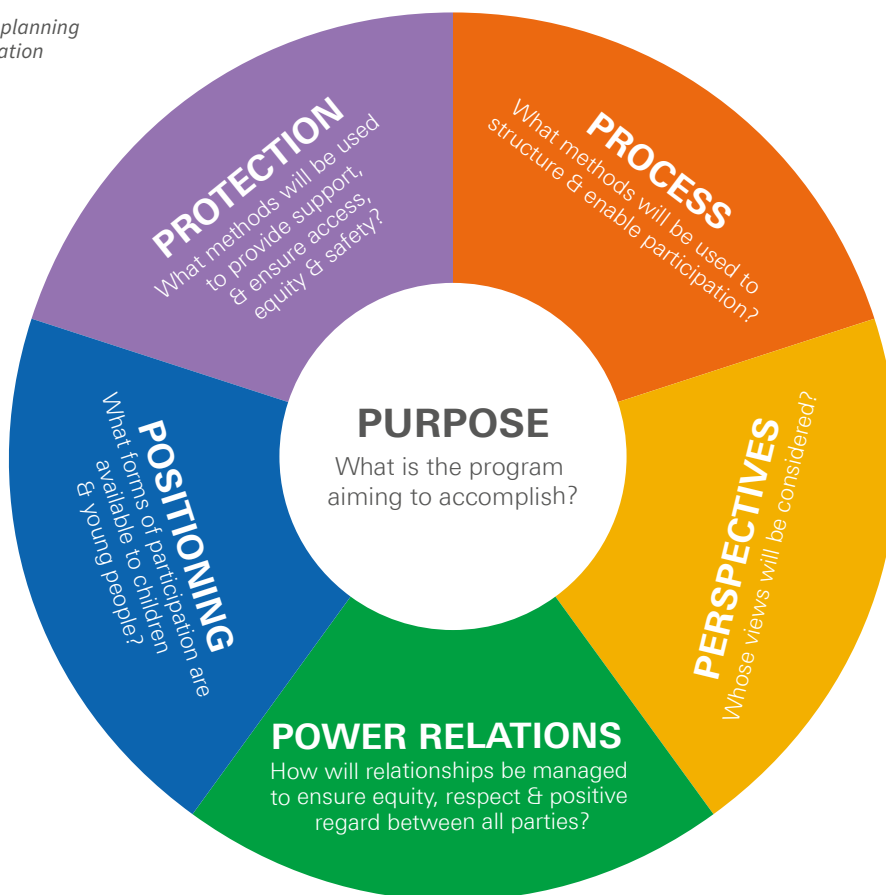


Figure 1. Framework for planning child and youth participation



Framework designed by: Professor Helen Cahill (2016)

PURPOSE – What was the program aiming to accomplish and to what extent did it achieve this?

PROCESS – What methods were used to structure and enable participation?

POSITIONING – How were the young people positioned, and what forms of participation were made available to the young people as a result of this positioning?

PROTECTION – What methods were used to provide support, and ensure access and safety?

PERSPECTIVES – Whose views were considered, and how were multiple perspectives invited?

POWER RELATIONS – How were relationships managed to ensure equity, respect and positive regard between all parties?

Introducing Y-Change

Y-Change emerged out of a process of exploration, consultation and learning over three years. This process was largely led by a group of three young people – Crystal, Damian and Lily - who came together with a shared passion for change in the systems that supported them and their peers at critical times in their lives.

Crystal, Damian and Lily met Berry Street's Senior Advisor for Youth Engagement Lauren Oliver at the 2012 *Connect for Improving Outcomes for Victoria's Young People* conference run by YACVic and the Department of Education, Employment and Training. Lauren ran the Youth stream in which Crystal, Damian and Lily (real names used with permission) were participating. A group of 10 emerged from the youth stream of the conference wanting to continue to work together to influence policy and practice. They formed a group that continued to be called Youth Stream and, although none of them were Berry Street clients, Lauren worked alongside them as a coordinator/guide. In the following year, the group met every one to two months to brainstorm ideas and come up with a plan. However they struggled to come together on a single, manageable idea. As a result the numbers fell to three, but this core group began to develop an idea for how to build the capacity of young people to do change-making work. During this process Lauren provided structure and guidance, and was mentored by Crystal, Lily and Damian on what young people really need and want out of a program that elevates their potential. Crystal, Lily and Damian became peer-mentors in the Y-Change pilot program.

The Y-Change pilot program was based on the recognition that young people who have particular experiences possess expertise because of their lived experiences of systems, practices and policies, and can make a valuable contribution to positive organisational and system change. Y-Change aimed to elevate the expertise of these young people (aged 16-25) so that it is recognised to be as valuable as the expertise of the professionals, bureaucrats and academics who currently define the systems that care for and support them.

Y-Change was a year-long social change and leadership initiative with two interconnected components: training and employment.

Target group

Y-Change is targeted at young people aged 16-25 who have been in contact with the out of home care system and/or have experience of disadvantage. Applicants were required to be a current or ex-client of Berry Street, Mirabel Foundation, Education First Youth Foyer or Youth Substance Abuse Service.

Potential participants were invited to apply to participate via contact with Berry Street and a range of other organisations who work with young people who have experienced disadvantage. Applicants underwent a full application and interview process intended to mirror traditional employment processes. The position description described the following as the key selection criteria and the young people were chosen based on these:

- Be able to independently manage things like travel and getting to places on time;
- Be ready to step up and be heard;
- Be ready and able to take on a challenge;
- Be interested in learning new skills;
- Have the capacity to do some class-based learning.

The total capacity of the pilot program, in order to be able to provide opportunities to all the young people involved, was 15. The program received 14 applications, 11 recruited to training and 7 went through to employment. Recruitment was in November and December 2015, Orientation camp was in January 2016, training ran from February to May 2016 and employment began in May the same year.

Two applicants were not successful at the interview stage. The English of one of the applicants was not high enough for her to fully engage in the whole program and the other opted out after the first interview. Four young people were recruited to the training but did not make the step from training to employment. Of these four, three were unable to commit to the training schedule and ended up missing all sessions, or so many that they did not qualify (there was a 75% attendance requirement), and a fourth self-selected out for several reasons, including disinterest in the subject matter and dyslexia that made it hard for him to engage with some of the materials (according to the program manager).