

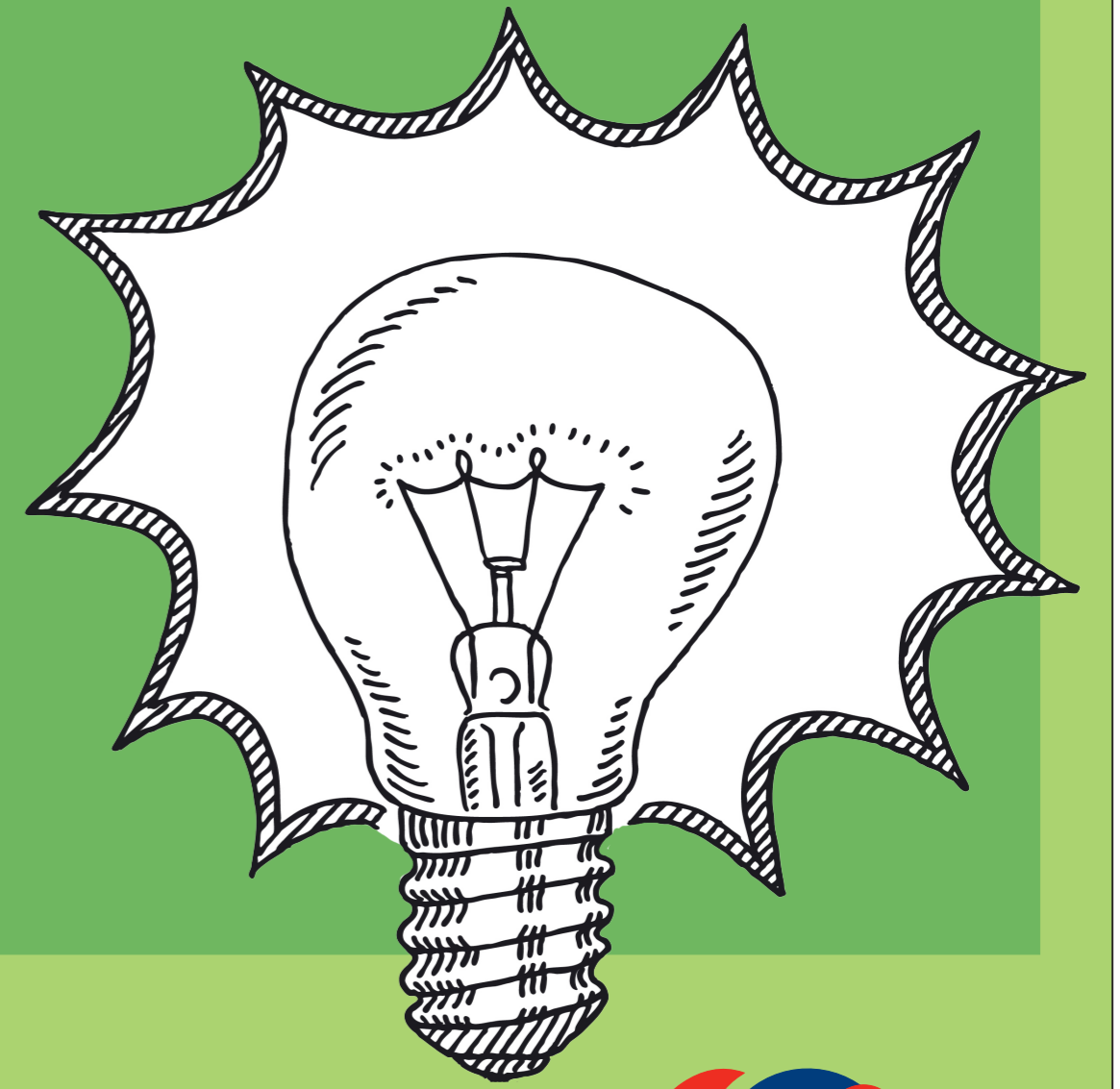
Young Edinburgh Action

Authors/team:

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effectively use research to improve the situation for children or families or to address issues in personal relationships

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centre for research on families and relationships

What research was used? Why was it appropriate?

Young Edinburgh Action draws upon research suggesting that a move away from formalised participation structures towards opening up spaces for inquiry, dialogue and action can enable young people's meaningful participation and active citizenship (Percy-Smith, 2010).

Young people's action research groups are at the heart of the Edinburgh Young People's Participation Strategy. The **action research groups** enable a core group of young people to access and present the views of a wider group of young people in Edinburgh. Action research groups focus on topics prioritised by young people at an annual open event. They are open to any young people who are interested in the specific topic and are usually made up of between 6 and 15 young people.

The way that the group operates is flexible, depending upon the topic and the participants, but each action research group will:

- **Think** about the topic and what it means for young people in Edinburgh
- **Investigate** the current situation around this topic and find out the views of other young people in Edinburgh
- **Make recommendations** to the people who make decisions about this topic
- **Create a resource** for example a poster, a video, a piece of drama or art, a song or a blog) to share what the group learns and their recommendations.

How did you get people interested in the research?

From the beginning of each action research process the group of young people discuss the impact that they hope to create. A 'Conversation for Action' is convened at the end of each action research process.

- The 'Conversation for Action' is an important interface where young people and adult decision-makers invited by the young people, come together to discuss the topic and develop an action plan.
- The agenda for the conversation is set by young people and the meeting is chaired by the senior worker in the Young People's Participation Team.
- Young people present their learning, ideas and recommendations in order to facilitate meaningful dialogue between young people and relevant policy makers and senior officers.
- The minutes of the meeting take the form of a list of action points assigned to specific adults and young people.

Many of these action points relate to young people sharing their findings with a wider group of relevant professionals. For example, young people who completed research focusing on sex education shared their findings at meetings for Depute Head Teachers, at a conference on Digital Safety and to RSHP practitioners. Follow up meetings ensure that professionals and young people are held accountable for completing their agreed actions.

Young Edinburgh Action is currently developing a partnership with CRFR to explore how best to share learning from the model and from individual action research groups with wider audiences. We are currently developing a film resource looking at young people's experiences of being involved with Young Edinburgh Action and of being a young researcher. The young researchers will present this work at the CRFR International Conference in June 2016 and the NCRM Conference in Bath in July 2016.

Who benefitted from the research?

At each YEA Conversation for Action young people and adult decision makers come together to make an action plan for service improvement related to a specific topic identified and researched by young people. Successful action points have included for example; the development of a new post supporting Relationship and Sexual Health education in schools, development of new resources, young people's input into staff training, a review of mental health services for young people in Edinburgh. An impact of the process is that senior officers responsible for the delivery of services hear directly from young people regarding 'live' issues relevant to them as citizens and service users.

The final outcomes are service improvement for all young people in Edinburgh at a local and city wide level and individual learning and development for the young people involved in the team.

The specific benefits for young people who are voluntarily involved in the project are best expressed in their own words:

"The reason I joined is mainly because it was so interesting, the first time I came I learnt so much! I also saw it as a good thing for my CV. The reason I stayed however was undoubtedly because of the people, the amazing staff... as well as the friends I have made over the years. YEA allows me to make decisions with other people my age and it gives me the ability to get my voice heard...I feel as though I have other people backing me up."

(YEA participant, aged 15)

How did you evaluate the impact?

- As outlined above, each Conversation for Action is minuted in the form of an action plan which is reviewed in subsequent meetings. This provides a level of accountability and makes it possible to monitor the impact of individual action research groups.
- In a Contribution Analysis workshop with Dr Sarah Morton and Prof Kay Tisdall, young people and staff developed a "results chain" for the model which we are now using to focus and structure our ongoing self-evaluation.
- The short film that is currently being developed will provide valuable evidence from young people's perspectives about their experiences with YEA.

What did the team learn from the project?

The project is ongoing and the team of staff and young people are continually learning from each other and from the research that we carry out. This learning includes (but is not limited to):

- How to identify research topics and research questions
- Different ways to do research to try to make sure that young people's views are represented
- Different ways that young people can be involved at all stages of the research process
- Findings from the action research groups which have covered topics including bullying, better sex education, gender inequality, votes at 16, poverty and inequality, and mental health support in schools
- How to effectively communicate those findings to decision makers and establish action plans that address the recommendations of the group
- That relationships are key and need nurturing – to give time to build relationship within and between groups of young people and adults
- That impact occurs when there is a commitment from all different stakeholders to take young people's views seriously and to affect change. Working towards this has involved integrating Young Edinburgh Action into City of Edinburgh Council structures and identifying "champions" at all levels who support the work of the team.

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