



Young survivors want action to improve journeys through the justice system

1. Adults in the justice system need to make it easier for children and young people to say what they think and to take this seriously when making decisions about children's lives
2. Make sure children and young people have their own worker straight away who knows about children's rights and the justice system, can listen to them and help them give their views
3. Give children and young people clearer, easy to understand information about what, why and when something is happening – at every step of their journey through the justice system
4. Courts and police need to make children and young people feel more welcome, at ease, comfortable and safe. Children need choice and control over contact.
5. Adults working in justice (e.g. sheriffs, solicitors, police) need training on gender-based violence, children's rights and how to listen to children/young people

“Get young people involved who have experienced abuse, get a group together to help people in power.”



Educate, campaign, reassure children that it's OK to report abuse; you will be believed, listened to and supported.

Agencies to listen to and believe children and young people, whatever their age, especially school teachers and police, to recognise signs

Agencies reassure people they will receive a helpful response

CYP learn more about how to report abuse at school, especially young children, more info about rights from justice people

Address fear of sharing their story, too quickly and with the wrong people 'call the parents'

Reassure CYP about what will happen next, immediate and ongoing support



Children and young people want action on gender inequality & societal attitudes

1. Homes and families should be places where girls and boys are equal and LGBT children and young people are empowered and supported
2. The media should show women's achievements and should not promote gender stereotypes or sexualise women and girls
3. Women and men should be able to do any kind of work and should get equal pay. They should be treated equally at work and childcare should be shared
4. There should be equal opportunity for young people from all backgrounds to get involved in politics and have an influence
5. There should be equal representation of women from all backgrounds in politics

“Young people should be included in conversations regarding gender inequality more regularly.”



Children and young people want action to increase their participation in making change

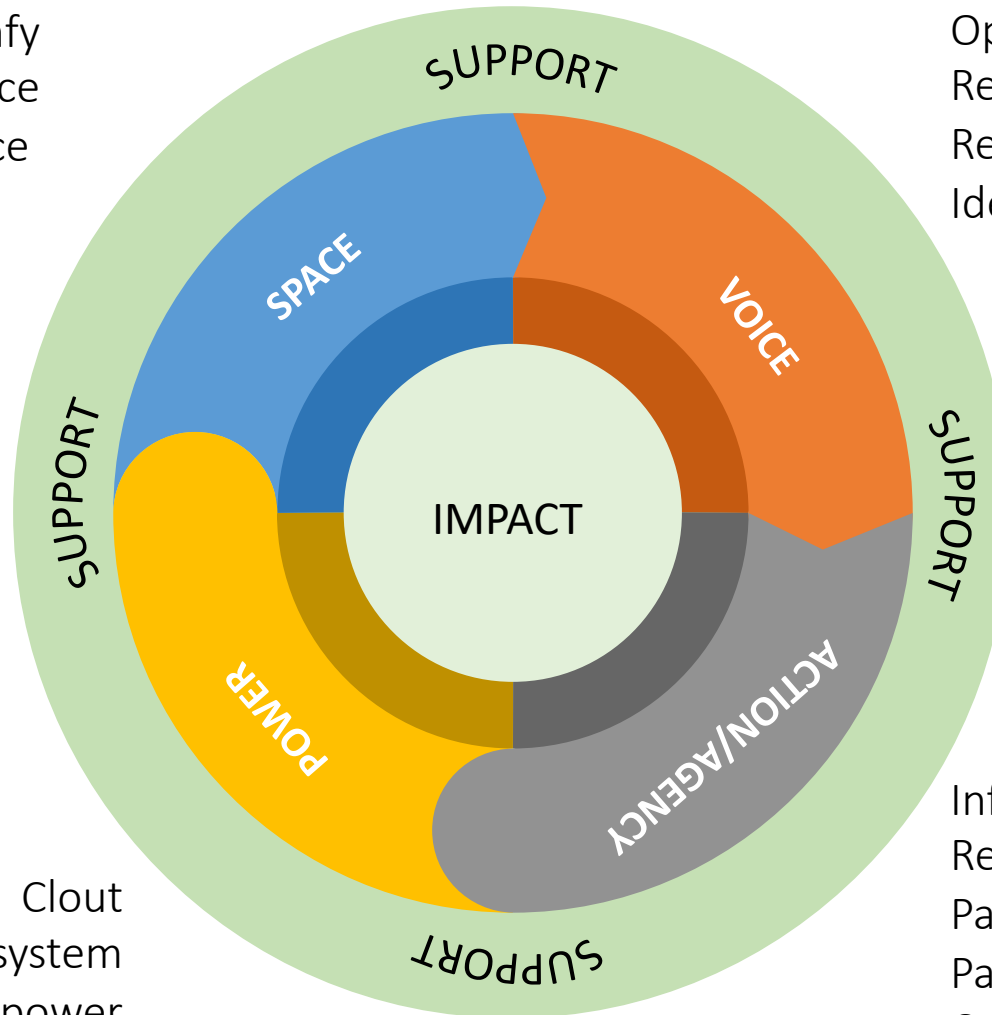
1. Involve children and young people in every action, review, research and evaluation that affects our lives
2. Make sure young survivors can participate in improving all services
3. Set up a national youth commission on gender equality
4. Set up a national young survivors group to advise on justice
5. Develop an online resource with and for children and young people on the issues we have raised about gender equality and gender based violence: support, information, rights; peer education and social media campaigns

**“Involve children and young people in making Scotland equal & safe
– listen and act on our priorities, include us in taking them forward.”**

Participation Framework

Survivors'/children's space for action with support
1:1, anonymous...
Safe, inclusive, comfy
Collective space
Decision-making/Political space

Options/choices
Respected/experts
Representation/ Mandate
Ideas/solutions



Influence
Recognise agency
Part of decision-making/prioritising
Part of action/evaluating action
Co-produce models/policy

Clout
Status within system
Direct, regular, access to people with power
Part of governance
Hold decision-makers to account

(Building on Lundy 2007 & Houghton 2018)

Space in policy-making

Safe, comfy space

Anonymous options

Creative methods and spaces:

Individual

collective

political

Inclusive: All genders, abilities, ethnicities, minoritised groups, sexualities,...

Creating & claiming political space/decision-making arenas



Competence of adult policy-makers and politicians

Gatekeepers (re-traumatisation argument & fears of disclosure)

Allies and insiders

Scaffold of support/'band manager'

Opening spaces for others

Voice in policy-making

Being a child -> **expertise as child, as an individual**

- Incompetent 'just a wee kid' -> competence
- > options choices as to how to participate

Being a 'victim' – **respected as expert**

- Doomed/pitied or invisible
- -> **expert in own lives**
- -> **collective expertise in priorities for action**

Prerequisites for group

- support, previous participation sometimes
- equal voice, diverse voices

Focus on ideas/solutions – not their personal stories but informed by them

- Insider knowledge and allies helps



Collective Voice

- Build mandate, need spaces
- can't 'represent' but can have equal status to e.g. adult boards
- Action research with others to provide evidence/currency
- 'A voice' promoting others/unheard groups
- Opening spaces for other voices (including those not able to be present)

Agency

“We are not here just to make it real”

“Adults see us as people with problems, not problem solvers; we’ve got ideas, solutions”

Active & equal participation in national priority decisions “don’t just nod and be nice”

Work with adults on CYP-defined priorities – distinct contribution

Co-production of solutions

Co-production of policy

Active part in evaluating progress

“We’re about actually changing things”

- Online national advertising campaign & a new web resource



- Spend to save dialogue -> multi-million fund to expand support and advocacy
- KE event on absence of CYP DA legislation -> Aggravator
- Work with Police and Prosecutors to amend protocol **COPFS/Police Scotland protocol** updated with CYP “Every effort will be made by attending officers to see and speak with children who are present at a Domestic abuse incident to confirm they are unharmed and to support and safeguard their wellbeing. Attending officers will also carry out an interview with them to establish the facts surrounding the Incident”

Power

Direct , regular, sustained access to Power
(hard to achieve??)

Enabling other CYP to access power

Critical friendship with politicians key

Youth led meetings at key times of influence
(policy development, priority/ budget setting)

Meeting with [D First Minister at] budget time

Status within system & governance of policy

- Status and direct access to civil servants/ legislators
- Working relationships with national leads of agencies = allies
- Respected, given time, legitimises inclusion



We fought for a role as political actors
Not just input as advisors
We had a role in political meetings, a purpose, brought evidence
So we could ask them what have you done?

They were accountable to us

It was two way

If you want a seat at the table you've got to bring something (Karen)

They just sat across from us whilst we told our stories and cried (Julia)

Space, Voice, Agency, Power, **IMPACT**



- Influencing political systems/status of children
- Improving children's lives
- Educating adults to respond better
- Changing societal attitudes
- Promoting young people's participation

“Support was a stepping stone, participation a bridge to a new life” (Lola)

VAV standards for participation, the film, their advert
<https://www.voiceagainstviolence.org.uk/category/resources/>

'Towards a Participatory Ethics' (Houghton 2015)

Support – participation in policy as part of the therapeutic process

'I'm still in disbelief that something so dark and supposedly crippling has become a spark of something that's the best thing I've ever done in my life' *Lola*

'I didn't have a lot of confidence it's been really self-affirming' *Declan*

'It's taught me I am a capable young person, I can really do things' *Raya*

'What we do is turn our past into experience and I now see it (DA) in a different way' *Chloe*

'Domestic abuse no longer defines me' *Karen*

'I can be me' *Marc*

'It's inspired me to make change, to fight for what you believe and be accepting of others' *Jack*

'Young people need to make the world a better place to live in' *John*



The Road is Long...

ongoing contestations

Prompting and re-prompting needed
Visibility, Rights and Participation fragile
Political investment/will, policy competence fluctuates
Investment in support organisations crucial
Framing to include human rights of women *and* children
Children's democratic participation key to ending Gender Based Violence and achieving gender intersectional equality

**Intergenerational
collaboration and spaces**

critical actors

CYP in a sustained role with status in policy-making governance and process
CYP Champions_within Cabinet (politicians) and Government Departments (civil servants)
Adults experts at the policy-making table: quota focused on CYP needed
Strong alliances and shared understanding between feminist and children's rights organisation
Intersectional approaches and actors

**Participatory Action research
with young survivors and
those with power**



Houghton, C., Mazur, J., Kansour-Sincalir, L. and Tisdall, E.Kay.M (2023) Being a young political actor: Reflections from the frontline of transformative participation

Houghton, C. (2018) 'Voice, Agency, Power: A Framework for Young Survivor's Participation in National Policy- Making' In Holt, S, Overlien, C. and Devaney, J. (Eds) *Responding to Domestic Violence. Emerging Challenges for policy, practice and research in Europe*. London: JKP.

Houghton, C. (2015) 'Young People's Perspectives on Participatory Ethics: Agency, Power and Impact in domestic abuse research and policy-making' *Child Abuse Review* 24, 235-248.

Thanks to all the young people and organisations that informed this presentation

<https://www.voiceagainstviolence.org.uk/>

<https://everydayheroes.sps.ed.ac.uk/>

Domestic Abuse Court Experiences: the perspectives of victims & witnesses in Scotland.

