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1. Purpose

This policy is designed to ensure consistent, high quality child participation practice in all Suffolk Artlink's programmes and activities.

It is intended to establish a safe, meaningful environment for participation and minimise the risk to children.

It aims to provide a framework that gives guidance and direction to staff enabling them to continuously review and improve their service to children/young people.

2. Persons Affected

- Suffolk Artlink staff
- Participants

3. Policy

Suffolk Artlink is dedicated to safeguarding children and young people and is fully committed to the following principles of participation, as reflected by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- Children have rights to be listened to, to freely express their views on all matters that affect them, and to freedom of expression, thought, association and access to information.
- Measures should be put in place to encourage and facilitate their participation in accordance with their age and maturity.
- Participation should promote the best interest of the child and enhance the personal development of each child.
- All children have equal rights to participation without discrimination.
- All children have the right to be protected from manipulation, violence, abuse and exploitation.

When developing areas of work involving the participation of children it is our policy that the following standards will be applied;

- The approach used will be ethical, transparent, honest and accountable. The children will be able freely to express their views and opinions and have them treated with respect.
- There will be clarity of purpose about their participation and they will understand how much impact they can have on decision making and who will make the final decision.
- A child's participation will be relevant and voluntary. Their involvement will build on their personal knowledge – the information and insights they have about their own lives, their communities and issues that affect them. They can withdraw their involvement at any stage.
- The environment that the work will take place in will be appropriate, child-friendly and enabling. The quality and effectiveness of children's participation and their ability to benefit from it are strongly influenced by a positive, appropriate environment being created for them.
- Equal opportunities will be applied throughout to ensure that all children who want to have an equal chance to participate. All children will have an equal chance to participate if they wish to.
- Staff involved in this work will be effective and confident. Staff will understand how to effectively and appropriately work with children and young people through the involvement process. They will understand the wide range of methods that can be used to facilitate this involvement.
- Participation will promote the safety and protection of children. We will ensure that risks of abuse and or other negative consequences of their involvement are minimised.
- Follow up and evaluation will always happen. Respect for children's involvement is indicated by our commitment to provide feedback and/or follow up and to evaluate the quality and impact of children's involvement.

4. Definitions

Children: This includes anyone up to the age of 18.

Participation: These are opportunities to express a view, influence decision-making and achieve change. This is through an informed and willing involvement of the children, including the most marginalised, those of different ages and abilities, in any matter either directly or indirectly concerning them.

5. Verification

The Suffolk Artlink will verify this policy through feedback from and supervision of Suffolk Artlink staff leading projects and programmes, evaluation and consultation processes applied to projects and developing appropriate training to ensure that evaluation of Suffolk Artlink's work remains relevant, appropriate and fully supportive of the Youth Involvement Policy.

6. Procedure

When developing areas of work involving the participation of children the following procedures will be applied;

6.1 The approach used will be ethical, transparent, honest and accountable.

There are inevitable imbalances in power and status between adults and children. An ethical approach is needed in order for children's participation to be genuine and meaningful.

- Children are able to freely express their views and opinions and have them treated with respect.
- There is clarity of purpose about children's participation and honesty about its parameters. Children understand how much impact they can have on decision-making and who will make the final decision.
- The roles and responsibilities of all involved (children and adults) are clearly outlined, understood and agreed upon.
- Clear goals and targets are agreed upon with the children concerned.
- Children are provided with, and have access to, relevant information regarding their involvement.
- Children are involved from the earliest possible stage and are able to influence the design and content of participatory processes.
- 'Outside' adults involved in any participatory processes are sensitised to working with children, clear about their role and willing to listen and learn.
- Organisations and workers are accountable to children for the commitments they make.
- Where the process of involvement requires representation from a wider group of children, the selection of representatives will be based on principles of democracy and non-discrimination.
- The barriers and challenges that participating children may have faced in other spheres of their lives are considered and discussed with the children involved to reduce any potential negative impacts from their participation.

6.2 A child's participation will be relevant and voluntary.

Their involvement will build on their personal knowledge – the information and insights they have about their own lives, their communities and issues that affect them.

- The issues are of real relevance to the children being involved and draw upon their knowledge, skills and abilities.
- Where practicable, children are involved in setting the criteria for selection and representation for participation.
- Children have time to consider their involvement and processes are established to ensure that they are able to give their personal, informed consent to their participation.
- Children's participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time they wish.
- Children are involved in ways, at levels and at a pace appropriate to their capacities and interests.
- Children's other time commitments are respected and accommodated (eg, to home, work and school).
- Ways of working and methods of involvement incorporate, and build on, supportive local structures, knowledge and practice and take into consideration social, economic, cultural and traditional practices.
- Support from key adults in children's lives (eg, parents/guardians, teachers) is gained as appropriate to ensure wider encouragement and assistance for the participation of the children.

6.3 The environment that the work will take place in will be appropriate, child-friendly and enabling.

The quality and effectiveness of children's participation and their ability to benefit from it are strongly influenced by a positive, appropriate environment being created for them.

- Ways of working will be used that help build self-esteem and self-confidence of children of different ages and abilities so that they feel they are able to contribute and that they have valid experience and views to contribute.
- Methods of involvement are developed in partnership with children so that they reflect their preferred mediums of expression.
- Sufficient time and resources are made available for quality participation and children are properly supported to prepare for their participation.
- Adults (including children's own parents/guardians) are made aware of the value of children's participation and are enabled to play a positive role in supporting it (e.g. through awareness-raising, reflection and capacity building).
- Child-friendly meeting places are used where children feel relaxed, comfortable and have access to the facilities they need. The meeting places must be accessible to children with disabilities.
- Organisational or official procedures are designed/modified to facilitate (rather than intimidate) children and make less experienced children feel welcome.
- Support is provided where necessary to share information and/or build skills and capacity to enable children, individually and collectively, to participate effectively.
- Children are asked what information they need and accessible information is shared with children in good time, in child friendly formats and in languages that the children understand, including children with visual or hearing impairments.

- In situations where children meet with different native/first languages, access to written information and professional interpretation is provided that allows for children's full participation in discussions.
- Non-technical language is used in all discussions involving children and/or all jargon or technical terms are clearly explained.

6.4 Equal opportunities will be applied throughout to ensure that all children who want to have an equal chance to participate.

- All children have an equal chance to participate and systems are developed to ensure that children are not discriminated against because of age, race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
- Children's involvement aims to include all rather than a few, this could mean reaching out to children in their local settings rather than inviting representatives to a central point, where resources and facilities allow.
- Participatory practice with children is flexible enough to respond to the needs, expectations and situation of different groups of children – and to regularly re-visit these concerns.
- The age range, gender and abilities of children are taken into account in the way participation is organised (e.g. in the way information is presented).
- Those working with children are able to facilitate an environment that is non-discriminatory and inclusive.
- No assumptions are made about what different groups of children can and cannot do.
- All children are given an equal opportunity to voice their opinions and have their contributions reflected in any outcomes of a participatory process, including in processes that involve both children and adults.
- If there is a limit to how many children can participate, children themselves select from among their peers those who will represent them in participatory initiatives based on the principles of democracy and inclusion.
- Influential adults are engaged to gain family and community support for the participation of discriminated-against groups.

6.5 Staff involved in this work will be effective and confident.

Staff will understand how to effectively and appropriately work with children and young people through the involvement process. They will understand the wide range of various methods that can be used to facilitate this involvement.

- All staff and managers are sensitised to children's participation and understand the organisational commitment to children's participation.
- Staff are provided with appropriate training, tools and other development opportunities in participatory practice to enable them to work effectively and confidently with children of different ages and abilities.
- Staff are properly supported and supervised, and evaluate their participation practice.
- Specific technical skills or expertise (e.g. in communication, facilitation, conflict resolution or multi-cultural working) is built up through a combination of recruitment, selection, staff development and practice exchange.

- Relations between individual staff, and between staff and management, model appropriate behaviour, treating each other with respect and honesty.
- Support is provided for managers and staff for whom children's participation represents a significant personal or cultural change, without this being regarded as a problem.
- Staff are able to express any views or anxieties about involving children in the expectation that these will be addressed in a constructive way.

6.6 Participation will promote the safety and protection of children.

We will ensure that risks of abuse and or other negative consequences of their involvement are minimised. This should be read in conjunction with Suffolk Artlink's Safe Guarding Policies and Procedures, Data Protection GDPR Policy and Code of Conduct for Staff.

- The protection rights of children are paramount in the way children's participation is planned and organised.
- Children involved in participation work are aware of their right to be safe from abuse and know where to go for help if needed. Children, parents and carers, artists and volunteers should be aware who is responsible for handling disclosures and how to contact them.
- Skilled, knowledgeable staff are delegated to address and coordinate child protection issues during participatory processes.
- Staff organising a participatory process will comply with Suffolk Artlink's Safeguarding Policies and Procedures.
- Safeguards are in place to minimise risks and prevent abuse (e.g., children are adequately supervised and protected at all times; risk assessments are in place; children are protected from abuse from other children).
- Staff recognise their legal and ethical obligations and responsibilities (e.g. in respect of their own behaviour or what to do if they are told about the inappropriate behaviour of others). A system for reporting critical incidents is in place and understood by all staff.
- Child protection procedures recognise the particular risks faced by some groups of children and the extra barriers they face to obtaining help.
- Careful assessment is made of the risks associated with children's participation in speaking out, campaigning or advocacy. Depending upon the risks identified, steps may be needed to protect children's identity or to provide follow-up measures to give protection (e.g. to ensure their safe reintegration into their communities).
- Consent is obtained for the use of all information provided by children and information identified as confidential needs to be safeguarded at all times. Staff must comply with Suffolk Artlink Data Protection (GDPR) Policy and Procedures.
- A formal complaints procedure is set up to allow children involved in participatory activities to make a complaint in confidence about any issue concerning their involvement. Information about the complaints procedure is accessible to children in relevant languages and formats.
- No photographs, videos or digital images of a child can be taken or published without that child's explicit consent for a specific use.
- Unless otherwise agreed, it must not be possible to trace information back to individual/ groups of children.

- Responsibilities relating to liability, safety, travel and medical insurance are clearly delegated and effectively planned for.

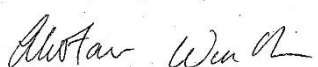
6.7 Follow up and evaluation will always happen

Children are supported to participate in follow-up and evaluation processes.

- Follow-up and evaluation is addressed during the planning stages, as an integral part of any participation initiative.
- Children are supported and encouraged to share their participatory experiences with peer groups, local communities, organisations and projects with which they may be involved.
- Children are given rapid and clear feedback on the impact of their involvement, the outcome of any decisions, next steps and the value of their involvement.
- Feedback reaches all children involved.
- Children are asked about their satisfaction with the participation process and for their views on ways in which it could be improved.
- The results of monitoring and evaluation are communicated back to the children involved in an accessible and child-friendly way, and their feedback is taken into account in future participation work.
- Mistakes identified through evaluation are acknowledged and commitments given about how lessons learned will be used to improve participatory processes in the future.
- Adults will evaluate how they have translated and implemented children's priorities and recommendations into their policies, strategies and programmes.
- Where appropriate and practicable, sustainability of support is discussed with children. Adults will provide clear feedback to children regarding the extent/limit of their commitment to support children's ongoing initiatives.

5. Revision History

The Suffolk Artlink Board will review this policy triennially or when there is a change in legislation.

Date agreed	Date amended	
19/04/2021		

Appendix 1: Rewards and incentives

As far as possible staff should consult young people on the types of incentive and reward they would prefer for a particular task. Staff must work within this policy when doing so.

Suffolk Artlink recognises the importance of building in appropriate incentives and rewards within the charity's work. These rewards and incentives are informed by previous projects and feedback from the young people involved, and may also be developed during the course of the project, in response to consultation with the young people concerned, thus ensuring they remain appropriate and relevant.

Expenses

Expenses may be paid, for example, for travel, where this is agreed in advance. Expenses are reimbursed against receipts.

Incentives

There is a wide range of incentives that staff can use to encourage young people to become involved in/with Suffolk Artlink. These include:

- Learning new skills and ideas (through activities or training)
- Building confidence and self esteem
- Meeting new people and making friends
- Having fun
- Experience days e.g. trips to events
- Having their voice heard

Rewards

These may include: certificates, accreditation, prizes, a meal as part of the working session.

Rewards will be fair and equitable and will reflect the task, time and contribution of the young people. The amount should be agreed by the budget holder in line with this policy.

The use of any rewards that have a financial cost and are not stated in the agreed project or programme budget should be discussed with a Co-Director or the General Manager before they are offered.