

## Young Hackney- Youth Voice and Participation

'Youth voice' and 'Youth Participation' has been a growing movement in a number of sectors for a long time. Underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to all young people aged 17 and under. Which gives children and young people a set of comprehensive civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It includes specific rights to guarantee children's participation in all matters affecting them.

In Hackney we have absorbed and localized these principles into the Hackney Youth Charter. A set of eight principles which provides local organisations with a good practice guide for the involvement of children and young people. These principles were originally set by young people and are regularly reviewed by groups of young people see Appendix 1.

There are many groups facilitated by Young Hackney and the voluntary sector which provide young people an opportunity to be involved in matters affecting them(us) - Hackney Youth Parliament (HYP), Young Futures Commission, Hackney Wick Through Young Eyes, Account and the Entity, are a few examples. The formation of these groups can vary from formal groups with elected members to groups formed around projects or particular issues.

### **Hackney Youth Parliament:**

Elections for Hackney Youth Parliament take place every two years in October, the next elections are scheduled for October 2020. The majority of the current Youth Parliament were elected in 2018, however we have since recruited some honorary members due to elected members leaving to attend university. Currently HYP consists of twenty two members aged 12 - 22, representing Eight of the Secondary Schools and Seven of the wards.

In order to become a HYP member candidates are required to prepare a manifesto and present at hustings. They are then elected by their peers through a formal voting process with over 11,000 votes being cast at the last election by young people.

During a weekend residential in August 2019 HYP young people reviewed their manifestos and produced four promises which will be integral to their work in the year ahead.

1. We promise to support our peers in making Hackney greener, starting by assessing evaluating our youth hubs.
2. We promise to increase young people's awareness on opportunities within Hackney
3. We promise to project and represent the voice of young people in Hackney, through everything we do.
4. We promise to support and guide our next youth parliament.

Hackney Youth Parliament is an opportunity for young people to engage and commit to a long term project that will develop skills and knowledge. Whilst making a positive change in

the borough that we love. During the lifetime of the project young people develop their critical thinking skills, learn about local/national politics and social action. In order to develop and deliver campaigns where we can influence or challenge. The HYP group meets each week at Hackney Town Hall and is currently working on an eco project which will challenge youth provision in the borough to become more environmentally friendly. Whilst through our peer influence encouraging young people to be aware of what they can do to support this cause. **Please see Appendix 2 for the project outline.**

Once elected HYP Members are given the opportunity to represent local young peoples' voices locally through council based consultations and attending CYPS Scrutiny Board meetings. HYP Members also have the opportunity to engage on a national level. Through being internally elected to positions on the British Youth Council and London Youth Assembly. This includes the annual Make Your Mark Ballot which culminates in a debate in the House of Commons. The outcome of this debate dictates the future campaigns for the British Youth Council to lead on.

The Youth Opportunity fund is part of Hackney Youth Parliaments remit; awarding up to £5000 for projects that young people devise and lead on throughout the borough. These grants have included projects as diverse as alternative sports tournaments, cultural days out, healthy cooking sessions, and residential overseas.

HYP is regularly asked to take part in LBH consultations. Whilst it is nice to be asked, and helpful to be aware of service developments, HYP is not always the most appropriate group to consult with; for example, consultations that are borough area specific. We are hoping to rectify this with the introduction of 'Friends of HYP', an extensive network of young people and groups which we can sign post consultation opportunities to. This will only be possible if the LBH departments who are looking for consultation develop this with Young People in mind, rather than coming to us as an afterthought. One idea would be to invite LBH departments to the beginning of the Youth Parliament term so they can 'pitch' the project(s) that will require youth consultation within the next 12 - 18 months. This way HYP can effectively filter, signpost and support other groups to engage - this links directly with our promises.

HYP usually undertake an annual survey to gain the views of other young people. This year it was agreed that the survey would not take place due to the work of the Young Futures Commission, as this would potentially duplicate work. Our expectation is that HYP will be involved in driving forward the recommendations of the Commission.

### **Recruitment in Young Hackney and wider CFS:**

As part of Children and Families Service (CFS) participation work we ask young people to take part in the recruitment process of new staff who apply for positions working directly with young people. Young people also offer the opportunity for applicants the experience of visiting our youth hubs as part of this process before they are selected for an interview.

Young people devise questions to ask candidates at interview panels led by young people and feedback to the adult panel their recommendations. We are hoping these panels will be expanded to cover all departments across CFS.

## **The Entity and YH Forums:**

### **The Entity**

The Entity consists of a group of young people from across Hackney initially brought together as part of a 'critical conversations' consultation event. This consultation took place in March/April 2018 to capture the voices of young people across five main themes: Racism, Safety, Crime and Policing, Education, Young people's services and any other subject young people wanted to discuss.

The young people who engaged in these conversations expressed their lived experiences of being let down, silenced and often ignored by adults generally and often decision makers. The Entity was birthed out of the need to give young people centre stage to engage in issues that were key to them.

This group provides a space for young people to achieve two main goals.

(i) Empowered to make a difference for their community. The group has autonomy to influence change for other young people. The group through training are able to put forward an alternative voice in the discourse of youth participation, involvement, group work delivery and to offer themselves as a viable alternative for organisations wishing to capture youth voices.

(ii) Developing and working on individual personal goals within the context of the group. These range from improving wellbeing, creating friendships and building on social skills.

This youth-led group has been successful because of the genuine relationships informally established. Young people invest their time, take the risk to trust and share their narratives. This has resulted in the group holding powerful evenings which professionals have reported was informative and allowed them to reflect on their practice and the needs of young people.

### **Young Hackney Youth forums**

The youth forums are for young people aged 12- 19 (and up to 25 for young people with additional needs) who live in the Borough of Hackney and attend the Young Hackney hubs. The forums take place fortnightly and support young people to develop and share their ideas with Young Hackney about the hubs. Here, young people learn how to make decisions and play an active role in how the hubs are run.

The youth forums provide opportunities for young people in Hackney to debate, inform and actively participate in the development and improvement of services for young people.

Forums are divided into local areas, North and South Hackney. These forums provide a range of activities for young people in the borough, empowering them to contribute to

developments in their area. Project proposals to improve the community in the area are developed within each forum.

There are a range of benefits to these forums including introducing them to new young people, developing and building on skills, allowing them to build up their confidence, learn how to present, chair meetings, take notes and work effectively as members of a team.

### **Appendices**

1. Youth Charter
2. HYP Eco Project Overview

### The Hackney Youth Charter

The Hackney Youth Charter has been developed by young people to support the active involvement of children and young people in decision making. The charter outlines young people's expectations, and provides organisations with a good practice guide for the involvement of children and young people.

The Hackney Youth Charter reflects rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC grants all children and young people a universal set of rights to ensure that they have a safe, happy and fulfilled childhood regardless of their sex, religion, ethnicity, social or geographical origin. It underpins and enforces the duty of all organisations working with and for young people to involve them and listen to them when planning any services which affect their or their families' lives.

### The Hackney Youth Charter

1. We have the right to be involved and have a say in planning projects and services which affect us, our families, communities and the environment in a real and meaningful way.
2. We are all different and all equal and our participation matters. We want and need to be involved in ways which work for all of us and that take account of our different life circumstances for example those of us who identify ourselves as young carers or disabled.
3. We can expect organisations to respect, encourage and facilitate our involvement. They should work with us to decide how this happens. They should also link us to other organisations in the community to work with us. If we cannot be involved, we need to be told why.
4. We need good standards of training and support to become confident at expressing our own ideas and needs, and to be able to find out what issues are important to other young people in Hackney.
5. When we get involved in projects and services, adults need to invest time in developing trusting relationships with us by treating us with maturity and respect. They should communicate clearly from the beginning about what is expected of us, what we will get out of our involvement, and what we can realistically expect to achieve.
6. Our involvement should not be limited to the planning stage. We should be involved as much as possible including by having a say over budgets, and by being supported to participate in the inspection of services and projects to make sure that they meet the needs of the diverse group of young people in Hackney.
7. Every year services and projects should report to young people how they are involving children and young people as active participants.
8. Most young people get actively involved because they want to make Hackney a better place. For those of us who don't actively participate, services should continue

to make every effort to seek our views and encourage our participation in ways that reach us too.

### **Hackney Youth Parliament Promise to Support Our Peers to Make Hackney Greener**

At HYP we have noticed an increasing emphasis on tackling the global crisis. This fight has been spearheaded by young people like Greta Thunberg. We thought long and hard during our Youth Parliament meetings to come up with what we believe is an impactful project.

We were fortunate enough to have had visits from Vasant Chari - Head of Policy Lab who encouraged us to think simultaneously about the experiences of the individual as well as the larger impact. Through this we were able to identify the spaces where we could make the greatest impact.

We also invited both The Greens Schools Project and ecoACTIVE. This helped us recognise that the greatest impact we can make is increasing awareness of environmental issues with our peers.

Our project will see us visit 10 Youth Hub/clubs across Hackney, engaging mainly with the Junior age range 8 -12. We will give a short presentation which covers Air Pollution, Wildlife and Food Waste. Explaining simply “Why we should care?” and more importantly “What we can do?” We will then evaluate not only how Eco friendly the youth hub but also how aware the young people are. The assessment has been split into 5 categories which spell out the word RENEW.

1. REUSE, RECYCLE, REFUSE, REDUCE & REPAIR
2. ENERGY
3. NATURE
4. ECO FRIENDLY
5. WHY?

Each category has 5 criteria and if the hub is able to demonstrate at least 3 of these they will be awarded the corresponding letter. This is done to encourage the Hub to work towards obtaining the full award. We will revisit the youth hub a minimum of 4 weeks to see if they have made any improvements. The Youth Hub to make the biggest improvements will be announced at the 2019 Youth Awards! Youth Hubs who need longer to achieve the full award they can do so via email and post.