

Listen Better

Strengthening Care-Experienced Youth Voice across Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester already has strong foundations for care-experienced youth voice. Across the city region, children in care and care leavers are giving their time, insight and experience to improve the systems around them. Professionals are creating spaces where young people can speak, be heard and influence change.

However, this mapping highlights an uneven picture across Greater Manchester. Good practice exists, but it is not consistently connected or shared. Feedback loops are not always clear, and a reliance on a small number of young people can place pressure on them to represent the experiences of others, while many voices remain unheard. Care leaver participation in particular varies noticeably and is often dependent on stretched staff capacity and resources.

This report does not say Greater Manchester is not listening. It says we can listen better.

Greater Manchester in Numbers

10

localities
included

15

practitioner
interviews

16

young people
survey responses

All 10

boroughs have
groups for
children
in care

93%

of practitioners said
participation is not
very well connected
across GM

85%

of practitioners say
recruitment of
young people is a
challenge

69%

of young people
wanted better
feedback

81%

of young people
wanted cross-
borough
connection

The Core Message:

The next step is to connect local work, widen who is heard, strengthen feedback, and make sure young people can see what changes because they took part.

What We Found

Children in care participation is more established

Children in care participation across Greater Manchester is generally more stable, regular and well established, whereas care leaver participation is more varied and often needs to fit around housing, employment, education, finances, parenting, mental health and other significant life pressures. As a result, opportunities for care leavers should be flexible, relationship-based and responsive to the realities of adult life.

The system needs to move from consultation to influence

Only 20% of practitioners reported that young people were consistently involved in co-producing work. Participation is often influenced by organisational priorities, with young people not always involved early enough in shaping agendas and decisions. Meaningful participation is most effective when young people are involved from the outset and supported throughout the process.

Feedback loops are still too weak

While most local authorities have established routes for young people to influence decision-makers, the findings suggest that feedback is not always clear or consistent. Young people need stronger feedback loops so that they can understand how their views have (or haven't) influenced decisions and why.

Strong local work exists, but it is not connected enough

Practitioners and young people highlighted the need for stronger regional collaboration across Greater Manchester. While examples of effective participation practice exist locally, opportunities to share learning, resources and experiences across boroughs remain limited. Young people expressed a desire to connect with peers from other areas, while practitioners identified greater collaboration as an opportunity to reduce duplication, strengthen practice and develop a more connected regional approach to participation.

Not everyone is being heard

Many groups rely on a small number of regularly engaged young people. While their contributions are extremely valuable, the findings highlight the importance of widening participation opportunities to ensure a more diverse range of CEYP are heard, including separated young people, young parents and young people in the criminal justice system.

Four Ways to Listen Better

1 Connect What Exists

Create Greater Manchester wide opportunities for young people and professionals to share learning, build relationships and avoid duplication. This means stronger regional participation routes and better ways for practitioners to share tools, ideas and good practice.

2 Close the Feedback Loop

Ensure every participation opportunity is clear about its purpose, potential influence, timescales, feedback and recognition. Young people should always receive feedback explaining how their views were used, what changed (or didn't), including the reasons why.

3 Reach Wider

Use outreach, creative methods and trusted spaces to hear from young people missing from formal participation groups. This includes youth workers, creative practitioners, advocates, housing settings, peer-led spaces, and voluntary and community organisations.

4 Turn Voice into Action

Embed the Lundy Model as a shared standard for participation across Greater Manchester, ensuring young people have space, voice, audience and influence. This should be underpinned by sufficient capacity and dedicated participation roles, particularly to improve engagement with care leavers.

The Lundy Model asks whether young people have:

Space

Safe opportunities to speak

Voice

Support to say what they think

Audience

The right people listening

Influence

Evidence that views are acted on

The Eight Recommendations

- 1** Strengthen existing Greater Manchester-wide participation networks for care-experienced young people.
- 2** Establish a structured practitioner network and central resource hub to reduce duplication and share best practice.
- 3** Formalise the request to consult and feedback loop process.
- 4** Launch a targeted inclusion strategy to reach underrepresented groups and bridge the 16 to 18 participation gap.
- 5** Partner with the VCFFSE sector to engage care-experienced young people within trusted community spaces.
- 6** Create fair and consistent approaches to rewarding participation.
- 7** Invest in dedicated participation roles, particularly for care leaver engagement.
- 8** Embed the Lundy Model across Greater Manchester through training for practitioners and leaders.

What Happens Next

1 Test the Findings

Share the findings with young people and practitioners. Check what feels right, what is missing and what should happen first.

2 Agree Ownership

Work with young people, professionals, local authorities and regional partners to agree who leads each part of the work.

3 Take Action

Identify what can happen through the Esmée-funded work, what can happen through existing structures, and what needs additional resource, developing a practical implementation plan.

About the Mapping

This work was carried out by Greater Manchester Youth Network with support from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The mapping drew on information from all ten Greater Manchester localities, including structured interviews with professionals, visits to voluntary and community organisations, survey responses from young people, young people met through visits and sessions, in-depth conversations with care leavers, and examples of participation practice from across the city region.

We are grateful to the young people, professionals and partners who contributed, and to Anna Walters for leading the mapping work with care, curiosity and respect.

Greater Manchester has strong foundations for care-experienced youth voice. The next step is to connect them, widen them, resource them and show young people what changes because their voice was heard.

The task is not simply to listen. The task is to listen better.