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# 1 Background

- 1.1 The Strengthening the Voices of Young People Project was a twelve-month joint strategic initiative between the Scottish Health Council and Includem. The Scottish Health Council works in a variety of ways to improve the involvement of people and communities in health and social care services in Scotland. Includem is a specialist Scottish charity which supports vulnerable young people who are often excluded from mainstream services. Includem seconded an experienced member of staff to the Scottish Health Council for the duration of the project.
- 1.2 The aims of the project were to use the learning from four engagement test sites where we:
- provided an opportunity for young people to share what mattered to them when using and accessing health and social care services
  - created an environment for support staff, health and social care practitioners and organisations to effectively engage with young people in a meaningful way, and
  - explored how the voices of young people could be used to improve services in partnership with health and social care service providers
- 1.2 The four test sites were in:
- Fife, which focussed on how to improve physical and emotional support services for students at St Andrews University
  - Highland, where we engaged with secondary school students and focused on mental health and sexual health services
  - Forth Valley, where we engaged with looked after children to gather their views on health and wellbeing needs and support services
  - Greater Glasgow & Clyde, where we worked with Includem to gather views on transitional support services for young people
- 1.3 The Scottish Health Council is a key delivery partner for Our Voice which is a framework that operates at three levels (individual, local and national) and aims to strengthen public involvement so that people's views are listened to so they improve health and social care services. The Strengthening Voices of Young People Project fits with the aspirations of Our Voice.
- 1.4 This report describes the work we did for the Greater Glasgow & Clyde test site.

## 2 The Approach

2.1 The Scottish Health Council worked in partnership with Includem to organise and host a joint engagement event to gather views and experiences of six young people and six key workers who support them. We concentrated our discussions on the challenges young people face when they move from using children's services and start to use adult health and care services. Through this work we aimed to ensure that participants:

- felt listened to and taken seriously
- achieved a sense of motivation and confidence to be engaged
- improved their awareness of what affected the health and social wellbeing of young people
- improved their knowledge about support services available to them
- developed confidence and knowledge about who, how and when to access relevant services at times of need, and
- increased their capacity to develop improved self management and coping strategies.

2.2 We encouraged young people as participants to share their experiences by having open conversations about:

- what they thought worked well with current support services
- the challenges they experienced when working with those services, and
- how Includem and other services could work more closely with them in future to improve how their support needs are met.

2.3 The engagement event took place in Glasgow at Includem's offices (which has a social space which was familiar to those taking part) in December 2016. Six young people aged from 15 to 20 took part along with some support staff. The participants came from diverse backgrounds and had a range of health and emotional wellbeing needs some of which were fairly complex.

### **3 Key Principles for planning the engagement**

#### **3.1 Jointly agree key issues**

Some key issues were identified through early discussions with young people and their support staff to form the basis of our engagement, including the following.

- What did young people find most helpful or unhelpful when trying to access support services? As part of this, we also explored Includem's role in overcoming barriers to accessing wider support services.
- What mattered to young people most when moving from the transitional support which is provided by Includem to accessing adult services? We also explored young people's views on how this should happen and included some perspectives from staff.
- What could Includem do to ensure the views of young people were taken into account in transitional support and associated support plans? This also included gathering young people's perspectives on what helps or hinders their current involvement.

#### **3.2 Involvement from the start**

It was an important part of the planning process that before any engagement took place, the Scottish Health Council spoke with Includem management and support staff. By doing this, we were able to learn a lot from Includem's experience of engaging and supporting young people. We were also able to share some principles about our engagement approach and in partnership create a safe and open environment for the young people's discussions. We also jointly agreed on the structure of the event, how it would be facilitated to take into account young people's learning styles and how best to create a safe environment which encouraged open conversations for those taking part.

- 3.3 The Scottish Health Council was keen for Includem staff to be involved in delivering core elements of the engagement sessions. We felt that this would demonstrate a feeling of trust and encourage openness for everyone taking part. The approach also worked as a way of encouraging young people and staff to share their views on an equal basis. Throughout the event we stressed the importance and value of peer learning and the need to respect all opinions, experiences and values.

### 3.4 Main engagement tools

The four engagement tools we agreed to use to generate discussion and feedback at the event were: 'The Road Map Exercise', Emotional Touchpoints, What Matters to You and Attitudes & Assumptions, Building Better Relationships. We used these tools based on the Scottish Health Council's experience of providing workshops on Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland's Voices Scotland programme which builds the capacity of people to be involved by providing them with knowledge, skills and confidence to share their views and offer feedback. The approaches, which worked well in practice, are described in more detail below.

**The Road Map Exercise** is a simple visualisation exercise which encourages people to self reflect and explore their lives; what parts help make them healthy and happy, what parts cause them stress and to explore what helps them recover from difficulties they face. As a group they then discuss what can help people to achieve better balance in their lives, the importance of this and what helps people work towards

**Emotional Touch Points, Listen to Our Stories** is a visual tool that empowers people to explore the emotions they are feeling around a situation or experience of using a service. This is accomplished by picking two cards from a menu of emotions, one positive and one negative, giving people a chance to share how situations and experiences of services and professionals made them feel.

**What Matters to You? What can services do better?** This section focuses on how to improve access and experience of services by exploring what matters to young people. This is achieved by looking at current pathways and structures of services they use, drawing on their experiences of using them and exploring through conversations what they see as working well and what could be done better

**Attitudes & Assumptions, building better Relationships** is an exercise to help people explore how they would like to build better relationships with people and professionals involved in their lives. This is accomplished by exploring different attitudes and assumptions that people can have towards each other with a view to finding shared understanding and encouraging more open and honest

### 3.5 **Supplementary approach to gather views**

At the event, the Scottish Health Council felt it was important to offer additional ways for young people to share what mattered to them in a more private setting rather than through a general group discussion. We did this by encouraging them to either write their feedback down, to use drawings to illustrate it and use other approaches such as podcasts, short films, storytelling, etc.

We also conducted some informal face-to-face interviews with three of the young people separately from the event. This gave them the opportunity to think in advance about what feedback they wanted to share.



## **4 Feedback received**

The feedback we received from the engagement fell into two broad categories: (a) quality of life of the young people and (b) experience of interacting with services and how that affected them and their quality of life. It is summarised below under key themes.

### **4.1 Finance and employment**

A number of young people raised issues associated with money and management of finance. Specific examples included the following:

- The challenges of being on a low income and not being able to safely manage their money or have any leeway to deal with emergencies as they arose.
- The need for more understanding and support to help them manage their finances.
- The need for more compassion and understanding from organisations like the Department of Work and Pensions which was perceived by some to be inflexible and unrealistic with their deadlines. Some young people said that they felt dealing with the Department of Work and Pensions was difficult and confrontational.
- difficulties in obtaining employment and the challenge of too few job opportunities. One participant described seeking employment as a “full time job in itself”.

### **4.2 Relationships**

Some young people highlighted the importance of having good relationships with family, friends and with the various professionals that they regularly came into contact with. One person highlighted that loneliness was a major factor amongst young people and which resulted in them being unhappy and having poor emotional wellbeing. Young people also mentioned the importance of trust, in the context of the need for more organisations to work towards developing trust when they interact with young people.

### **4.3 Meaningful activities**

Several young people mentioned how valuable it was to have the opportunity to regularly engage in recreational activities and hobbies. Examples included having pets which then generated exercise and emotional wellbeing, listening to music and doing arts and crafts and helping others which then helped them to feel satisfied and to have “improved self-worth.”

They also highlighted the importance of maintaining positive mental and physical wellbeing and how recreation and social activities had a positive impact on that. Participants said that not being able to take part in those activities because of lack of finance or other social reasons simply exacerbated a lack of positive wellbeing which then affected their health.

With regard to physical health in particular, young people also highlighted the importance of eating well but said that more could be done to provide them with more information or promote a better understanding of what was good for “body and mind” which would lead to better physical health overall.

#### **4.4 How services interact with young people**

There was wide ranging feedback relating to how service providers engage with young people and a strong emphasis on the need for them to be listened to and their views taken into account. They recommended that service providers should:

“Not jump to conclusions based on someone’s case or medical history.  
Treat and talk to us like a person, not a number.”

“Listen to what young people are saying and don’t be dismissive of what we say.”

“Don’t use jargon to confuse or shut us up. Talk normally to us and help us understand.”

“Treat us as individuals, not as a condition, a sentence or a need.  
I am not just a number, I am a person.”

#### **4.5 Help and support to access services**

Young people shared some of the difficulties they faced when accessing services. The main issues seemed to be associated with managing appointments and managing their time more generally. Some felt that they would like more support to be available to help them access services and one participant suggested improving links between Includem and other support services.

There were other suggestions such as involving young people more in the recruitment of the staff that support them across services. Some young people mentioned that they had been involved in a trial of this approach which had been undertaken by Includem. They said how much they had welcomed the opportunity and enjoyed being involved in a recruitment process. Young people said that they thought that by being closely involved in this way they felt valued and that their opinions were being taken seriously. They also felt

that it would lead to a good appointment of an individual who would be able to offer the right kind of support for young people.

#### 4.6 **Not being judged**

From the discussions, it was very clear the importance young people attach to not feeling as if they were being judged and the need to be taken seriously. Similarly, they spoke about how important it was for people not to judge them on their past history (whatever that was) and how they wished for people to take the time to talk to them about their present situation and future aspirations as that was what really mattered to them. One participant said “people shouldn’t have to have their past follow them wherever they go”.

In the context of feeling prejudged and prejudiced, two young people spoke about the effect a period of imprisonment had had on them. They described how it had negatively affected how they felt about themselves generally, how difficult it was to integrate back into society and how socially isolated they felt upon release. Whilst they described how difficult it was to deal with the prospect of homeless accommodation because of not being able to afford rented property, they were very appreciative of the support they received from both Includem and the Supporting Transitions and Reintegration Service (STARS) Project at Polmont Young Offenders Institute. STARS is a government funded service which supports young people in their transition from custody to the community by helping them to engage with services that can meet their needs in the long term, thereby reducing offending and the time spent in custody in the future.

#### 4.8 **Building trusting relationships**

The importance of building trusting relationships between service staff and young people was seen as crucial to ensuring young people engaged effectively with services. Some said they had developed that trust over time and one young person described how that helped to “keep people safe when they are in crisis”. Another described a less positive relationship and experience:

**“During a stay in hospital I was asked if I had a razor. I denied it, but the staff searched the room anyway and found one. I felt put down and judged for putting staff in danger, and made the bad guy because of my condition rather than them trying to talk to me and explore things in an understanding way.”**

Young people also discussed some other important factors such as:

- staff being available and not judging them when most needed
- the benefit of having staff who seemed to “go the extra mile” who made a massive difference (such as help to prevent a crisis or to turn a bad situation around)
- Includem support staff were seen as “part of a good system” and an approach which other organisations could replicate
- having staff who were approachable and being someone to talk to comfortably without fear of judgement, and
- getting the right support worker from the outset.

#### 4.9 Other aspects

One important issue to emerge out of the work was a discussion about how important it is for young people to receive quality and honest feedback about why some proposed changes had not or could not happen. One young person said:

**“I don’t mind hearing ‘no it can’t happen’ that is ok, but at least explain why or better still, say “no, but let’s try this alternative instead”.**

The above highlights a theme identified by young people, which is the importance they attach to being treated as equals and with integrity in the relationships they have with organisations and support staff. Young people were keen to develop more of a partnership relationship and especially when it came to talking about how services were designed and developed. Some experiences which young people shared showed there was on occasion a perceived pre judgement from service providers about young people seeking help.

**“Less authoritarian and more liberal and understanding of the issues many young people face.”**

## 5 Evaluation of the Test Site and Engagement Approaches

5.1 A key aim of this project was to gather views from young people and learn about how they felt about taking part. The Scottish Health Council used an evaluation indicator tool (based on an approach used by Evaluation Support Scotland) which participants completed both before and after attending the engagement events. The questions we asked them were:

- how well do you understand what it means to be healthy and well?
- how confident do you feel in being able to ask for help from services?
- how important is it that decision makers explain why something has or hasn't changed?
- how seriously do you think your views are taken and that your voice makes a difference?
- how confident do you feel about sharing your views and getting your point across?
- how important is it to you that people making decisions listen to you?

The evaluation illustrated that there was a general increase in all areas and a rise in how confident young people felt in asking for support and how valued they felt their views were. See appendix for more details.

The engagement at this test site highlights the benefits of bringing together young people, their support workers and managers to reflect on young people's experiences of services. Exploring the views of young people about what is working well, what barriers exist to accessing services and what actions are required to help to ensure better outcomes for young people starting to use adult services has been beneficial.

5.2 The Scottish Health Council tested a range of engagement approaches which are outlined in section 3.4. Our experience showed that these worked well in practice and lent themselves to gathering the views of participants. In section 3, we also describe some key principles around agreeing outcomes and ensuring the correct environment for discussions to take place; this was key to this particular project. Based on our experience, we would advocate using similar principles to other engagement activities with young people.

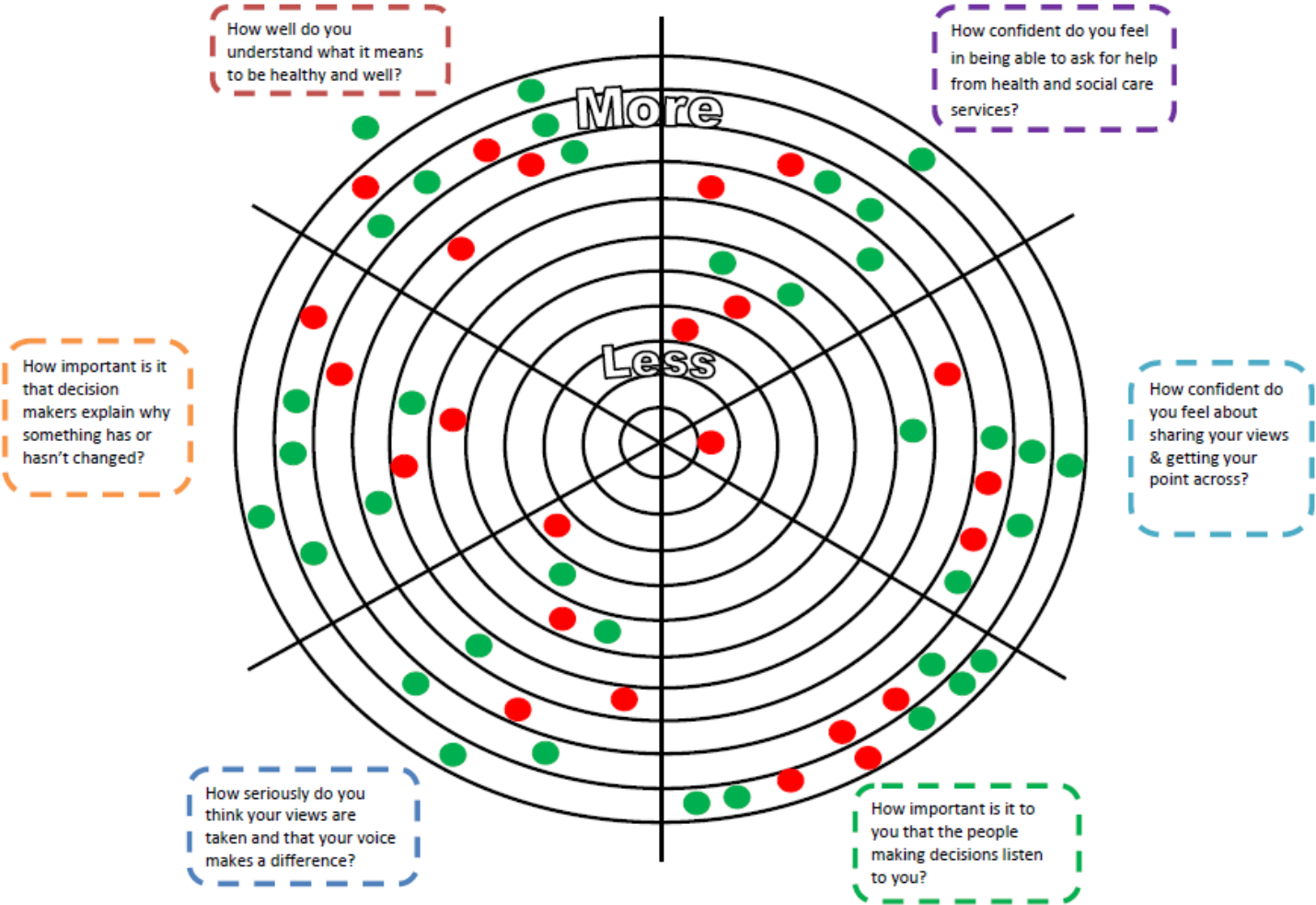
5.3 Details about the Evaluation Indicator Tool approach and the four engagement methods used at this test site can be found on the [Scottish Health Council website](#).

The three additional tools will also be incorporated into the [Scottish Health Council's Participation Toolkit](#) at the next revision to accompany Emotional Touchpoints.

## **6 Next steps and acknowledgements**

- 6.1 This report will be shared with Includem as our key partner for this test site and with everyone who participated. The Scottish Health Council would like to thank all the participants who shared their views and in particular the young people and Includem staff who supported the engagement. We look forward to hearing about how the views and suggestions contained in this report have been used to improve the experience of young people and the support they receive to access and use services

# Appendix – Evaluation Indicator Tool and Results



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 After ●



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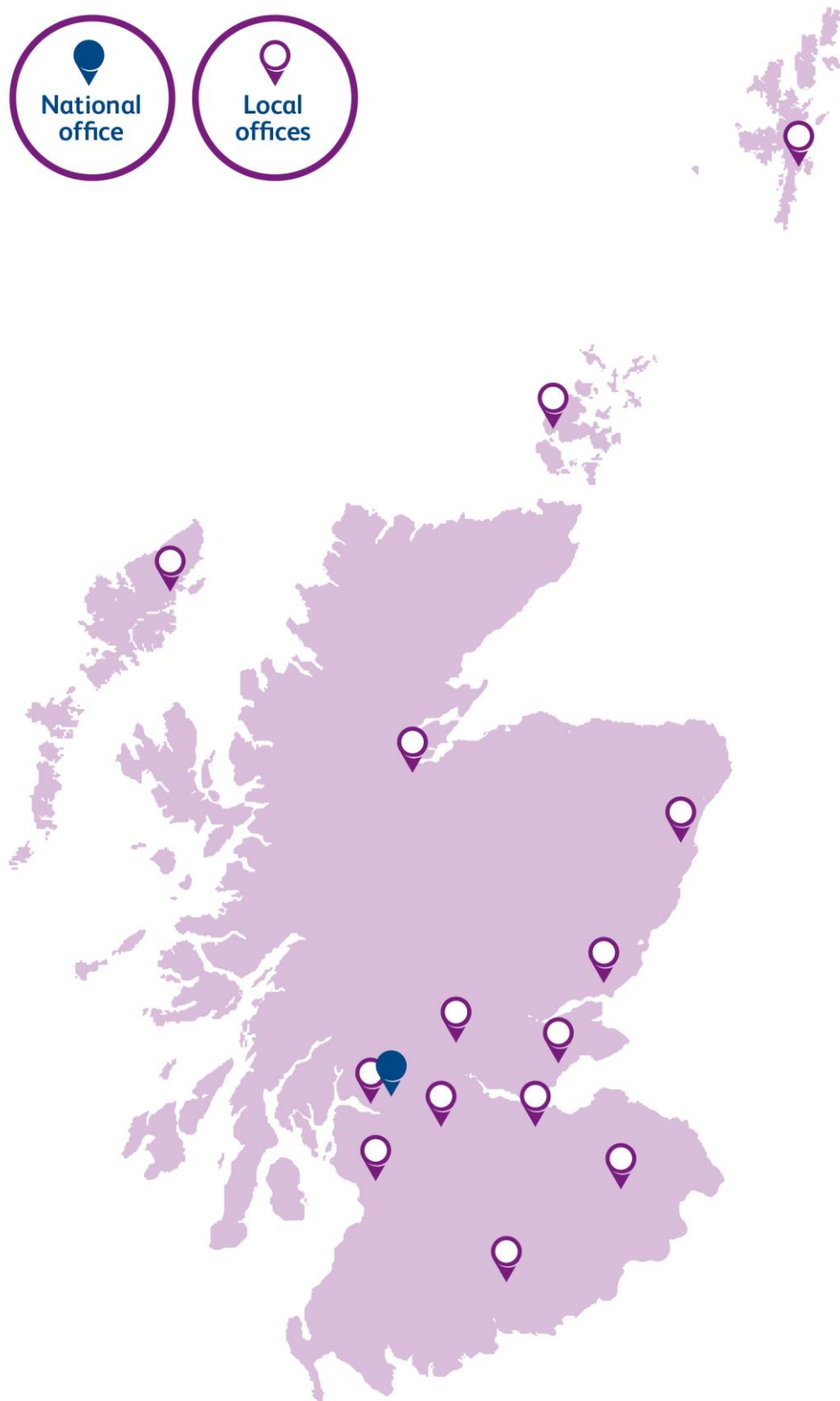
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