioner group members can be asked to provide feedback on the questionnaires and resulting recommendations in their part of service.

Audits

Building scrutiny around CYPs' experience of the CP process into audits can provide useful evidence (of 'voice' and 'impact').

Norfolk: All case audit tools require information on the voice of the child/young person in the process (whether CP or otherwise). CP Plans are audited in file audits which explore:

- "Child seen and seen alone, feelings recorded and evidence of skilled practice in how the child's/young person's views were sought?"
- "Is there evidence that the assessment has been shared and involves parents/carers/child throughout the assessment and feedback sought?"
- To what extent does the file record evidence the worker's skill in building a relationship with the child and family?
- How well does the file record evidence that the child was seen during any assessment process?
- How does the file evidence that the child was seen alone during any assessment process?
- How does the file evidence the child was told what was happening and why?
- How does the file evidence how the child was included in his/her planning?
- How does the file evidence how the child participated in the reviewing process?
- If not actively involved in the assessment, planning or review process, how does the file evidence how the child's wishes, feelings and views have been considered?
- How does the record evidence that the case responsible worker understands the impact that their intervention has had on the child and family

There are also one-off audits in the chairing service.

The case work analysis tool is attached as [appendix 21](#).

A Duty & Child Protection Manager Audit Tool Adapted from Ofsted Annex D:
Evaluating the effectiveness of individual children's case files further considers:

- whether the quality of case recording is of a good standard, is relevant and provides a narrative of the child's experience, outcome and impact

The Interview questions for Social workers used as part of Norfolk's audit process include a focus on the voice of the child/young person with the following questions:

- Tell us about the child and how well you know them
- What is it like to be this child in this family?
- How would you describe them, what they like, dislike, what's important etc?
- Who are the important people in their life and why?
- If the child/parent/carer/professional was here, what would they say about our service and what would they say about you?
- How do you capture and record what they say?
- How does that help the way you work?

Cambridgeshire: the following processes are undertaken, several of which include joint auditing where managers audit alongside their team member:

- Auditing of Child protection plans on weekly basis by service managers and HOS using an internal service audit tool.
- Auditing of written records of CP Conferences using an internal service audit tool. Four conferences a month are also observed by managers and the tool is used to evaluate practice.
- Audit of the quality of monitoring information gathered by IROs and chairs in LAC reviews and CP conferences.
- The Cambridgeshire Children's Social Care Single Case File Audit Tool provides an overview on the quality of case work in different domains and the different domains supports issue specific analysis. Cases are graded within each domain and overall.

Drawing from complaints and compliments

Compliments and complaints, if analysed for themes and fed into performance data provide another rich source of information.

Norfolk: the QA Team collates all feedback from the Compliments and Complaints Team. From 1st April 2015 all user feedback will be collated by the QA Team. This will facilitate more 'join-up' and so more opportunity to evidence the views of children and young people beyond individual cases – and therefore more opportunity to adjust services accordingly.

One of the areas of work for this project is to ensure that feedback from CYP (and their families) is included in measuring outcomes in terms of performance

Focussing on what works

There is much to be gained from exploring what works well, and Appreciative Inquiry is a method to support this kind of analysis (for further information see [appendix 22](#)). In the final DG session the group undertook an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) exercise. AI has been recognised by Ofsted as a method available to LSCBs to audit and evaluate safeguarding practice and change (Ofsted, 2011). It involves a staged process focusing on:

- Exploring essential features of participants' experience of existing best practice.
- Collectively developing a shared vision of most desirable practice for the future.
- Working together to develop, design and create this practice, with changes occurring from the very first question asked.

(Rose and Barnes, 2008):

Some local authorities are already using AI as a method of evaluation or in direct work with families. For others it was new. However, for all it was the first time they had used the process to consider the following:

'Some good practice (relating to the voice of CYP in child protection) that you have witnessed, been involved in/has happened in your authority (or has been highlighted through our work together on this project) of which you are proud, which you think has made a difference and been beneficial to a child/young person or children/young people'

The process itself threw up a great deal of information; while some examples had been raised before, the AI method invites participants to 'dig deeper' and this fleshed out previously discussed activities considerably. Feedback was positive and participants were keen to utilise this approach in their local authorities. Many commented in their evaluations that on reflection it could have been a good place to start the discussions in DG session one. Local authorities might consider using this approach in the early stages of this report's 'suggested staged process.'

East Sussex plan to use AI with CYP in 'families of known success'. They also plan to use the Learning Together approach (SCIE's [Learning together, Root Cause Analysis, Learning Lessons Review and Child Death Reviews](#)).

Next Steps

Group work in progress:

One half of the DG commenced work on developing child friendly CP plans, working on this in group sessions and meeting up in between. In April's session they described how this work has started to develop 'principles' to underpin child friendly CP planning. They agreed they would like to strive for a regional 'vision' or 'core principles' that each local authority could sign up to. They are currently exchanging ideas about this. For further information contact Emma Sparrow who is leading on this. They briefed the other group members who they plan to keep informed.

The other half of the DG group worked on the theme of 'practice champions' and have taken this forward in their own local authorities, with varied progress to date. Some have already established the model through the course of the Change Project. They do not intend to continue to work on this together as a group.

Individual LA plans and support

Although there are a few exceptions (with some local authorities already having drawn up a plan and set up governance arrangements), most DG representatives have a vision and a set of ideas for taking this work forward locally. They now require Assistant Directors and other local stakeholders to formally engage with this work, including the development of detailed, signed off plans, underpinned by a good understanding of the current local picture.

The Regional plan

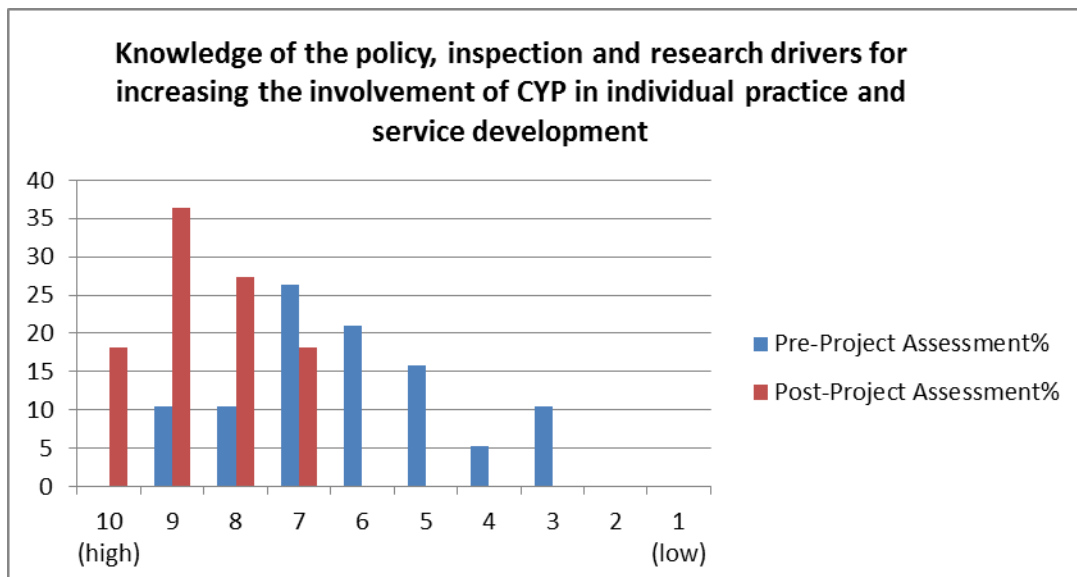
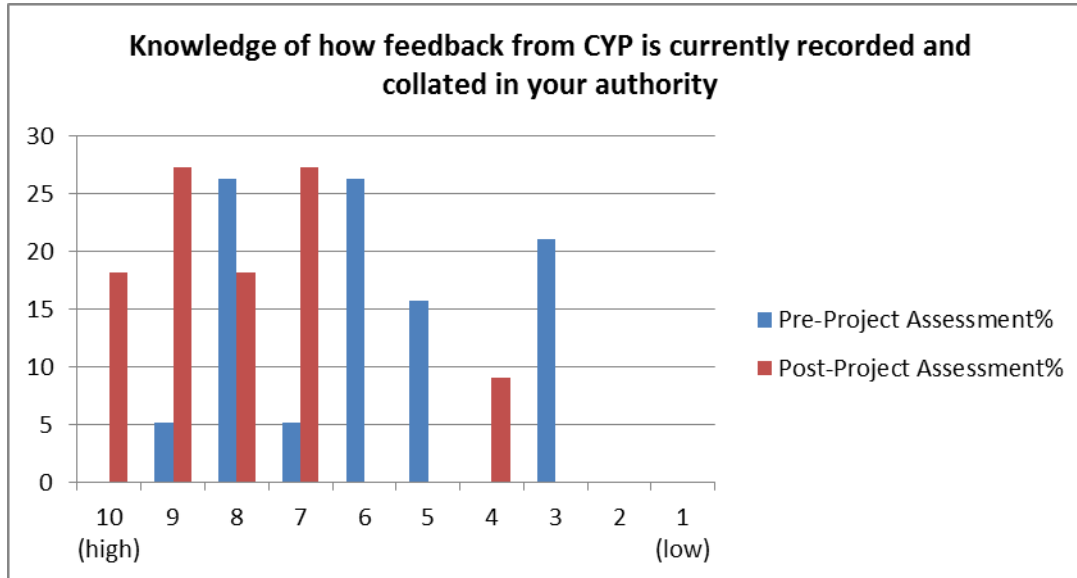
DG participants are keen to continue to network and support each other with this work regionally.

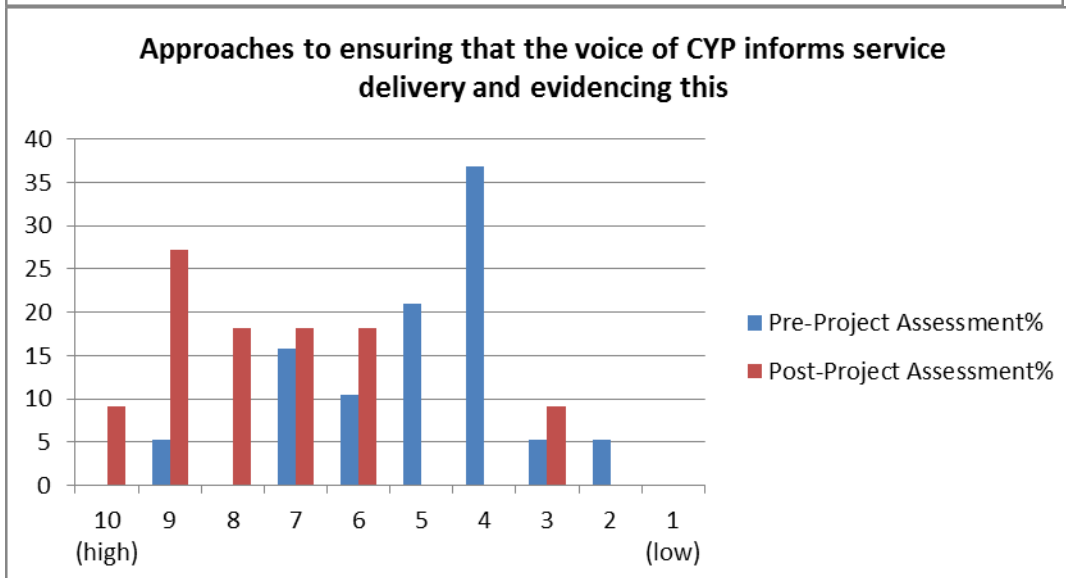
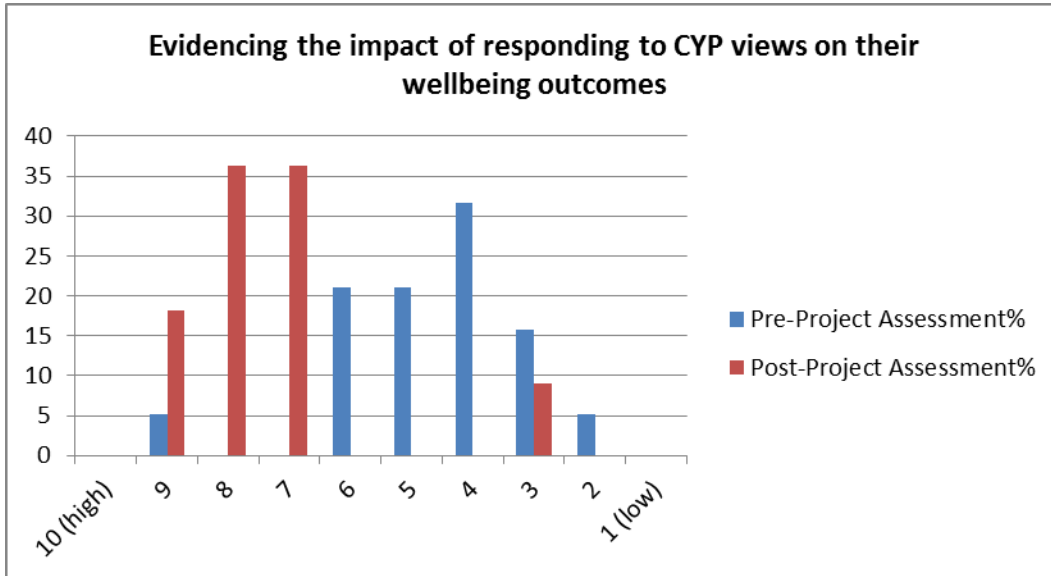
They have suggested the following:

- An information sharing 'portal' so they can continue to exchange ideas, tools and resources, building on those already made available through this report.
- Quarterly 'coaching' for their own local authority to help them review progress and plans and maintain momentum.
- Some said they would welcome monthly catch ups, but all agreed they would find it helpful to reconvene in six months time to review and share progress.
- All agreed they would like the region to facilitate a conference in one year's time for DG group members, the strategic leads and key stakeholders taking this work forward in each local authority including participation champions and children and young people representatives.
- Setting up peer shadowing opportunities (for example to be taken up by practice champions) could enable local authorities to see each other's approaches to this work in practice and build on the exchange of ideas.
- Additionally one participant has been keeping the 'Regional Participation Workers Network' informed of this project and will continue to do so.

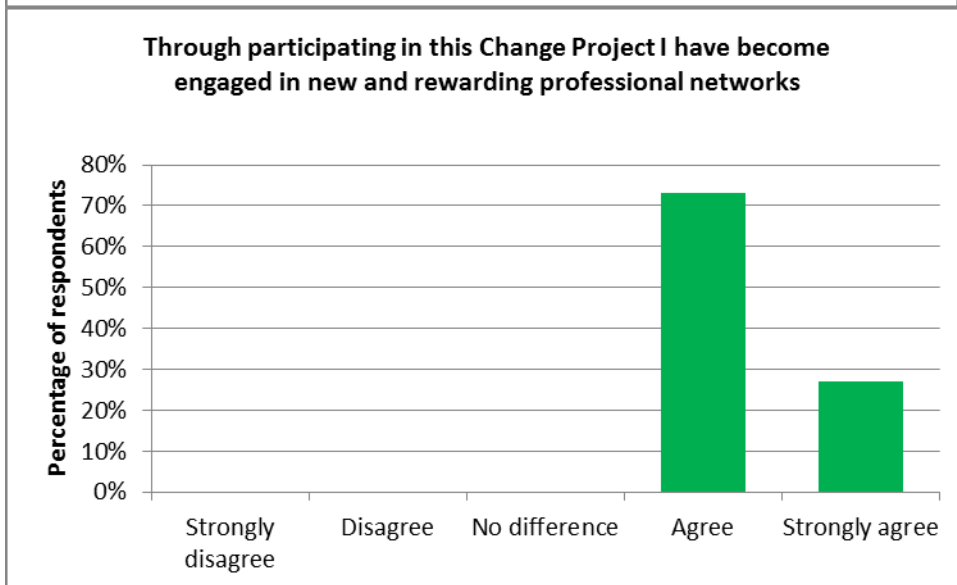
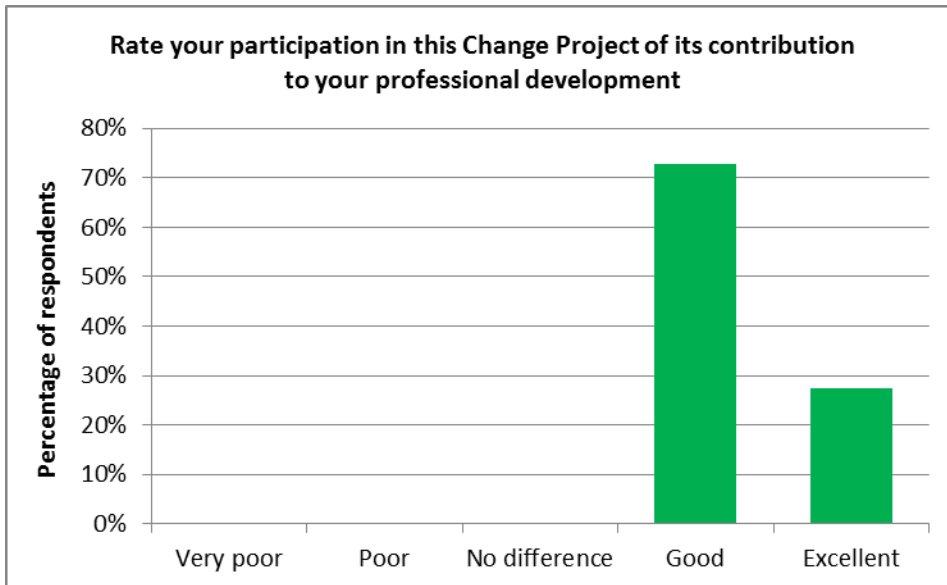
Eastern Region Sector Led Improvement Programme and Research in Practice Voice of the Child Change Project: participant feedback.

Participants were asked to rate their knowledge and skills in relation to aspects of this topic at meeting one in and re-rate at meeting four. Their responses are set out below.





Participants rated the project’s contribution to their professional development and their engagement in professional networks:



List of appendices

The appendices listed in the report can be viewed and accessed via the following link: <https://www.dropbox.com/home/VOC%20Appendices>

- Appendix 1 – Change Project Flyer
- Appendix 2 – List of Participants
- Appendix 3 – Outline Agendas for Meetings 1 - 4
- Appendix 4a – Feedback Statistics
- Appendix 4b – Evaluation Report
- Appendix 5 – East Sussex Participation Toolkit
- Appendix 6 – East Sussex Questionnaire
- Appendix 7 – Takeaway Task 1
- Appendix 8 – Essex Annual Strategy and Plan
- Appendix 9 – East Sussex PID
- Appendix 10 – Norfolk Outline Project Plan
- Appendix 11 – Essex CP Leaflet for CYP
- Appendix 12 – Essex All About Me ‘Sparky’ Leaflet
- Appendix 13 – NSPCC Risk Assessment in Relation to Use of IT and Social Media
- Appendix 14 – Essex Preconference Form
- Appendix 15 – Luton Information Gathering Form for Children
- Appendix 16 – Cambridgeshire Strengthening Families Conference Model Brief
- Appendix 17 – East Sussex ICPC Outcome Record
- Appendix 18 – East Sussex RCPC Outcome Record
- Appendix 19 – East Sussex Focus Group Report
- Appendix 20 – Norfolk’s Young Person’s Feedback Form
- Appendix 21 – Norfolk’s Case Work Analysis Tool
- Appendix 22 – Appreciative Inquiry Briefing