



Final report on the Policy and Research Unit
service user-led bullying research project

Involving young people in research

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May 2006



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GIVING CHILDREN BACK THEIR FUTURE



Policy and Research Unit

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Acknowledgements

Many people have helped see this project through to fruition. In particular we would like to thank:

- Barnardo's Creative Services team, including: Karen Banks, Paul Carr, Marysa Dowling and Paul Abrahams for their photography work and poster design
- Barnardo's Yorkshire Media team for facilitating the newspaper article
- Barnardo's Yorkshire Services, their staff and young people who took part in the research project, especially KKDB, Sibling Support, Seen and Heard, Wakefield Children's Advocacy Service and Hull 348
- Bob Cook, Policy and Standards Officer for meeting with the Peer Research Group (PRG) about policy and guidelines
- Lorraine Brown, Policy and Research Unit (PRU) secretary for typing up PRG information
- Malcolm Stone, former PRU Senior Research Officer, for his drama workshop in July 2005
- Peter Allinson, Director Barnardo's Yorkshire for his support for this project and for enabling its continuation in the Yorkshire region
- Sally Moore and Year 5 at Burley St Matthias Primary School in Leeds for inviting the PRG to discuss the bullying project with them
- Sarah Frost, Angela Hutton and Sara Scott for their continued guidance and advice about the group
- Shelly Eades-Jones, Children's Service Manager (CSM) Voice for her advice and support throughout the project
- Wakefield Children's Fund and Barnardo's Yorkshire Learning and Development section for allowing us to use their premises on a regular basis.

Introduction

The Barnardo's Yorkshire Peer Research Group (hereafter referred to as the PRG), also known as 'The Originals', is a group of service users who have undertaken a research project on the issue of bullying.



The group has existed in previous formats, with different members, facilitators and research projects over a period of four years since 2002.

This report focuses upon the duration of the bullying project which ran from August 2004 – January 2006, a period of relatively stable membership, facilitators and research subject and during which time young people were involved in every stage of the research process.

The purpose of this report is to:

1. Report on the research project
2. Reflect upon the process of training and supporting young people as researchers

Background information

A Research Officer (Claire Turner) from Barnardo's Policy and Research Unit (PRU) set up the original group in 2002. The purpose was to develop a model for enabling service users to participate in the research team. More specific objectives were:¹

- To recruit and train a group of young people as peer researchers
- To carry out a piece of research on a subject chosen and developed by young people, with young people as the researchers
- To produce a research 'report' or other output which will influence Barnardo's work
- Partnership working between young people and the researchers, with input from other Barnardo's workers and managers in the Yorkshire region

The group undertook some research training and several research-related projects, including an evaluation of a summer arts project and as consultants for the Department of Health evaluation of the social work degree. One of the objectives for the group was to undertake their own research project from start to finish. The PRG decided upon the topic of bullying, since it was an issue of which they all had experience.

In August 2004 the bullying research project began. Two research staff Pip Tyler and Helen Mills took over the facilitation of the group and were managed by Claire Turner. As with any kind of voluntary group, membership has inevitably been unstable. At this point, several of the original PRG members had left the group. Four new members from Barnardo's Yorkshire services were recruited and during the course of the project, two further members left the group. This left a

¹ Turner C (2002) *Peer Research Project Proposal – June 2002*. Internal research proposal.

core group membership of five young people who have seen the project from beginning to end; their ages have ranged from 14-20 years.

The group met once or twice a month in the evening or on a Saturday for several hours to train and plan the project. In addition to this, they spent extra time during weekdays to undertake data collection and dissemination. The group did not have a meeting place to call their own and therefore met at Barnardo's services in four different locations since they live in different areas of West Yorkshire. Although the cost of the entire research project was relatively low, costs were raised due to the transport costs of the group. Each meeting cost approximately £100 in expenses (food and transport), in addition to staff time. These costs were met by an internal grant at Barnardo's. The PRG themselves had applied for YSpeak funding in May 2005 but were rejected on the grounds that it sounded more like a research project than a consultation.

In principle the research project was user-led and where possible the PRG were encouraged and aided to make decisions about the project. The young people considered themselves to be the principal decision makers:

'We have chosen to make the posters, we have chosen to hold events and we chose to go to the school and to talk to senior staff.'

'Influence that we have had has been almost full, I don't think we could have had much more without it being fully personalised and if it had I don't think we would have got as far as we could, we needed the corrections of the adults and the workers.'

In reality, we adopted a model of 'appropriate participation.' Much of the decision making was done in partnership: with the facilitators and the young people bringing different expertise and ideas. Certain decisions had to remain in the hands of the facilitators since they had the time, resources and networks that the PRG often lacked. For example, opportunities for dissemination were explored by the facilitators since they had the internal knowledge of Barnardo's structure and therefore who best to approach. While the facilitators ran every meeting and decided upon the agenda, different Barnardo's experts were invited to share their expertise with the group. This principally included the media team (newspaper article) and creative services (photography and poster design).

The young people had to be trained in research methods before they could make decisions e.g. they needed to learn about different research methods before they could decide which to choose. Often training and decision making took place almost simultaneously due to time constraints and the interest of the PRG in training; it was easier to engage the group in learning about the research process when they could discuss it in the context of the bullying project rather than in the abstract. Therefore, being trained in research and 'doing' the research project regularly took place at the same time.

The research project

Aim

The aim of the research project was to undertake research into young people's experiences of bullying. The PRG chose the following definition of bullying in Spring 2005 based on several sources in addition to their own opinions and thoughts:

Bullying is carried out by individuals or groups of people.

It is an imbalance of power where the bully/bullies have the upper hand.

It can be:

- 'Physical: pushing, kicking, hitting, pinching, any form of violence, threats;
- Verbal: name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, persistent teasing;
- Emotional: tormenting, threatening ridicule, humiliation, exclusion from groups or activities;
- Discrimination: racial taunts, graffiti, gestures;
- Sexual: unwanted physical contact, abusive comments'

(Bullying Online website)

Bullying can happen once or be repeated over any period of time.

The person who is being bullied might find it difficult to stop the bullying.

The bully (for personal reasons) may find it hard to stop bullying.

The group set three broad research questions about young people's experiences of bullying:

1. What happened?
2. Why do you think it happened?
3. What helped and what didn't help?

Method

The population from which the sample was drawn was Barnardo's Yorkshire service users. This was decided due to the relatively easy access to this population. The sample was self-selecting and consisted of 51 service users. Each one of Barnardo's Yorkshire services was sent an invitation to participate in the project, which included a poster designed by the PRG to advertise the project.

Young people from these services were invited to a research event called 'Bullying – tell us about it' in July 2005, which consisted of a drama workshop facilitated by Malcolm Stone of the PRU, and a photography workshops facilitated by Paul Carr and Marysa Dowling of Barnardo's Creative Services. Participants were also given the option to be interviewed by a member of the PRG or complete a questionnaire – these two methods formed the bulk of the data collection.

Following this event, the PRG were keen to gain a larger sample. Therefore services were again contacted with the option of hosting a similar research event, or to ask service users to complete questionnaires and return them anonymously. Two services hosted a research event in August 2005 in Hull and Kirklees. These consisted of a drama workshop and interviews/questionnaires. Several more services also returned questionnaires.

The PRG undertook the following research methods:



- **Observation:** at each event, each PRG member had six observation questions (see Table 1) to use as a basis for observing the events. This was used to recollect what happened at the research events at a later date, particularly when recounting an event to an absent member or for writing up the findings. Observation notes were either written down or tape-recorded according to the preference of the observer.
- **Interviews:** three PRG members undertook individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The interview schedule was developed by the whole group (see Table 2) and was fairly complex – several questions needed to be omitted if a participant answered ‘no’ to a previous question. Interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of each interviewee.
- **Questionnaires:** the PRG designed the questionnaire based on the interview questions so that the data from both methods could be merged. Questionnaires were submitted anonymously.

The photography and drama workshops were used to introduce the topic of bullying and prompt thinking and discussion around the subject; they were not used as a research method. The photographs from the workshop were used as illustrative material for the research output.

Table 1: Observation Questions

1. Has anything unexpected happened or surprised you?
2. What decisions has the group made?
3. What has the group done?
4. Who is helping someone else?
5. What activities are there?
6. Is anyone feeling uncomfortable? How do you know?
Has anyone asked if they are ok?
7. What’s the mood of the group?

Table 2: Interview Questions

<p>1a. What different forms of bullying do you know about? 1b. (Show our definition of bullying) 2. Do you think that there's a reason why bullies bully people? 3. Have you seen any form of bullying? 4. Did you get bullied?</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>YES</p> <p>5. What kind of bullying did you experience? 6. Where did it happen? 7. How did it happen? 8. Why do you think they picked on you? 9. What did you do? 10. Did anything help you? 11. Did you talk to someone? Who was it? 12. What other help did you get? 13. The help that you got – did it help? 14. In what way did it (or didn't it) help? 15. In a perfect world what would have happened?</p>	
<p>16. Have you bullied anyone at any time in your life? (NB refer back to confidentiality)</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>YES</p> <p>17. What did you do? 18. Looking back, how do you feel about the bullying now? 19. What changed if you were a bully? 20. Did anything help you? 21. Did you talk to someone? Who was it? 22. What other help did you get? 23. The help that you got – did it help? 24. In what way did it (or didn't it) help? 25. In a perfect world what would have happened?</p>	
<p>26. How do you feel now you've talked to us about it? 27. Would you like any information on receiving help on this problem?</p>	

Analysis

Once the data was collected, the group undertook data analysis. Two group members tallied the questionnaires. The tapes were listened to by several group members, and quotations were written down under the three main research questions. During this process, smaller themes emerged within the three questions.

The information was collated and the PRG interpreted tables of data to give the main findings for each theme. This resulted in 17 main findings that the PRG had interpreted from the data and judged to be the most important. The PRG then discussed which 6 of the 17 findings were the most important to them.

The PRG cross-checked their findings when presenting their project to a local school. They asked a class of Year 5 pupils to draw a picture of what bullying means to them and describe the picture to the whole class. The subject of the picture was recorded to see how this compared to the main research findings. It was found that the main actions on the drawings related to physical and verbal bullying, rather than any other type of bullying, which confirmed the PRG findings.

Ethics

Barnardo's Statement of Ethical Research Practice was used as a basis for approaching the ethics of this research study. The core conditions of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and feedback were honoured; these terms were explained to all participants. Parents and carers were sent consent forms prior to each research event. Each questionnaire was submitted anonymously and each interview was recorded with the verbal consent of the interviewee.

In addition, other ethical issues were addressed. For example:

- The questionnaire included information on a free local counselling service for teenagers, in case answering the questions added distress to the participant. Although local counsellors were asked to attend the July event, none were able to take part.
- During the research events, participants were given a card pouch (or 'traffic light') to wear around their neck, with interchangeable colours to allow facilitators to check how individuals were feeling. If participants wore yellow or red, they would be approached to ask if they were ok or needed their worker.

Findings

The 17 main findings from the research are listed below:

- On the questionnaire, more people talked about verbal bullying, compared to the interviews, where more people talked about physical bullying
- 3 people thought stealing was a form of bullying
- Most victims of bullying wish they had hit back or stuck up for themselves
- Some bullies would not change anything about their situation
- More people in the questionnaire had seen bullying than in the interviews
- Most victims wish the bullying hadn't happened
- The most common view on why bullies bully is that they have been bullied themselves
- Peer pressure was only mentioned once as a reason for bullying
- More people have seen bullying than have bullied or experienced bullying
- Most people were helped by those who they asked for help
- Most victims were advised to ignore the bully
- Everyone we interviewed had been a victim of bullying at some point and half of them had been a bully too
- There are 2 main types of bullying that people talk about – verbal and physical, and these are the types most experienced
- Most bullying happens within schools. More people in the interviews mentioned bullying in the home than in the questionnaires
- Most victims talked to someone - most talked to their family members – away from the bullying place
- The number of those victims not helped even when they asked for help is high
- A lot of bullies have told someone of their actions but most bullies found that talking when bullying didn't help them

The PRG decided to produce a series of 6 posters to disseminate the most important findings from the projects. For copies of the posters; research materials or other documents related to the project please email Claire.Turner@barnardos.org.uk

Table 3: Research findings

<p>1. Everyone has experienced bullying Everyone we interviewed had been a victim of bullying at some point and half of them had been a bully too.</p> <p>2. There are 2 main types of bullying The most common forms of bullying that people we spoke to talked about were verbal and physical bullying.</p> <p>3. Most bullying happens at school Most bullying happens within schools. People in the interviews also mentioned bullying in the home.</p> <p>4. Victims of bullying need someone to talk to Most victims of bullying need to talk to someone away from the place they've been bullied.</p> <p>5. Don't tell victims of bullying to ignore it The number of bullying victims not helped, even when they ask for help, is high. Most people are told to ignore it.</p> <p>6. Bullies do tell people what they have done A lot of bullies have told someone of their actions but most bullies found that talking about it didn't help them.</p>
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Discussion

The research findings highlight some important issues and confirm what is important to young people, rather than what adults *think* is important to them. The findings raise some key issues which may be worth further exploration:

- **Young people admitted to being bullies and have talked about this to others** - it is only possible to speculate why this may be: they may have felt comfortable talking to another young person; they may have been assured of their anonymity and felt confident in the confidence of the young researchers; bullies may not be as reluctant to admit anti-social behaviour as we assumed.

- **Bullying through new technology was rarely mentioned** - only 5 young people mentioned it as a form of bullying they knew about compared to 44 who mentioned physical bullying and 48 who highlighted verbal bullying. While newspapers may fill headlines about cyber-bullies, this is not the type of bullying that was recounted by young people.
- **Six young people mentioned being bullied at home** - this compared to 27 who mentioned school being the main location. From our data, it is not possible to extract more detail about this, but it is either a form of bullying that is not appreciated widely, or it is a term which young people may use to describe other types of abuse.
- **Young people are still being told to 'ignore it'** - despite the number and variety of anti-bullying initiatives in the UK, young people's concerns about bullying continue to be dismissed by adults. Young people are still hearing the advice 'ignore it' when it does not seem to be a useful response for most victims of bullying.

Dissemination

In May 2006 the findings were disseminated by sending the posters to Barnardo's Yorkshire services, from whom the data was collected and relevant staff across Barnardo's. There are plans to disseminate the posters more widely over the coming months. In addition, the PRG have presented their findings to a variety of audiences:

- Burley St Matthias primary school, Leeds, December 2005
- Barnardo's Yorkshire Senior Staff Meeting of Children's Service Managers, December 2005
- The group have also been approached to give a plenary paper at a Barnardo's conference about creating child-centred organisations later in 2006.

The PRG met with Bob Cook, from Barnardo's Policy and Standards Team in December 2005. On the basis of their research findings, the group critiqued Barnardo's existing anti-bullying guidance which was due for review in 2006. The PRG endorsed elements of the policy, suggested additions and highlighted areas which their research did not confirm. As a result of the meeting, Martin Ruddock (from the Policy and Standards Team) and Claire Turner will develop a new version which will be available later in 2006, with the possibility of this becoming policy rather than guidance for all of Barnardo's UK services.

Reflections on the process

Involving young people in research is not a straightforward process. Whilst we have achieved much through the project, the work has been time and resource intensive. This section looks at the outcomes for peer researchers; and what we have learnt from the project.

Outcomes for peer researchers

- **Skill development**

When evaluating the project, PRG members rated a list of skills from 'got worse at this' to 'improved a lot'. Nobody thought that their skill had worsened, and in only a minority of cases did they think their skill level had stayed the same (see table 4). The PRG collectively noticed most improvement in interviewing, observation and team working skills.

Table 4: Peer researchers' skill development

Skill	Worsened	Stayed the same	Improved a bit	Improved a lot
Designing (e.g. posters, questionnaires, interview schedule)	-	-	2	2
Interviewing	-	1	-	4
Decision-making	-	1	2	1
Observation	-	-	2	3
Planning	-	-	2	2
Presenting	-	1	1	2
Reading and writing	-	2	-	2
Social skills	-	-	3	1
Team working	-	1	-	4

In particular, the self-confidence and social skills of two young people improved notably. These two young people on several occasions did not want to take part in some opportunities such as interviewing or presenting, but by the end of the project they expressed a desire to attempt some of these skills in the future.

In relation to research skills, two members excelled during the interviewing who had lacked confidence when taking part in training on this research method. One member, who had been reluctant to join in many of the group activities, found a niche when undertaking observation

work. She focused like never before and attached much more importance to the activity than any of the other group members.

- **Opportunity for new experiences**

In addition to taking part in the research process, the PRG had the opportunity to take part in other new experiences. These experiences added to the young people's enjoyment of the group and their personal and professional development:

- Media training with Barnardo's media officer – resulting in a small article in the local newspaper
- Presenting to the Barnardo's Senior Staff meeting with approximately 30 Children's Service Managers present
- Designing professional posters with the Barnardo's Creative Services Team
- Disseminating results to a local school
- Having a different role or persona to that of a 'Barnardo's service user'
- Visiting Barnardo's Head Office in Essex

- **Making a difference**

When asked what their highlight of the project had been, one young person stated:

'My highlight has been doing the senior staff meeting and school, I can't particularly pick between them because both of them were so influential, also...when we went to go meet Bob down in London, Policy Meeting, I really liked that.'

Evidently, being able to make a difference was a key motivator for young people to join and stay part of the PRG. The young people did not want to simply to generate information about bullying; they wanted their research to be used to help tackle bullying. The impact on Barnardo's internal policy and guidance will be a key achievement of the project outcomes and influence. Barnardo's guidelines affect every one of the 370 services, and 120 000 service users. If each service has to consider the anti-bullying guidelines or policy, the effects of this small research project will be much greater than ever envisaged.

When asked to describe the project and why they were part of it for a funding bid application, young people cited a variety of reasons but to make a difference or to help others were a central theme throughout their responses (see table 5).

Table 5: Quotes from peer researchers

“I come to the group to help out, help everyone to notice bullying is around and give information about it. I like being involved in helping people. I want to try our best to help reduce bullying and get people to take notice.”

“The group matters as it’s a chance to make a difference. I come to the group because everyone is my friend, this project is important to me bullying is something we’ve all been through and we want to change it. We want to get information and a report together and take it to people who make decisions. It wouldn’t be a research project if we didn’t talk to other young people. I want everyone in Barnardo’s to know our names and everyone giving us money to do our own research. It’s important because we’re not having to find what they want us to find – we do our own thing. I wouldn’t have much of a life without the group it is the only adult conversation once a month that I get.”

“I come to the group to try and help stop bullying and talk about issues that affect us. It’s important because it affects everyone no matter how old you are: old or young there are a lot of bullies and victims. You can’t just see the bullies as bad though.”

“I hope that the project will mean more understanding into bullying, why it happens and help in schools in West and South Yorkshire to stop it. From the project I’d like bullying to come down (in number) and more understanding of how to deal with it. At the event it is important to get a wide range of views and opinions and what’s happened to them.”

“Personally I want to get more experience in handling delicate issues and planning experience as part of the project. Bullying affects everyone, more research should be done about it and this could be the first step in a long line to help do something about it.”

Learning from the project

This section looks at key areas of the project: participation; research and influencing. It reflects on the lessons learnt including any key challenges or questions which arose through the work.

Participation

This was primarily a research project. The facilitators were clear that this was not a support group and many of the young people continued to access Barnardo’s support services during the project. However, as with any ongoing group work with vulnerable young people the facilitators were involved in many tasks that weren’t research focused. In addition to practical issues such as organising a venue; food; transport; and risk assessments many of the young people faced personal crises during the life of the project. The facilitators spent time thinking, worrying about and dealing with the support needs of the group.

The group had mixed abilities and a considerable amount of energy was invested in helping the young people communicate with each other and work together. Developing the research project

was, at times, a slow process and keeping momentum was sometimes a challenge with a group that met once a month. This raised the question about who is best placed to facilitate peer research projects. Is there a disadvantage when the group is run by staff with more experience in research than working with young people? The facilitators had to learn how to manage a group.

The model for the project began with a partnership between the facilitators who provided the research expertise and the young people who provide their expertise on the issue to be researched. Whilst this model felt appropriate and worked well for most of the time, it did present the facilitators with challenges. The main challenge was when to intervene and when to let things go. This is a key dilemma for participation work. How do staff support young people if they disagree with their approach or the decision they want to make? In addition, how do you encourage young people and build their confidence without overstating their abilities and setting them up to fail? (For further discussion see the research section below).

There were examples of differing expectations and perspectives throughout the project. Before presentations and meetings, the facilitators were keen that the young people prepare thoroughly. However, at times young people felt that they did not need to prepare and were confident (perhaps at times overconfident) in their ability to 'ad lib' and take on the role of researcher.

From the beginning of the project the focus was on a piece of research led by young people. However, the facilitators had to be careful in gate-keeping the opportunities that the group were offered. Throughout the project the facilitators were contacted by a number of professionals who were interested in consulting with the group. Some opportunities were put to the group and the facilitators explained to the young people the impact that getting involved in these tasks would have on their own project.

This experience reflects an aspect of participation culture in which groups of young people may be in danger of being seen as 'for hire'. The peer researchers were not being asked to provide their views on research or bullying but on a range of professional led agendas. The facilitators had to reiterate on a number of occasions that this was a research group who were carrying out their own project. The identity of the young people was an issue throughout the project. Some professionals found it difficult to see them as researchers; and related to them primarily as service users.

During the latter stages of the project, it became clear that research can be a useful tool to support young people's participation. When the peer researchers met with Bob Cook they had had time and support to reflect on and explore the issue of bullying. Their recommendations and ideas were well thought through and based on the views of a larger group of young people. The meeting would have been very different if the young people had not done the research and had been asked to give their views 'on the spot' or with limited preparation. Young people (just like everybody else) need time and support to develop their views.

Research

There was a tension within the project between conducting a piece of rigorous research and maintaining the participation and interest of the group. For example, when the PRG were designing the interview questions, it was difficult to decide whether to make suggestions for

'better' questions than those listed, which would enhance the research study, but meant that the PRG were not in total control over the design of the methods. Always prioritising the quality and efficiency of the research process would have meant that it would have been better to undertake the research project by fully qualified researchers.

At that point it was necessary to question the purpose of the project. It was felt that it was more important to view the project as an opportunity for young people and to test the difference it makes to have young people carrying out the project instead of professional researchers, rather than insist upon the quality of the research study taking precedence. Therefore the extent to which the facilitators led, criticised, explained or corrected depended upon keeping the balance between allowing it to be a young people-led project and a 'good quality' research project by adult researcher standards.

Young people did bring a different perspective to the work: they asked different questions, they drew more on their own experience than professional researchers; and they focused much more on the practical application of research than knowledge creation. The impact of young people as researchers was evident in relation to ethics and engaging young people. During the design stage of the research project, the group very easily discussed and debated ethical issues related to their work. They were conscious of the position of the research participants, and the power imbalance inherent in the research process which included all three research methods. They were also able to suggest ways in which this power balance could be reduced e.g. they made suggestions of how to minimise negative impact of observation work (see Table 6 below).

They were very conscious of the necessity to reserve judgement if they interviewed anyone who had been a bully themselves, and volunteered viewpoints such as needing to understand the background of the bully and the reasons behind their behaviour. The peer researchers were also clear that they wanted to show their appreciation to the young people who had taken part in the research and ensure that everyone who took part in the group activities was given a thank you gift and a card.

Table 5: PRG suggestions for minimising the power imbalance in observation work

Tips to minimise the negative feelings people might experience when we observe them

- Don't single anyone out
- Make eye contact but try not to stare
- Facilitators to explain what we are doing during the workshop
- Be near enough to record what is going on but not close enough to put people off.

In relation to engaging with young people, some of the peer researchers were skilled in this area. The peer researchers took to the fieldwork tasks particularly responsibly and at the events carried out individual interviews to a very high standard. In the workshops some peer researchers took on a 'peer motivator' role of supporting young people to participate through their own example and relating and re-explaining things when necessary.

However, it is difficult to conclude whether or not young people prefer a peer researcher to an adult or even that it makes a difference to their agreement to participate in research. At the beginning of the research events we asked the participants to anonymously sign up for interviews if they wanted to. In both cases this got a relatively low (less than 50%) sign up from the young people. However, this number did increase when we asked again later in the session. This may suggest that it is not necessarily the age of the researcher that matters but that is more about having the time to make a decision about the research and the person carrying it out before deciding whether to participate.

Influencing

Earlier on in the project, Claire Turner gave a presentation about the work at a conference on research governance. As part of this she raised the question:

*“My concerns are not around the young people’s ability to carry out research but around the issues of power and influence. Will young people be taken seriously by professionals? How does the peer research group move forward from professionals being **interested** in their research towards professionals being **influenced** by their research?”*

The fact that this is a young person’s research project has enhanced our ability to generate interest in the research; if this had been a adult-led PRU research project there is little doubt that the interest and opportunities for dissemination would have been much smaller. This has been a positive development for the PRG and has led to the dissemination opportunities and an opportunity to influence Barnardo’s anti-bullying practice.

The partnership model of participation has been crucial to the influencing element of the project. Whilst young people’s involvement was sufficient to generate initial interest, the PRG had to build strategic links in order for the work to have influence. Claire Turner, the project manager has a strategic role within Barnardo’s and could link the findings from the project with other work happening across the organisation.

In addition, the facilitators kept Barnardo’s Director of Children’s Services in Yorkshire and the Regional Management Team informed about the project’s development. As a result, the management of the PRG has now been taken over by the Volunteer Co-ordinator post in Yorkshire. This will enable the group to be sustainable past the life of the bullying project.

Conclusions

The PRG has demonstrated that it is possible to involve young people in research in a way that benefits them personally and can make a difference. The project suggests that whilst research projects led by professional adult researchers may be of better 'quality' young people-led research work has the potential for greater impact. Furthermore, it has shown that research can be a useful tool to support young people's participation. However, this type of project is very resource intensive and young people can require a considerable amount of support and investment to carry out a small piece of research work.