



Participation And Engagement Strategy 2026-28

Contents

Subject	Page
Introduction	3
Participation	4
Children's participation rights in alternative care in England	4 - 5
Stakeholders	5
Our Pledge to Children and Young People	6
Where do we want to be?	7 - 8
How Engagement and Participation Works	8 - 10
References	11

INTRODUCTION

Children's voices lie at the heart of working with children. By 'children's voices' we mean children's expression of their meaning through talk and other ways, the "hundred languages of children", to quote Loris Malaguzzi (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). We seek to ensure that children's voices are channelled through multiple modes so that children might express their meanings as fully and richly as possible.

This document highlights the participation and engagement strategy of Chrysalis Care used for the wellbeing of foster children, carers and other stakeholders.

Participation is a multifaceted concept (McDowall 2016) and Children and young people's involvement in decision-making is frequently mentioned as a key component of participation (Mannion 2007). The idea of participation from the perspective of fostering is further explained along with the existing practices of Chrysalis Care to ensure children's participation. The tools and strategy to incorporate the voices of children is further explained in the document along with the feedback received from our stakeholders using participation tools.

Lastly, the document brings forth the future plans on improvising the engagement strategies and avenues of stronger means to translate the voices of children into effective practices and policies.

We are cognizant and fully welcome the remit of the 2026, Working Together to Safeguard Children document, which mandates voice as an accountability measure and as a required contribution to shaping plans.

Participation

Children and young people must have the chance to express their views on their experiences in foster care and how their needs might be better served because they are the main recipients of out-of-home care services. The participation of children and young people in decision-making is commonly cited as a crucial aspect of participation (Mannion 2012), frequently in relation to UNCRC Article 12 on the rights of children (1989) which states:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

According to Kri and Skivenes (2017), care workers confuse consultation for involvement, and among those surveyed, 40% of care workers in the UK and 35% in the US supported views of children's participation that may be classified as token or non-participation. Inconsistencies between programme staff members' conceptions of adolescent involvement and the techniques they use inside them were also discovered by Havlicek et al. (2018).

There are two key components of children's participation:

1. A process and not a one-off event (Council of Europe 2012; Fylkesnes et al. 2018; Larkins et al. 2014)
2. Enable the child or young person to have an influence on their outcomes (Kennan et al. 2016; McDowall 2016)

This is in line with the following definition of participation:

"...widely used to describe ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes."

Good practice guidance comes from Social Care Institute for Excellence, publishing principles of Participation in 2024.

Children's participation rights in alternative care in England

Before making any decision about a child they are looking after, or proposing to look after, local authorities in England must, so far as is reasonably practicable, ascertain and give due consideration to the child's wishes and feelings (Section 22(4) Children Act 1989).

Children's homes managers must prepare a written plan for each child they look after. When preparing or reviewing this placement plan, the manager must, so far as

practicable having regard to the child's age and understanding, seek and take account of the child's views (Regulation 12, Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015). Each children's home must have a statement of purpose summarising the aims and objectives of the home and how children are looked after. This statement must describe how children are consulted in the running of the home. Information must also be included about complaints and anti-discriminatory practice in relation to children's rights (Paragraphs 15, 23 and 27 of Schedule 1, Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015).

Fostering services have similar legal duties (See in particular regulation 11 The Fostering Services (England) 2011), and they are additionally required to consult children when monitoring and improving the quality of provision (Regulation 35 The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011).

Stakeholders

The stakeholders to be involved in the participation process are as follows:

- Foster Carers
- Children & Young people
- Birth children and their families
- Local authority and multi agencies
- Chrysalis Care staff and leadership team
- Independent Panel

By working along with the above stakeholders, we aim to deliver the following priorities:

- Parents, children, and young people will all be encouraged to participate equally in establishing a plan and deciding on desired results. Every attempt will be made to obtain their opinions in order to better understand the crucial role that families and parents play in fostering a child's growth.
- Children, young people and parents will play a key role in coproducing and developing services across health, education and social care – particularly those specifically for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Our Pledge to Children and Young People

Chrysalis Care pledges to ensure that all children and young people in our care have the right to be safe, happy and meet their full potential. We are committed to:

Safety

- Ensure a safe and homely place to live.
- Listen to children, particularly when they raise concerns about their safety or the quality of care they are receiving.
- Ensure that those people who care for children are trained and supported to keep them safe.
- Make sure children are prepared for the next stage of your life, including managing money, looking after their health and taking care of where they live.

Good education

- Make sure education needs are met.
- Celebrate educational achievements.
- Help those who care for children, have the right advice to support the education of the children and young people they are looking after.

Health and wellbeing

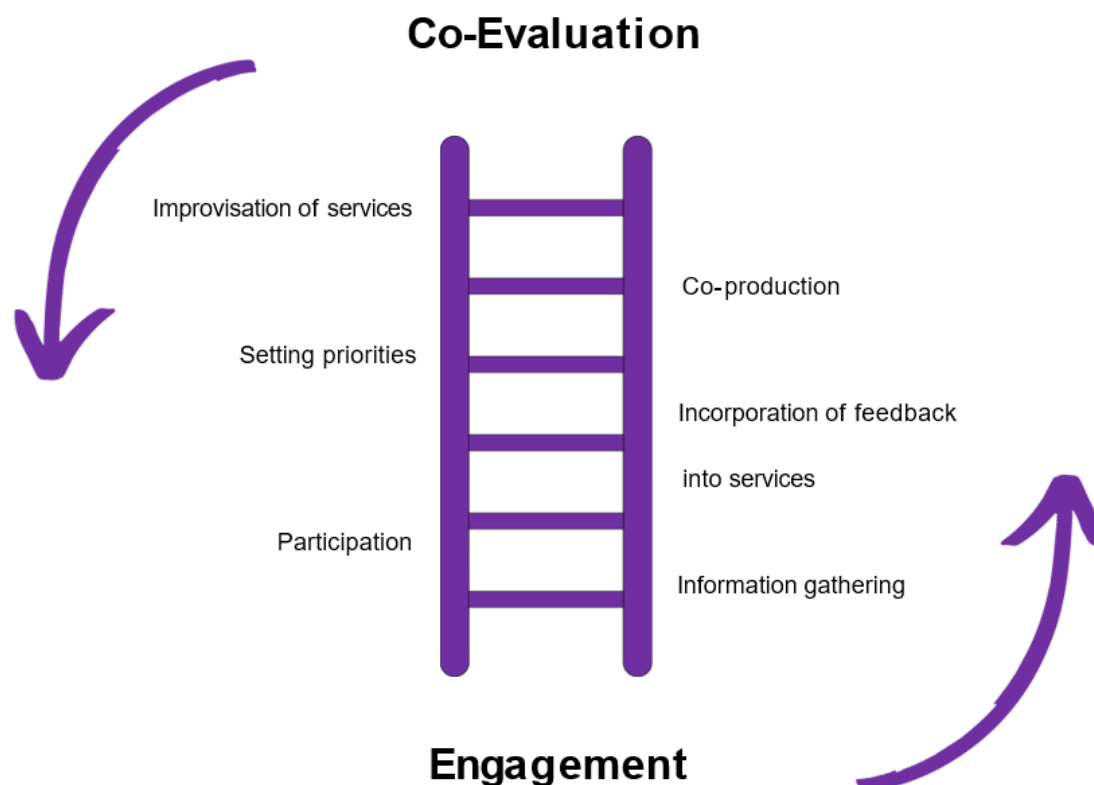
- Help to be physically and emotionally well.
- Support to take part in clubs and/or hobbies that interests them.
- Help to socialise with friends (as long as this is safe), building resiliencies through appropriate risk-taking.
- Support to take part in exercise and have fun.

Support your future

- Help you to take part in positive activities.
- Support you to undertake work experience.
- Help you to find employment, apprenticeship or to study further.
- Support you to take part in adventure when you reach 16.

Where do we want to be?

Through this participation and engagement strategy we aspire to enable foster carers, children & young people, service providers and other institutions to work together more effectively so that we get better experiences and outcomes for everyone involved. Taking inspiration from the Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969), which shows who has the power when important decisions are being made, we designed our participation and engagement approach.



Through this approach we aspire to encourage and enable participation at individual and institutional level to develop avenues for co-production and co-evaluation of services which subsequently leads to improvisation of services. The approach helps in identifying the gaps in service provision to help the stakeholders involved to improvise frequently and meet the needs of children and young people.

When service providers support and cultivate productive working relationships with the individuals who use their services, engagement and participation occur. A key component of establishing this relationship is effective communication, which also helps those who utilise the services feel involved in and affected by decisions that have an impact on their life.

We are very clear that this is not just about consultation or involvement but that the integration of co-design and co-creation activities is crucial for ethical, empowered and

strengths-based approaches to Social Work practice. This is reflected in a range of papers and articles, including those published in the BJSW, reminding us that co-production constitutes genuine involvement in shaping our services, where feasible.

Genuine collaboration or co-production results from effective engagement and participation. Co-production is the process through which commissioners, or individuals who plan and fund services on behalf of the general public, and service providers collaborate in a real partnership to deliver services that are efficient and improve the lives of people. Co-evaluation occurs when all parties involved in commissioning, providing, and receiving services work together to identify what aspects of a given service are working or not functioning, as well as any potential adjustments that may be made to make the service as good as it can be.

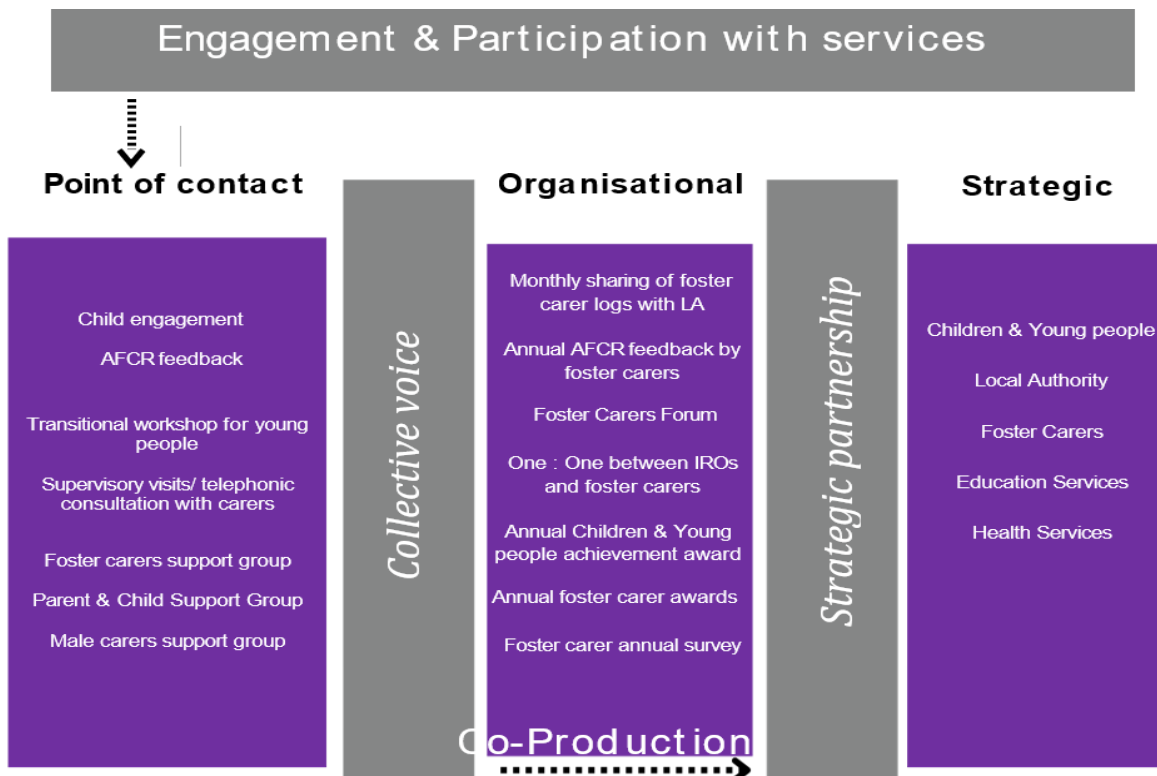
Key areas of legislation that support this approach are:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990 Children Act (1989, 2004)
- The Care Standards Act (2000)
- Fostering Regulations (2011)
- National Minimum Standards
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026)

We build on guidance from Social Care Institute for Excellence, in their 2025 guidance related to Co-Production and Social Care Wales' National Occupational Standard, which centres creativity and resourcefulness in communication, when engaging people in social work practice.

How Engagement and Participation Works

The model below illustrates how engagement & participation at Chrysalis Care functions with its stakeholders:



Child engagement refers to the requirement of every Supervising Social Worker to engage with our children and young people at least once in 3 months to gather their views around the care they are receiving, how things are going for them, what's working well, what's not, etc. Ongoing engagement is allocated to our Children's Services Department, vai Support Workers who meet with children, secure their views and at the point of Annual and LAC Review, encourage the completion of a child-centred form, which is also available in picture format. This is recorded on our system, CHARMS.

Annual Foster Carer Feedback form allows a platform for children and young people to share their views about their foster carers, their fostering household, their wishes, feelings, etc.

Transitional workshops for young people, sometimes commencing aged 11 years and through to Independence has been developed by our children's services, as a platform offering a series of sessions addressing different topics that are relevant to transition into independence such as, independent living skills, budgeting, trainings, resources available for care leavers, etc.

The recognition of children and young people's achievement throughout the year is organised in the form of Children's Achievement Awards. This encourages children and young people to engage in celebrating their achievements and thereby encourages motivation.

Carers are also invited to virtual and/or face to face support groups and forums (foster carers, male foster carers, single foster carer and Parent) offering support and a platform to share their views with us as an agency.

Foster Carer Forums are utilised to gather their views and taken forward for to improve the service.

The Best Practice Group takes place once a quarter, involving foster carer representatives. We share information with them about plans, future developments and also give them the opportunity to share what is working well and what could be done better.

Another platform where foster carers can share their views is their Annual Foster Carer Review. Within this forum, they have the opportunity to separately speak to the Independent Reviewing Officer and also provide written feedback.

The 'buddy foster carers' ensures carers become 'mentors' in different fields for other carers, providing a platform for learning through the skills and experiences of peers.

We work in partnership with local authorities and other agencies working as the 'Team Around the Child' to promote the wellbeing of all children and young people. Where possible, we encourage their feedback to improve our services at every level. We do this by:

- Requesting regular professional feedback so that a team around the child approach is strongly implemented. We recognise the vital role of each professional who is supporting the child in our care.
- Ensuring that the Local Authority social worker is contacted at least every six weeks and more regularly if necessary.
- Attending Local Authority working groups so that we are fully informed of the LA policies and procedures.
- Sharing of information within multi agencies to support and prevent problems arising which may impact on children's learning and achievements.

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