



Voluntary Organisations for Children  
young people & families

# Young people consultation: Feedback forms Sept - Nov 2010



We are a network of voluntary and community organisations who work with children, young people and families in Bedfordshire.

Our mission is to champion the voluntary and community sector.

Our aims are

- To be an open forum for member organisations to disseminate important and relevant information to member agencies
- To advocate on behalf of and for the benefit of our member organisations at meetings
- To encourage positive working relationships between the statutory and voluntary and community sector
- To support voluntary and community sector agencies to deliver on the five Every Child Matters outcomes
- To offer a support network, enabling links to be made with other agencies within the same field.

The role of the Youth Officer is

- To represent and voice the views of the Voluntary and Community sector working with young people and families
- To work with youth organisations who deliver services to young people
- To support the youth Voluntary and Community sector and improve the communication and liaison between Voluntary and Community sector organisations.

The post is funded by Bedford Borough Council (Integrated Youth Support) and is part of the Engagement & Development team. The post holder is managed by the VOCypf Strategy Group and hosted by Community Voluntary Service (Mid and North Beds)

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## Purpose

The overall purpose of the consultation was to find out what would encourage young people to fill out feedback forms.

Views were collected from young people on the feedback forms currently used by four voluntary sector organisations which provide counselling or other support to young people. These forms were aimed to get feedback from young people so that improvements could be made to each service if necessary. However the forms are not always completed or completed fully - the problem may be with the form itself.

The aim therefore of the consultation was to get ideas from young people on what would encourage them to complete these forms.

These ideas would then be fed back to each organisation to enable them to take them into account when redesigning their form. The feedback would also be available in the form of general tips to the wider youth voluntary sector.



## Methodology

Invitations to participate in the consultation were extended to the VOCypf counselling collective. The following signed up and supplied a copy of their current feedback form:

- o Plan B (CAN)
- o Bedford Open Door
- o Youth in MIND
- o Safe Space (Energise)

The Youth Officer ran three sessions: at the September Youth Cabinet session (preceded by consultation around the Targeted Mental Health training programme), at the Bedford Foyer and at Youth Matters. A fourth session with Get Set Go was abandoned due to low numbers. The young people attending did not have to have personal knowledge of the services provided by the organisations.

They were encouraged to think about the type of questions that they would ask if they were the organisation and what methods they would use to get the feedback from a young person who used the service.

They were then asked in small groups to consider each of the forms and to identify things they liked (green), things they didn't (red) and things they didn't understand (black). They wrote directly on to the forms which had been enlarged for this purpose.

At the end, all participants were thanked and given an information sheet about keeping healthy emotionally and contact details of support organisations.

**Thank You!**

## Results

In total 16 young people took part in the consultation ranging from 12 to 18 years old.

### Key general points

- **Overall impression:** none of the forms really appealed to young people as their style was seen to be very formal. The use of colour, pictures and an informal font would help. The shorter the better, especially if not much writing is expected.
  - **Introduction section:** all felt that these were too long and wouldn't be read anyway. It's best to explain face to face. Just say "Please fill in our survey".
  - **Personal details section:** most did not feel that your name should have to be given as this would prevent honest feedback. Some thought that profile data was the right thing to collect but others felt that if you do record the name, then you would be able to get this from your files so "stop being so inna!" There was no understanding of why location or postcode was needed.
  - **Language style:** again, this was felt to be too formal and lots of alternatives were suggested
    - Instead of "courteous" > "respectful", "polite"
    - Instead of "confidential" > "private"
    - Instead of "facilities" list what you mean
    - Suggest "How would you describe your time with us?"
- Some questions were felt to be difficult to answer:
- Instead of "professional", explain what standards you expect
  - Choice of words to circle or rate need to be neutral even if you have the option to disagree
  - Open questions such as "What has it helped you to achieve?" might be easier rephrased as a closed question instead with space to expand "Did you achieve what you set out to?" Also, "How" and "Why" questions might be problematic.
- **Purpose of the feedback form:** in some cases it appeared that the form was not so much to capture feedback on the service itself but on the outcomes for the individual. This causes confusion and needs to be kept as a separate exercise.
  - **Method:** there was a complete range of preference for circling words, ticking boxes, using a 1-10 scale rating and/or having free space. Some people felt that one method should be used consistently on one form and others that a variety should be used. There should be an option that includes "None of the above" on some questions





- **Scales need to mean something.** “Satisfactory” ratings are not engaging for young people (replace “Very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied” with “Really good, good, bad and really bad”)

- **Suggested questions:**

- How did you hear about us?
- How do you feel about this service?
- Would you recommend us to a friend?
- Did you find it easy to talk to us?
- Was it helpful?
- How did we help you?
- What do you think of the staff working here?
- What do you think of the organisation?
- What did you gain from us?
- Is there anything you think we could have done better

Most of these questions are open which as explained above, might still prove difficult.

The use of text messaging was suggested, but only for a limited number of questions as asking loads, e.g. more than 15, was felt to be “hassling” and likely to be counter-productive.

## Next steps

The results have been passed back to each individual organisation and the general points will be highlighted to the wider youth voluntary sector via the VOCypf network and Practitioners Network 025. The participating organisations have already started talking consulting further with young people on changes to their form.

In general, there were some clear messages from young people that indicate that they should be involved in the design of any materials like this that are aimed at drawing out their views. Most of the changes that the young people in this consultation suggest do not require additional expenditure. Alternative methods are worth exploring.

Some services for example those that provide a counselling service may find it difficult to directly engage young people in their service. They may want to get in touch with services such as Link Vice Versa, a group of young people who will advise organisations on making their service more youth-friendly. For details, please contact the VOC office.

# TOP TIPS FEEDBACK FORMS

Advice from young people consultation Sept - Nov 2010  
Contact VOCypf office for full consultation report



## DO...

Talk to young people for their ideas - you may end up with a form that is better for adults too

Spend time and imagination to design the form

Use colour and strong images to warm up the form - use coloured paper to save money on colour printing

Use a friendly font and everyday interesting words

Only ask questions if you can act on the feedback

Make your questions neutral, not leading

Be careful with open questions - it can be hard to know where to start your answer

Keep everything short - lots of writing or space for writing answers is off putting

Keep tick boxes to no more than 15 - more than this encourages casual answers

Consider whether to mix tick boxes with words to circle and ratings



## DON'T...

Churn out the same form you've been using for ages

Use the standard form that you give to adults

Be too formal and use a plain boring style

Use a formal corporate font

Use specialist language or jargon

Be patronising and use fonts or images that are too childish

Be patronising and try to be too "down with the kids"...

Leave loads of space for people to use their own words - they won't know where to start...

Ask questions that you can't do anything about anyway

Ask questions that give you a meaningless answer or rating

Forget to pilot the form with young people to see if it works