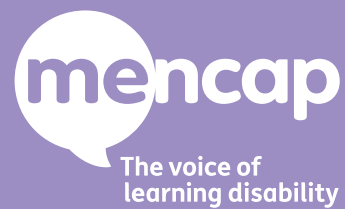


Community Changemakers



Best practice guide



Hello!

Our names are **Callum, Josh, Richard, Michael, Lauren** and **Anna**, and we are Community Changemakers. Thank you for reading this guide to getting young people involved in social action.

Community Changemakers is about young people like us being in charge and making changes to the area where we live, telling people what is important to us and making a difference through volunteering.

We enjoyed being involved with Community Changemakers. We learned lots and made a big difference in our community. In the area where we live we enjoyed handing out hundreds of leaflets in our local shopping centre, to tell people about bullying and why it should stop.

Community Changemakers has also made us feel good about ourselves. We don't get asked our opinions very often so it's great when people listen to us and take an interest in what we think.

We think all young people should be able to get involved with making life better in the areas where they live, so we helped Mencap to write this guide. It will tell you:

- why helping young people to engage in social action is good for you and your community
- how to support young people (including young people with a learning disability) to understand their rights and responsibilities in community life
- how to work with young people to plan social action opportunities.

This guide was written by Mencap with help from young people with a learning disability and can be used for working with all young people.

Good luck making your community a better place – we hope this guide helps!

From

Callum, Josh, Richard, Michael, Lauren and Anna
Community Changemakers



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Welcome to our guide to engaging young people in social action

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for anyone who works with young people or who provides services for them, as well as young people and their friends, families and carers.

Although this guide was designed for young people with a learning disability, we hope it will be useful for those keen to engage any young person in social action. Activities designed for those with the most complex needs work better for those without, and the principles of youth-led action in this guide can be used by anyone to support young people to make their world a better place.

This guide demonstrates the difference young people with a learning disability can make to their own lives and to the communities they live in. It provides tips, case studies and resources to help you understand what you can do to support them.

What is Community Changemakers?

The Community Changemakers pilot project was built on the learning gained from our Me2 project, winner of the 2011 UK Youth's Hearing Unheard Voices Best Local Campaign, and our Inspire Me project, which worked with 10,000 young people over the last two years.

Young people told us they loved making a difference in their community, and that every success made them more motivated to keep on engaging in social action. And we got lots of great feedback from local people, too. We knew that for everyone to get a chance to take part, we had to create something that existing groups of young people (school classes, youth groups and sports clubs members) could adopt, and that would allow them to see the success of their social action in a short space of time.

We worked with young people to identify the elements of training, workshops and activities they found most useful in their work with Mencap, and condensed these into a 28-hour programme. This enabled them to take part in Community Changemakers in their local groups.

More than 850 young people with a learning disability have now taken part in Community Changemakers to date, and they have helped shape this best practice guide by telling us what worked for them.

This guide contains many great examples of inspirational changes achieved by young people. Their use of social action has changed not only their communities for the better but also their own lives. They've also helped change Mencap by making it more inclusive and better informed.



We hope this guide will help those who work with young people to see similar positive change in the groups they support, their communities and organisations.

What is social action?

Social action describes the things people do for free to make their communities a better place.

Is social action the same as participation?

Participation Works¹ defines participation as “A fundamental part of citizenship. It is the process by which children and young people can influence decision-making which affects their lives to bring about positive change.

“Participation is not solely the act of expressing an opinion and having that opinion taken seriously, but of being able to construct that opinion freely through accessing information and meeting and debating with others.”

While participation is a key part of engaging young people in social action, it’s not the only one. To be effective and sustainable, social action must be freely chosen, address a need a young person cares about, and be enjoyable. It’s not necessarily about shaping the services they use.

For example, the Community Changemakers group in Lufton chose not to influence a service they used but instead focused their volunteer work on reducing social isolation among the elderly.

Social action is the logical next step to participation for young people, moving from the right to participate to the responsibility to contribute.

Supporting young people to engage in social action is good for you and your community

Young people told Mencap that making decisions, planning and volunteering on a project made them feel more confident and more included in their communities. They also said they made new friends and learned new skills. Some young people thought the skills and confidence they'd gained would help them get a job.

Will, a Community Changemaker, said: "I liked learning new things and having fun along the way. Disabled people can create change and I am happy I was part of this group."

Social action makes services more effective, and improves their quality and value for money.

A report by the Children's Commissioner in 2010 showed that young people and professionals agree services are better when children and young people are involved in the design and delivery of them. Children and young people said that involving them made them feel like they were respected, valued and active citizens in a shared community.²

- **82% of young people believe it's important for them to speak up about their area.**
- **60% feel their views are taken less seriously because of their age.** ³

Local authorities reported that the involvement of youth councillors in public decision-making resulted in:

- **better quality youth services (62%)**
- **savings of 22% for the council**

Bryan Lindop from Blackpool Transport told us how Community Changemakers helped them develop their thinking on public transport.

"We were approached to look at improving access for young people with disabilities and we jumped at the chance to get involved," he said.

"The entire visit was highly rewarding and of great benefit for everyone. We were very impressed by the way in which the students had evaluated the whole situation and came up with some very good suggestions."

Social action builds cohesive communities.

Joe Scarth from Merseyside police, who worked with Community Changemakers in the Wirral during their safety campaign, said: "Projects like these are so important; for the students to give them a voice but also all the community will be aware of the same issues we are all facing."



"Projects like these are so important; for the students to give them a voice but also all the community will be aware of the same issues we are all facing." **Joe Scarth, Merseyside police**

Understanding their community will help young people know what local people want to change.

A young person's experience will vary according to where they live. Each area has different advantages and challenges. So in order for young people to make the biggest possible difference in their local area, they need to understand what makes it unique.

Some of the most successful social action projects completed by Community Changemakers were those which addressed local needs.

For example, members of Newark Community Changemakers knew there were no cinema screenings in their area suitable for people with a learning disability, and that travelling to accessible performances in other areas would take more than an hour. They approached the manager of their local cinema who agreed to put on regular accessible screenings.

Now 'Lights Up, Sound Down' performances take place at Newark's Odeon cinema once a month when reduced volume and higher levels of lighting make the films more accessible to people with a learning disability. Young people from the area ensure local needs are met by voting on which film should be shown.

Understanding their cultural community will help young people engage with people who care about similar things to them.

Community isn't always about where people live. It could also describe their being part of a community of choice, or 'cultural community', because of their beliefs or interests. These may lead some people to identify strongly with communities built around things like religious beliefs, cultural heritage or musical taste. Sometimes these communities have a greater impact on people's lives than their geographical community.

Understanding things that worry the local community will help young people bring about change.

'Communities of change' is a term used to describe groups of people with a shared mission to make something better. These groups can be as diverse as a church flowers committee or political parties, but they essentially use their time and energy to focus on changing one particular issue.

For example, when young people in Hackney decided they wanted to run a club night for young people with disabilities, they

assembled a community of change around them by identifying organisations, both locally and nationally, that worked with young people with disabilities.

They approached Mencap after hearing about Community Changemakers to see if it could help them with volunteers and some funding to stage their club night. The event was a huge success because the young people had worked with a community of 17 organisations that cared about the same issue as them.



Helping young people understand their rights and responsibilities in community life

Knowing about rights builds a sense of community.

Communities are rich with diversity, yet young people may find it hard to see past differences in income, culture or style to identify a single united community.

Each person has different experiences and ways of seeing things, and it's these that makes them an individual. They bring these differences to their communities, making them diverse and interesting places to live. Communities are also about what people share, whether it's the area in which they live, a shared belief or an interest.

This is why an understanding of rights is so important. Human rights describe the shared human experience and protection of differences. They're something that people should want for themselves and everyone in their community.

Knowing about rights encourages people to have expectations for themselves and for others.

According to a European Commission report "few young people think much, if at all, about human rights and do not automatically associate them with their own situation and the situations of those they know, they think even less about children's specific rights".⁴

People participating in Community Changemakers found many young people had experienced bullying. Some people had been told by their parents or teachers that it was "just a part of growing up." However, when they realised they had a right to protection from harm, many chose to do things to protect this right. They were also keen to make other young people aware that they too had the right to be safe from harm.

Jane, a member of a Community Changemakers group, said: "My friends all have a learning disability and together we have a strong voice. We were helped to have our voice heard which was very important.

"I think that more people with a learning disability should be taught how to campaign because then we can stand up for our own rights. Staying safe is one very important right."

A good understanding of human rights helps young people appreciate not just what they can expect in their communities, but also what everyone else has a right to. It also helps them appreciate their part in upholding those rights, and ensuring that the rights of everyone else are met.

Knowing about rights helps young people understand their responsibilities as active citizens.

Just as everyone has rights, they also have responsibilities; to themselves, to the community and to society. By knowing about their rights, and through acting in a responsible way, people can positively influence their community to promote and uphold the rights of others.

Nicky, a member of Community Changemakers, said: "We'd like to do other projects together to get people to stand up and make the public hear them. [Community Changemakers] has given me the opportunity because I know more about my rights. Because we know about it the public listened to us."

"I think that more people with a learning disability should be taught how to campaign because then we can stand up for our own rights. Staying safe is one very important right."

Jane, Community Changemaker

See section **B** of the **activity guide** for more information





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Why choosing one thing to change makes it more likely the young people will be successful in their aims

It's easier to measure the success of a single clear aim, rather than something vague such as 'make the world a nicer place', or choosing lots of things like 'stop animal cruelty, tidy up our local park, and put on a party'.

An example might be: "We want our local park to be a welcoming place for the community, so we will clear up the litter and plant some flowers." This would enable a young person to see clearly what success looks like – a litter-free park with newly planted flower beds. Or if they want to fight world poverty, for example, they might decide to raise £500 for a particular charity; something that is measurable.

If there are lots of things they care about, it's better to pick one to focus on and keep a note of the others to tackle later.

Choosing one important thing helps young people appreciate they are using their time to do something worthwhile.

Choosing what social action activities to focus on helps develop critical reasoning skills, particularly when selected as part of a group. Prioritising activities means young people spend their time on what is most important to them.

Helping young people use their time effectively shows them their commitment to social action is valued and respected by others.

Seeing the difference they have made to something important to them will build young people's confidence in themselves and what they can achieve.

Everyone feels good when they achieve a goal. The easier someone can see what they have achieved, the easier it is for them to feel good about it, as this young Community Changemaker recalled:

"I wanted to go to a club night and I wanted to feel what a club night feels like. Some people, like me, haven't been to a club night in their whole life before. If they could go to a club night they would know that feeling and know what it's like.

"The best time I ever had in my life was to be asked to plan an amazing club night. I was surprised that we could do it - I thought it would be harder, but it went easy with people talking to us and listening to us. I made new friends and fell in love. I learnt that clubbing is not easy to plan, but if you've got the right people it will be perfect."

See section **C**
of the **activity**
guide for more
information

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Why it is important that young people understand how to plan social action activities

Planning helps young people work out what needs to be done and when.

Understanding how to plan, and how to identify the strengths and risks of their chosen social action activity significantly increases young people's chances of being successful. They will need support to understand project management so they know what needs to be done and when, and how each person's contribution affects the whole project's chances of success.

Making a plan outlines everything that young people want to do as well as things that might get in the way of the project, from school holidays and dental appointments, to the parliamentary recess. Having a plan means each person knows what is going to happen, when, and who is going to do it.

Planning ensures young people have realistic expectations about what they can achieve with the time and resources available to them. It's important that they are fully involved in looking at what resources, time and support will be needed to get what they want. It means that if they don't have everything they need to make the big change they ultimately want to see, they can reconsider their goals and set themselves more manageable targets.

Making a plan provides options. Investing time in planning at the beginning will result in the most successful outcome because young people will be able to do research, think about what will and won't work, and make contingency plans.

Planning for success in social action translates into planning for success in life.

See section **D** of the **activity guide** for more information



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Why it is important that young people understand how to evaluate the impact of their social action activities

Evaluating the success of social impact activities allows people to learn what works.

It's useful to understand the difference made by a social action activity, how it has changed communities, and what people most valued. Learning from this means the young people can build on things that were successful for their next activity. Also, people who fund and support youth activities will be more likely to continue to work with the volunteers if it is possible to show what they have done and the difference they have made.

Knowing what didn't work in social action activities allows people to make changes so they achieve more in the future.

Sometimes, even things that are well planned don't achieve what is expected. When this happens, it's important to understand why to be able to learn from the experience and avoid problems in future.

Identifying positive changes as a result of social action motivates young people to continue their involvement. Showing them the difference they've made makes them feel proud, motivated and valued.

See section **E** of the **activity guide** for more information



There are an estimated 1.5 million people with a learning disability in the UK, and they're among the most disadvantaged in today's society.

That's why Mencap is here. We work closely with people with a learning disability to change laws and services, challenge prejudice and directly support thousands of people to live their lives as they choose.

Mencap has always been committed to helping people with a learning disability to be full and equal partners in their communities. People with a learning disability lead in shaping our strategy, campaigns and services. We know this way of working delivers better outcomes for the people we work with, and contributes to changing society's attitude towards the contribution people with a learning disability can make to their communities.

We'd love to hear how you get on using our guide to put young people in charge and make change happen!

 www.mencap.org.uk/our-work-cyp

 Like us on Facebook – facebook.com/Mencap

 Follow us on Twitter – @mencap_charity

Elizabeth Archer

Mencap national strategic lead for children and young people

¹ www.participationworks.org.uk

² *Children's participation in decision-making - A Summary Report on progress made up to 2010*, Dr Ciara Davey

³ BYC Big Listen survey 2011

⁴ *Children's Rights as they see them*. 2011



