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Hello, my name is Amy Miskimmin-Logan and I am a Participation Development worker for [Our Hearings, Our Voice](#), an independent board of children and young people with experience of the hearings system. I'm here today to talk about participation, what our experiences are and what we've learned about it. So a little bit about our organization. Our Hearings, Our Voice is a small board of hearings experienced young people from all over Scotland. At present, we've got 10 young people on our board and their age between 14 to 20, although it's open to children aged from eight years old. We come together about six times a year, to carry out work around improving and reforming the Children's Hearings System. And we do this by providing young people with opportunities to share their ideas about the hearing system and their experiences, we ensure these ideas are passed on to a relevant audience, people who are in a position to implement legislative change, often that involves co-design or co-delivery of these changes in between our six board meetings. So here are a few examples of ongoing improvement and influence work that our young people have been involved with. And I would like to draw your attention to two of these in particular, which is a peer mentoring programme within Our Hearings, Our Voice, and recruiting and reaching out to more children through our magazine. The reason I want to draw your attention to these is because these two ideas came from the young people ourselves and they have participation at the centre. The young people asked if you could set up a peer mentoring service, which would allow more experienced board members the opportunity to mentor newer members of the board for the primary purposes of encouraging participation, and ensuring that new members have a voice at board meetings. They were very passionate about that. They said we know what it's like to start something new and not be able to have a voice not be able to jump in, we want to help them. So we'd like to set up a peer mentoring service. So we're in the middle of doing that at the moment. The magazine is an idea that two young people came up with recently, and we're working on at the moment, it's quite an exciting time for us. We're co-producing a magazine with our board members, and it will be distributed through hearing service centres all around Scotland. The magazine is aimed at children and young people who are attending a hearing and it contains information and advice about the hearing itself, along with some fun and relaxing activities and

information about how to get involved with the work that Our Hearings, Our Voice do. So it's run by the young people for young people, we don't want adults to be the ones writing the articles. We don't want adults to be deciding exactly who gets in it, it is the children and the young people themselves who have designed it and who are contributing to it. I'd like to draw your attention to this as well. It's our response to some of the issues that we've discussed in the Children's Hearing System, and we call it our 40 calls to action. The majority of organisations around the Children's Hearing System have taken these on board and they report back to the young people on what changes that they've made as a result. This includes most recent work on reform through the Hearing System Working Group and other examples of organisations who have taken the 40 calls to action on board at the Children's reporter, Children's Hearings Scotland, The Children's Hearing Improvement Partnership and The Promise Scotland. Some of the calls to action are about rights around participation. As you can see here, I'll just zoom in so you can have a good look at them. 13 of the 40 calls are about participation which just shows exactly how important it is to our young people. They cover themes like language, using feedback, respect, involvement, support, choice and flexibility. Participation is so important to our young people. And I would like to share with you how we at Our Hearings, Our Voice plan for effective, inclusive and meaningful participation.

Our Hearings, Our Voice uses Professor Laura Lundy's model of participation for the basis of its practice, which gives us a solid rights based and ethical framework for our work. The model is founded on the belief that children and young people must have agency over their own lives and have their rights promoted, protected and respected. They should be full and active participants in all decision making that affects their lives. The frameworks and evolving model of practice as the children and young people will be supported to explore, develop, test and evaluate their ideas and thinking around their priorities, what they want to see changed, the permission's that they want to be involved in or they're interested in, and the broader development of the board. And there will be times when the board try something and it doesn't work. That's okay, that's all part of the learning process and allows the young people to develop key life and learning development skills. The Lundy model, as you can see, creates four distinct factors for consideration the right to space, the right to voice, audience and influence. And what I'd like to do now is go through each of these factors in turn, in relation to our practice at Our Hearings, Our Voice and I'm going to intersperse this for things that we've learned the good and the not so good as we've been going along with that. So the first factor is space and we strive to create inclusive spaces and an environment that makes involvement as easy as possible for everyone, regardless of barriers like age, gender, disability, sexuality, or ethnicity. We do that by ensuring the places that Our Hearings, Our Voice meet are comfortable, they're safe, they're warm, they're welcoming. And we let the board members know ahead of time where we'll be meeting and what it looks like. So we'll send pictures and videos like the ones that I've got up here, I'll send those out in a video link on WhatsApp, or in a few photographs to let them know what to expect. And we aim to create practices that ensure Our Hearings, Our Voice is a space that enables children, young people to explore, learn, thrive and develop within a safe environment. We've always got drinks and snacks and let them choose themselves available to the children and young people throughout all our work. We create fun opportunities for the group to get to know each other, to build relationships, which is at the heart of our practice, to learn and work together. And there's a trusted support worker on hand to provide support and encouragement throughout our board meetings. We also ensure that venues we use for meetings have got suitable space and support available so members can actually opt out of

activities if needed. And something that we've learned – this is something that's maybe not so good is that even if we put these things in place, we remove every conceivable barrier, and we think really carefully about why they might not get involved, we can't just assume that people will participate, we cannot make the assumption of participation. And I've learned personally that a large part of participation is choice. Sometimes with the best will in the world, some of our young people will choose not to engage with activities and work with plan. And that's okay. And I try to get to the forefront of my mind that the young people we work with have got their own busy lives and priorities. But if they do choose to participate, we do all we can to ensure that they are supported. At Our Hearings, Our Voice, we uphold the right to participate through making an informed choice ensuring our young people have all the information and support that they need to make a freewill choice whether they'd like to be involved or not. Something that I've learned is that nobody can participate fully if they don't have all the information that they need in order to do so. And it can be challenging to establish what information our young people need, or what they already have. An example of this that I'd like to share with you was during a recent consultation for the Children's Care and Justice Bill, so what we did was me and my boss Gordon, travelled around Scotland and we met up with each of our board members individually, we took them for lunch, we had a chat with them. We went through the consultation. There's like 30 questions. And we asked her opinions on them. What happened was these questions are about things like the regulatory landscape around secure care, cross border placements, whether there's a requirement for local strategic needs assessments prior to approval of new residential childcare provision. That's just a few examples. Even with support, it was really clear that our board members did not possess the requisite information and background knowledge to participate fully in the consultation in an informed way. I didn't even know what some of the questions were about. So I found it really difficult to explain that to our young people. It's something we absolutely have to be mindful of when we plan participation, the presumption of informed choice, we need to make sure these young people have got all the information that they need.

We're continually supporting our young people to develop the skills and confidence to speak for themselves and others. An example of this being through the peer mentoring programme that I mentioned previously at the beginning of the presentation. Through the mentoring programme, and through all our work children, young people and adults demonstrate respect for each other's views and we respect the children and young people are the experts in their own lives. We think really carefully about having inclusive and creative ways for young people to communicate their ideas. I've got a picture up here to kind of demonstrate that from you. The board members can present their ideas and thinking through discussion through writing through drawing through games, and arts crafts, post it notes, all different ways. Pretty much like what we've done today with this hybrid model that we've got here. We recently carried out some work with two people from the Office of the Chief Designer and they facilitated an amazing opportunity for our young people. And they were creating prototypes of ideas that they had for improving the Children's Hearing System. I'd like to show you some ideas of what they came up with. So here's one of them here. This was a prototype that one of our young boys came up with. As an idea for an app where the young children attending a hearing can access and manipulate a diagram of the hearings room, they can move the furniture around, they can decide who sits where I want my mom here, I want my social worker there. I want my teacher here. I don't want my dad in the room for this reason or whatever. So that was his idea. He was trying to explain it we kind of got what he meant, but when he made it and was able to talk through it, he was able to become more involved,

he was able to bring his ideas to life almost. Returning to Lundy's model of practice, the next factor that we take into consideration for participation is our audience. We support the children and young people to understand how decisions are made, who they need to communicate their messages to, who these people are and what they can or should do. So for example, CHIP, SCRA or CHS. We ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to communicate directly with decision makers who have the responsibility to listen and take action on their priorities. We also aim to facilitate opportunities and creative ways for children and young people and the adult decision makers to communicate and work together. Sheriff David Mackie and Christina Spicer, from The Promise have played active roles, in several of our board meetings, listening to the young people's ideas and experiences directly and actioning them. And it means so much to young people, instead of just saying what tell me what is you want to do, I'm gonna feed that back to all the VIPs all the important people, all the bigwigs, they are actually they're listening to them, they're actually saying to the young people, what is it you want to change, I'm going to listen to that this is what I'm going to do about it. Audience is a huge part of participation. I've included this little picture down here of Kirsty, our research officer at SCRA. So this is an example of something that she sent to me that I was able to share with young people before a board meeting. So let them know this is someone who's going to be in attendance. This is a little bit of information about her. This is what she looks like. And this is what to expect. And there's a quote here that we've got as well, "Something I've learned about participations that our young people have actually felt in the past and have said this, that they're given a platform to speak, that ideas are listened to, but nothing gets done." And this quote from Bennie, one of our board members sums it up perfectly. He said, "I think using our own experiences can help us influence adults, and will help us achieve our calls to action for change in the Children's Hearing System. I want to see the adults putting what we're seeing into actions. This is not just about saying, Oh, that's great, well done. We want to see action." And that's something that I've heard time and again at other events that I've been to where young people have been. They say people say, Oh, what do you think about this? What do you think about that, and we share our ideas. But we never actually hear what's done with that information we never get to hear because of what you said, this legislative change took place because of what you shared with me. But you don't experiences which was quite a difficult thing for you to share. This is the huge impact it's had. It's so important that they see that

We ensure that children's and young people's views and rights are taken seriously, and that their voices are acted upon. And part of this is about contributing towards culture change. A recent example, this was a presentation that two of our young people deliver to SCRA, where they shared examples of children's hearings and described how intimidating it can feel, to speak to panel members. That wasn't an easy thing for them to do. They described exactly what that feeling is when they walk into a hearing and they speak to a panel member that they've never seen before. That left them kind of exposed emotionally and quite vulnerable. But it was very powerful. Many people attending the presentation fed back to our young people that their words really affected them. And had given them a lot to think about in relation to their own practice. And we shared that feedback, I copied and pasted it all from the team's chat and shared it to them. We routinely offer feedback to children and young people to ensure accountability and evidence of change. So for example, we recently received and shared a letter from Clare Haughey, the Minister for children and young people. It was thanking the board members for taking part in the consultation I mentioned earlier, the Children's Care and Justice Bill, so we shared that with them to say thank you. We also share regular updates with the board about how their ideas

and suggestions have been actioned and changes to the law that have been made as a result of their work. And there's three ideas up here that I'd like to share from our last board meeting. The one before this was a one on the left was a leaflet that some of our young people designed and they said we'd like this to be taken into our hearings with us. The one in the middle was the magazine that they came up with that I spoke about earlier on that they've designed themselves. And the last one was something that one of our young people designed and it's something that actually used to exist in hearings centres, but for some reason, I think it might be COVID, they did away with it, it was just a little profile picture of the panel members and a bit of information about them. And they said it really puts them at ease. But it's something that had kind of fallen away with COVID. And they've never quite reinstated it. Maybe that's been overlooked. But it really does mean a lot to young people. So she was able to share that and see what that would look like for her and how that would help her in hearings. So that brings us to the end of the presentation on how we address participation at Our Hearings, Our Voice and what we've learned. If you'd like to get in touch, you can follow us on Twitter, or you can contact us through Instagram, Facebook, or by email. You can visit our website as well to learn a little bit more about Our Hearings, Our Voice and our ongoing mission to improve the Children's Hearings System. We've got a constant recruitment going on. So if you think of any young people that like to get involved as well, please just give me a shout. We're always looking to welcome more people. And thanks very much for listening.

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