

Effective Practice case study: Lincolnshire Young Voices

Summary

Established in 2017, Lincolnshire Young Voices (LYV) is a strategic participation group that aims to harness the voice and direct experiences of young people with SEND. LYV aims to influence and improve support and services for other young people with SEND, and provide its members with positive experiences that will build confidence, social networks, skills and experiences of work that they can take into adult life.

The SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework considers that the "strength of evidence" of this case study is **good** – LYV has been running for over five years, with its delivery plans and specific thematic reports published online and shared with Directors, Heads of Service, and Elected Council members. LYV's work has also had the external validation of having won the nasen (National Association for Special Educational Needs) award for co-production in 2022. The "breadth of impact" of this case study is also **good** – there is evidence relating to lived experiences and long-term outcomes of young people, and positive feedback from professionals.¹



¹ The SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework uses two "signal strength" indicators to present the strength of evidence and the breadth of impact of a case study. Each indicator has four bars – emerging, promising, good and robust. The "strength of evidence" indicator is based on how the project has been evaluated and the length of time it has been sustained. The "breadth of impact" indicator is based on whether the case study can demonstrate impact in four broad areas – the more areas of impact, the higher the signal strength indicator.

Why was this work undertaken? What did the work aim to do?

As one of the current co-chairs of LYV puts it, *"we are involved in really important conversations with services. Sometimes, young people's voices are missed or ignored, or young people do not have a say – but we do. We want to say what we want to say with freedom."*

LYV was established in September 2017. At the time, Lincolnshire County Council were part of a network of regional and national partners seeking to strengthen co-production. In March 2017, Lincolnshire began a pilot project bringing together a group of young people from a local special school to discuss what good communication and co-production looked like. The young people, in their own words, *"had a lot to say"* and impressed upon local service leaders their desire to share their lived experiences, to be part of the work to improve services and support, and to make a difference to the experiences of young people with SEND.

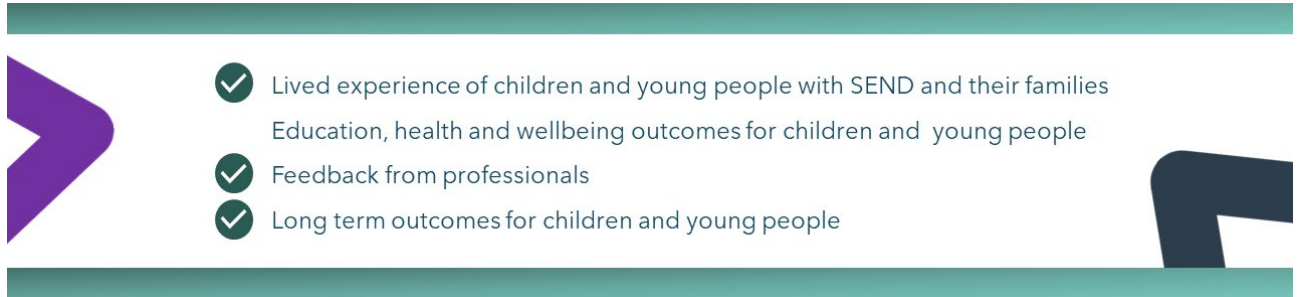
As a result, a SEND Service Manager and Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) worked together to set up a young people's group, which were designed to be enjoyable, fun and social, but also strategic on a par with the role of a Parent Carer Forum within a local SEND system. Over their first twelve months, LYV developed a mission statement, their first delivery plan, budget, and two paid roles for young people as co-chairs of LYV on two-year fixed terms.

The overall aims of LYV, in the context of developing co-production in the local area, were to:

1. Establish a strategic young people's group that could influence and improve support for young people with SEND in Lincolnshire;
2. Drive improvements in services for young people with SEND, encapsulated in the group's mantra, *'together, our voices make a difference'*; and
3. Provide young people who were members of LYV with valuable experiences and skills such as social opportunities, confidence, self-esteem, and employability.

At the time it was established, the local area SEND inspection commented positively on the potential of LYV: *"Young people are excited about the formation of Young Voices, which the DCO has positively contributed to. This has the potential to increase the voice and influence of young people."* Five years on, this potential has been realised, as one of the co-chairs described, *"it is nice to be included. Sometimes, as young people, other people tend to speak for us – that's not a good idea. We [at LYV] have freedom to talk about what we want."*

What was the impact?



- ✓ Lived experience of children and young people with SEND and their families
Education, health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people
- ✓ Feedback from professionals
- ✓ Long term outcomes for children and young people

The project has been able to demonstrate impact in three of the four areas captured by the SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework. There is evidence of the impact of LYV against each of their three original aims.

1. Establish a strategic young people's group that could influence and improve support for young people with SEND in Lincolnshire

LYV is still operating over five years since it was established. Each year, LYV members agree a set of priorities on which they will focus, which they "pitch", alongside their report of the previous year's activities, to senior Council and Integrated Care Board (ICB) members. LYV is now into the fourth cycle of pitching its priorities and securing the backing of the Council and the ICB. Over the same time, the membership of LYV has grown from 6 to 13 core members. (Once elected, members stay in post until they turn 25, at which point they can stay on as mentors for younger LYV members). In the words of one of the co-chairs, *"We are a big family. Our voices make a difference. We achieve this by working on things that are important."*

2. Drive improvements in services for young people with SEND

LYV have been able to influence improvements in the way key services for young people with SEND are delivered, as well as how broader community services make themselves accessible to all young people, including those with SEND.

- ✦ In 2021, with funding from NHS England, LYV worked with a media company to develop what they called 'A rough guide to not putting your foot in it' – a practical resource and training programme, drawing on the lived experiences of young people to improve knowledge and confidence for professionals working or coming into contact with children and young people with SEND. As well as providing insights from their own experience, this gave LYV members valuable experience of script writing and video recording. The training resource won the nasen award for co-production with families in 2022, and continues to be widely used – between November 2022 and November 2023, over 1,700 professionals from education, health, care and charitable services completed the training. A video clip about the resource can be viewed [here](#).

When asked about the achievements of which LYV could be most proud, one of the co-chairs said, *"The rough guide, without a doubt, [is] one of the biggest things that the whole group should be proud of. It is mind-blowing the amount of people who use it, and the amount of positive feedback we get."*

- ✦ In 2021-22 LYV focused on accessibility and designed a project to check accessibility at a range of public attractions, such as Lincoln Castle and Lincoln Cathedral, to see how 'SEND-friendly' these venues were for people with a range of disabilities. The aim was to highlight good practice and areas for improvement. LYV members developed an assessment framework that each venue was asked to complete, covering things like the welcome and information provided, mobility, toilet facilities, sensory accessibility, and staffing. LYV members used the framework when visiting 17 venues across the county. They produced a detailed report that was shared with participating venues and the Lincolnshire County Council's Culture Managers. In 2022, LYV carried out a similar project looking at the accessibility of toilets in key venues across the county.
- ✦ LA officers have commented that the experience of designing the recruitment process for the co-chairs of LYV, and the feedback from the candidates for those roles, has influenced recruitment for key roles across the Lincolnshire County Council. This has helped to ensure that recruitment processes are designed in such a way as to ensure people with additional needs feel comfortable and able to demonstrate the best of themselves during the recruitment process.

3. Provide young people who were LYV members with valuable experiences and skills

The first two co-chairs of LYV have both secured paid employment in fields relating to research and advocacy for young people and, in their feedback to the Council and ICB, both gave credit to LYV for providing them with invaluable experience.

"We have always said we have winged our way into such opportunities and made space for ourselves at the table, but this couldn't have been done without the confidence gained from our time at LYV ... we really do think we are on upward career trajectories. We love what we do and strive for more disabled people to be given the chance to thrive in employment. We'll forever be grateful for LYV for this, and it brings us joy to watch the Chairs and the committee as a whole, go from strength to strength."

- Excerpt taken from the first co-chairs' report on their term of office

Similarly, current LYV members consider that the experience of being a committee member or co-chair will provide valuable experience in their future careers. They also highlighted the value and the ongoing need for young people with SEND to have roles where they could use their lived experiences to inform organisations about how to improve opportunities for people with SEND.

"It is really good to put on your CV. Having your voice heard by Council officers is great to put on your CV. ... This experience will give you success in later life, when you want bigger opportunities." - LYV co-chair

The experience of being part of LYV has given its members the chance to meet new people, which in turn has had a positive effect on their confidence. As one member put it, *"my confidence developed massively when I was a committee member. I didn't know anyone at the start, but people got to know me straight away, which was a nice touch. It is a together community."* Council officers have also shared anecdotal feedback about the impact of LYV on other members, particularly in terms of improved confidence, self-esteem and employment. They described the transformation of one young person during their time as a member of LYV - from the first meeting where the young person was brought by their parent, to the second, third and fourth when their parent stayed in the car outside, to the present day where the young person contributes fully and confidently to LYV, has been helped by fellow members to understand, and overcome negative self-image about their needs. This young person has recently secured a paid job in a field which they are passionate about, following a successful supported internship.

What were the key actions and practices involved?

The most important reflection is, as one LYV co-chair put it in a [blog](#) *"when working with children and young people with SEND, don't just talk to their carer, talk to them."* Members of LYV and colleagues involved in supporting the group's work identified four other key aspects of practice that have contributed to LYV's success.

1. Young people themselves deciding on the identity and format of the group

During the LYV's first meetings, members of the group agreed the name, brand, and identity of the group, as well as the format of meetings and ways of working. Since the group was to meet on Saturdays, members agreed that it was important that there was a fun, social element to meetings, with food provided, whilst at the same time ensuring that members felt empowered that their concerns and insights were being listened to and acted upon.

"Host an event with food and games. All children and young people need to leave the event wanting to return, feeling their voice matters and they can make a difference. ... Allow group members to take control of their purpose and agenda; let them lead. ... Offer individuals choices for how they want to engage with the group. Not everyone will want to work in the same way. ... Keep a fun and friendly atmosphere. Members are volunteers, they want to socialise and make friends." Former co-chair

2. Ensure the group has standing as a strategic group

At the outset, those involved in establishing LYV wanted to ensure that it had the same important status as a strategic partner in the local SEND system as the Parent Carer Forum. It took 12 months to thrash out the detail of how LYV would function and its first delivery plan, but the young people were clear that all involved had to work at the same pace, and not be impatient or tokenistic. This included agreeing to have two co-chairs, as a paid role within the Council, terms for co-chairs and members, an annual cycle of identifying priorities, and the platform to pitch a two-year delivery plan and its impact directly to senior Council and ICB leaders. Young people and officers commented on the importance of creating a group of young people who could speak directly from their own experience to senior Council and ICB leaders, as opposed to officers reporting back what young people had said. As one former co-chair put it, *"seek out opportunities to work with professionals to make a difference to services, this is what drives the group to work together."*

3. Support from key senior officers

LYV has been supported directly by a council SEND team manager and the DCO, with the co-chairs having a dedicated supervisor from the Participation Team within the Council. Having key officers, with leadership responsibilities, and with dedicated time to work with LYV, has had the benefit of supporting the group to organise practicalities, such as meeting venues and minutes, but also demonstrating that LYV's voice is being listened to and actions taken away are being delivered on. Officers noted that this was crucial in demonstrating the value and potential power of LYV to its members in the early stages of its work. They also noted that having senior officers with dedicated time to engage LYV has helped members to frame their thinking in language that links to local strategic developments in the local SEND system, which in turn maximises the likelihood that LYV's advice informs how SEND and children's health services are designed and delivered.

4. Positive ethos

Officers described how, when pursuing specific priorities, LYV members have developed an ethos of not criticising, but using their skills to investigate, identify good practice and recommend improvements in a positive and helpful manner. This comes through strongly in the reports LYV has developed looking at accessibility of public attractions, for example, and in their current work focusing on experiences of bullying in schools. LYV members have commented that, because they are able to draw on their own lived experiences in education, pupils feel more comfortable opening up about their own experiences, which underscores the unique role LYV can play in giving voice to the concerns and experiences of young people with SEND.

How has the work been sustained?

LYV has continued to operate for over five years, and engagement with LYV is now embedded as 'business-as-usual' within the local SEND system, in terms of individual initiatives, strategic work (for example, the integrated commissioning strategy), and the work of key governance groups. The learning from the work of LYV would be relevant to any local SEND system seeking to create a means for young people to use their experiences to influence and shape strategic improvement projects across the local area.

A small amount of resource has been required to support LYV. The Council provides the funding for the two co-chair posts, while the ICB has funded training (such as the '*Rough guide to not putting your foot in it*') and specific events.



Resources required	Value for money
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Financial investment ✓ Human resources Physical space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustained £ needed ✓ Cost neutral Savings (+outcomes)

Finding out more

Contact to find out more	lincolnshireyoungvoices@lincolnshire.gov.uk
Useful resources and links	Lincolnshire Young Voices 'A rough guide to not putting your foot in it' video