Meaningful participation of children and young people in decisions about their care

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Exchange March 2019

Schedule for the session

- 9.30-9.50am Clive Introduction and objectives for the session

- 9.50am to 10.20am Lorna and Chloe- what does research say regarding young people, meetings, and decision making

- 10.20am to 11.30am Clive- Feedback from 2 research studies on children's participation

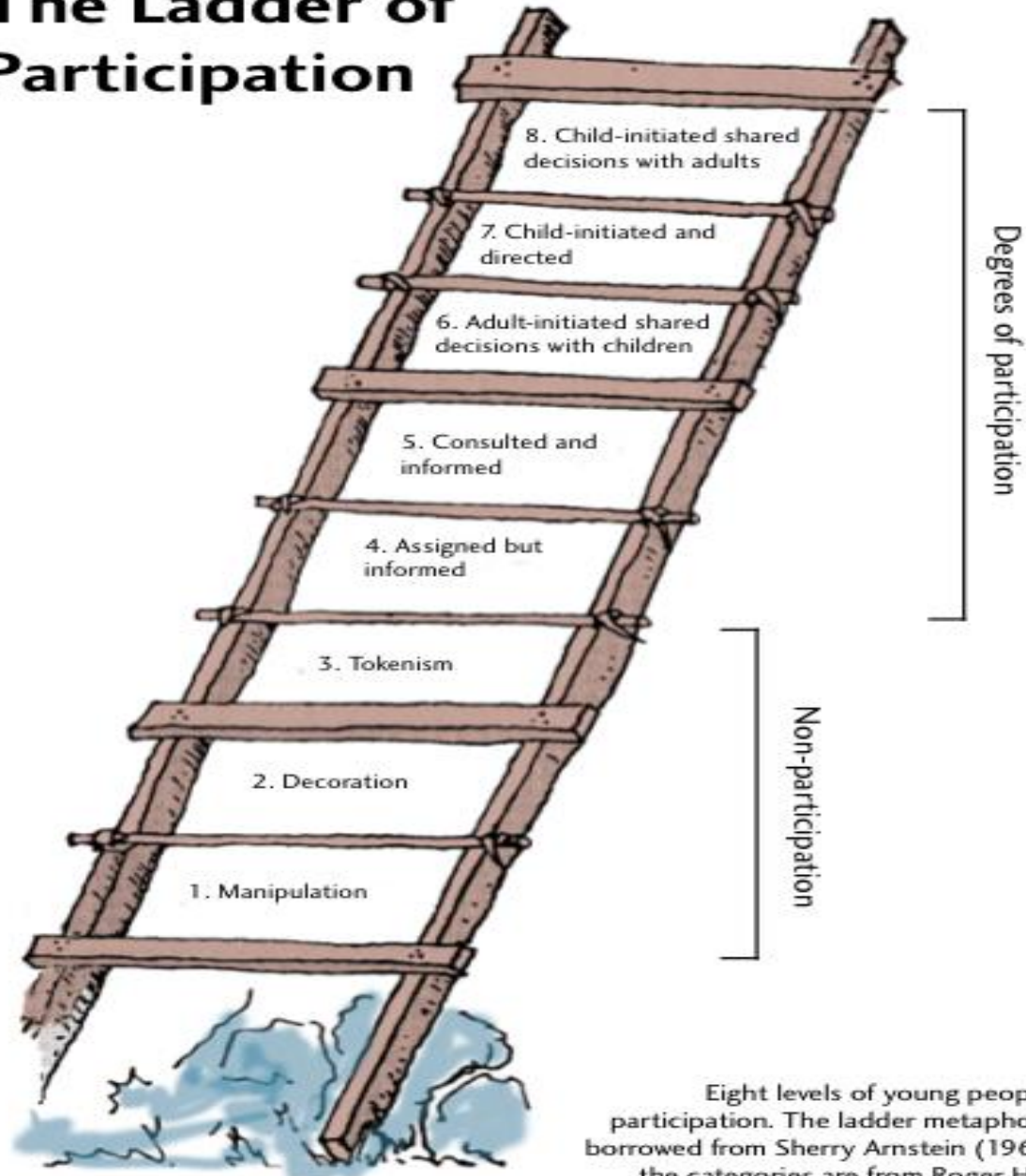- 11.30am to 12.30 Voices From Care and Children In Wales

Workshop Objectives

- To consider what we mean by children's participation
- To feedback findings from research with children and professionals
- To discuss barriers and enablers to ensuring children and young people have an opportunity to participate meaningfully
- To consider how we can improve practice in relation to children's participation

# Theoretical and practical questions

- What do we mean by participation?
- What is the aim and purpose of participation?
- What counts as effective participation?
- How do we evaluate participation?
- Who participates, in whose space, under whose rules?

The Ladder of Participation

8. Child-initiated shared decisions with adults

7. Child-initiated and directed

6. Adult-initiated shared decisions with children

5. Consulted and informed

4. Assigned but informed

3. Tokenism

2. Decoration

1. Manipulation

Degrees of participation

Non-participation

Eight levels of young people's participation. The ladder metaphor is borrowed from Sherry Arnstein (1969): the categories are from Roger Hart.

The 'climbing wall' of participation (Thomas 2002)

autonomy   choice   control   information   support   voice
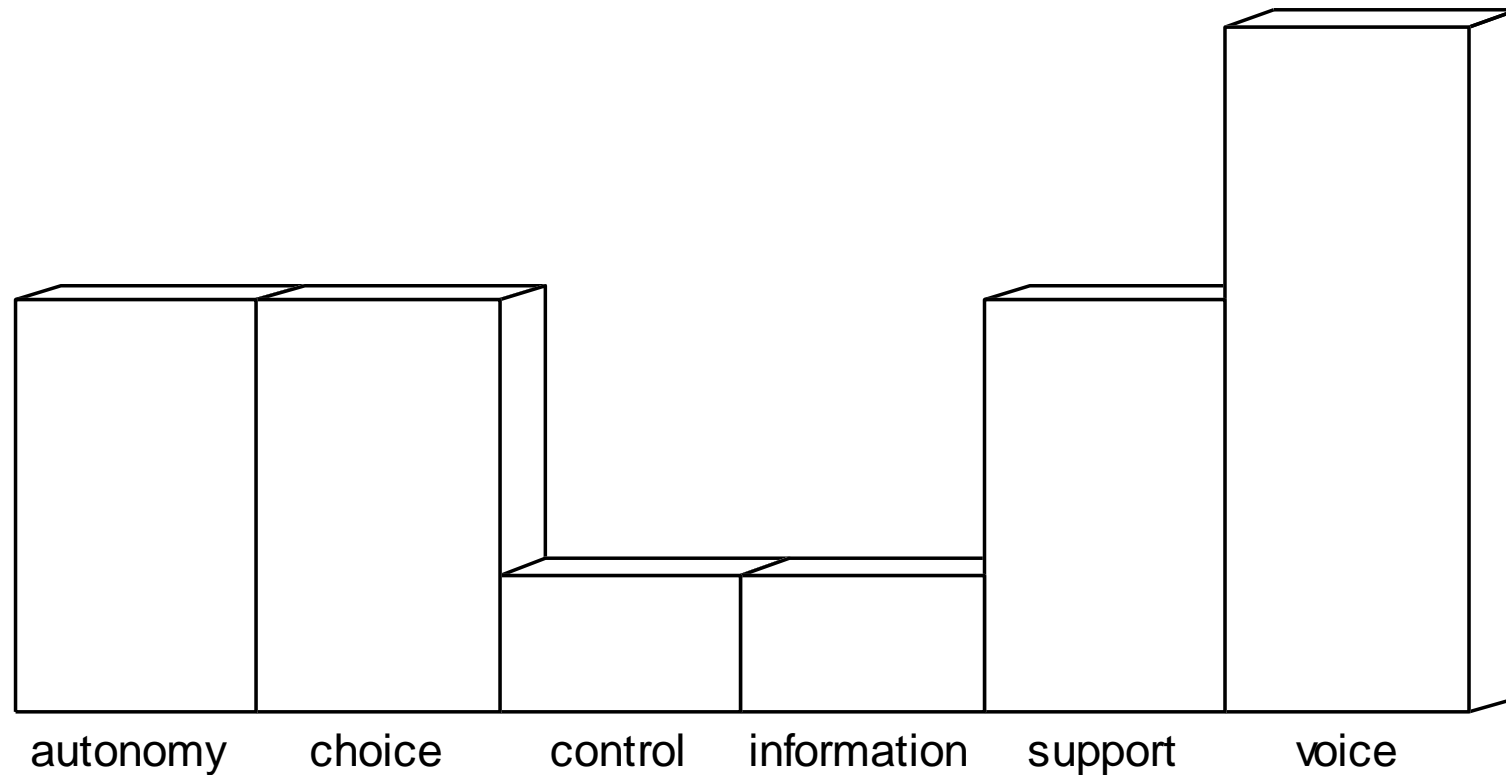
Task 1 - Consider:

➢How important is children's participation to you?

➢Why is children's participation important?

Children's Participation: why is it important?

- Participation can be seen as a protective factor for vulnerable children and young people leading to increased levels of confidence, self-efficacy and self-worth (Dickens et al. 2015).

- Participation by children matters because it an acknowledgment of their civil rights and because without listening to children and understanding how they experience their world, how can we begin to determine what will ensure their protection and enable them to grow into healthy adults? (Schofield and Thoburn 1996, p.1).

Children's Participation-why is it important

- All decisions relating to a child should take their wishes and feelings into account considering their age and understanding (Munro review 2012).

- Maltreated children who do not feel involved may be left with feelings of powerlessness (Bell 2002).

- It will improve the practice and decision making of the agency (Dickens et al 2015).

Children's participation in family and professional meetings: Findings of a Realist Review

Overview

- Method
- Preparing for the meeting
- During the meeting
- Incorporating non attending
- After the meeting
- The practitioner's role

Method

- The Realist Approach

- Theory Building
  - Literature
  - Consultation

What Works Centre for Children's Social Care:

Signs of Safety review: https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research_reports/signs-of-safety-findings-from-a-mixed-methods-systematic-review-focussed-on

Scoping review on Reducing the need for children to enter care: https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research_reports/reducing-the-need-for-children-to-enter-care

Young People's Involvement in Meetings
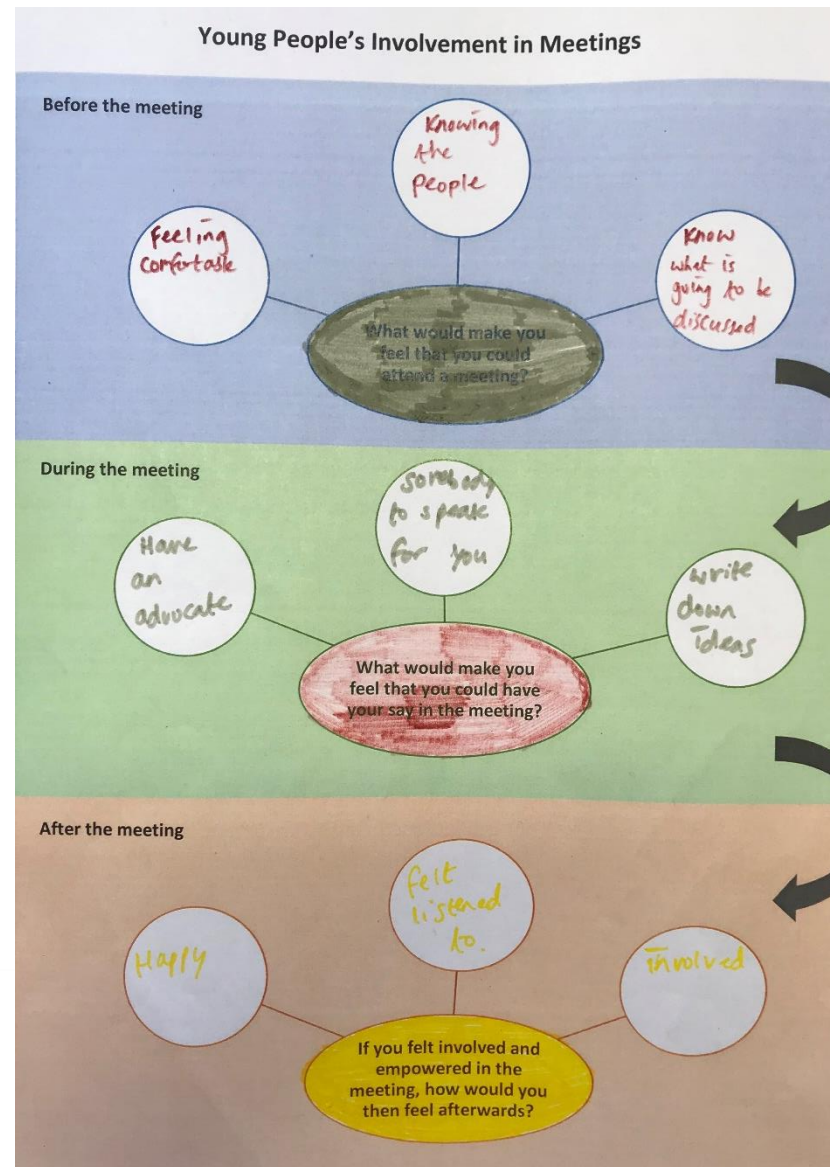
Before the meeting: Pre conditions
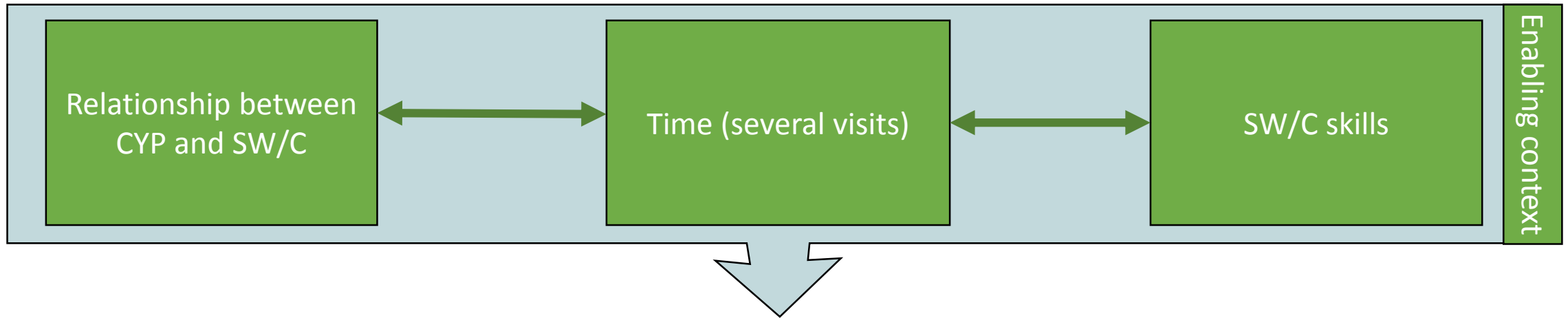
Before the meeting: Preparation
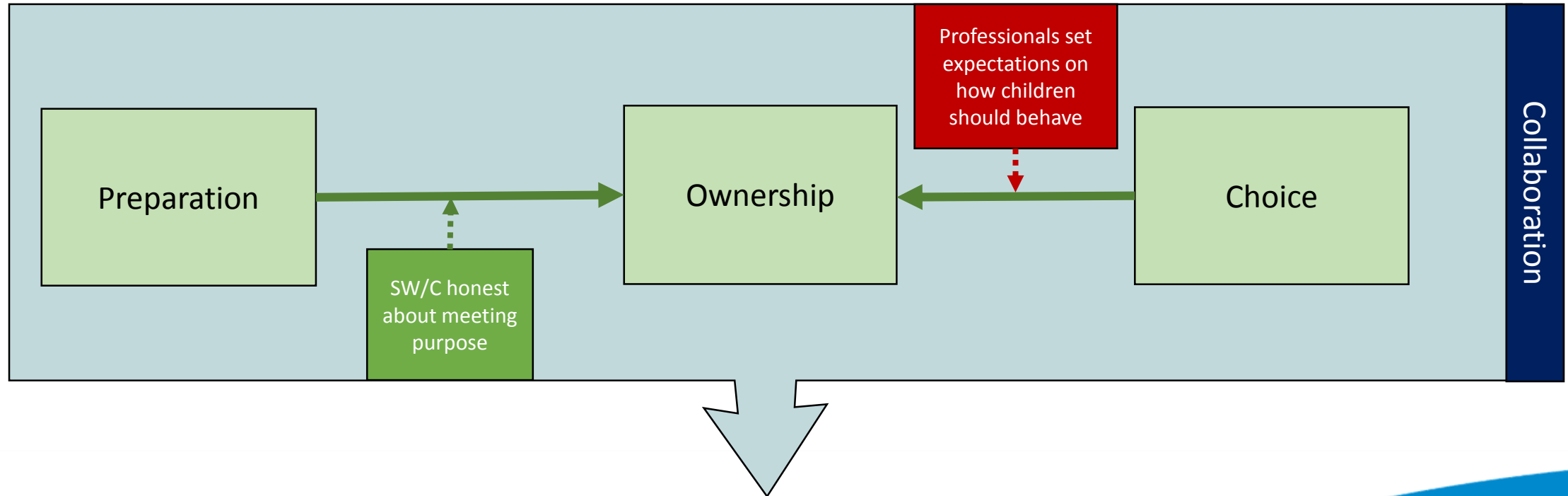
Before the meeting: Feeling able to engage
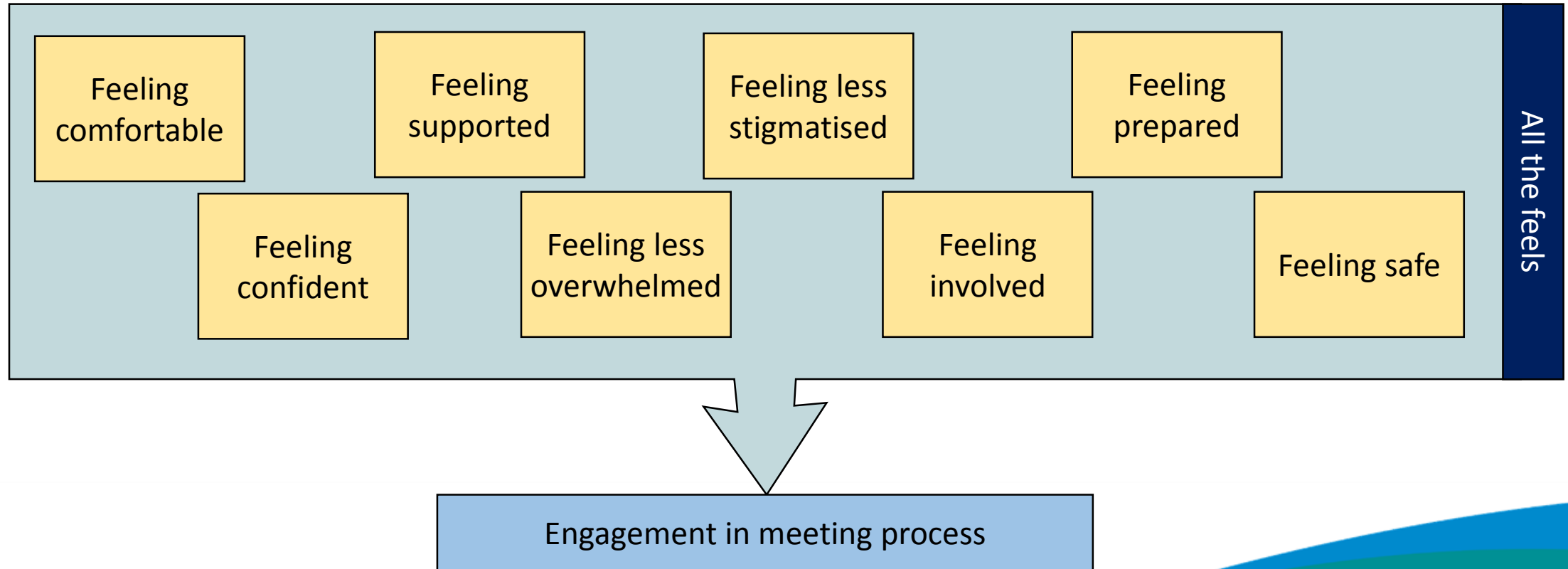
In the meeting: Setting the tone

Child/ Young Person attends meeting

People relevant and known to CYP attend the meeting

Advocate chosen by CYP available

CYP has a specified role in the meeting

CYP knows the meeting is about them

CYP feels they have control over how they participate

CYPs feel they will be listened to and respected

Anxiety is reduced
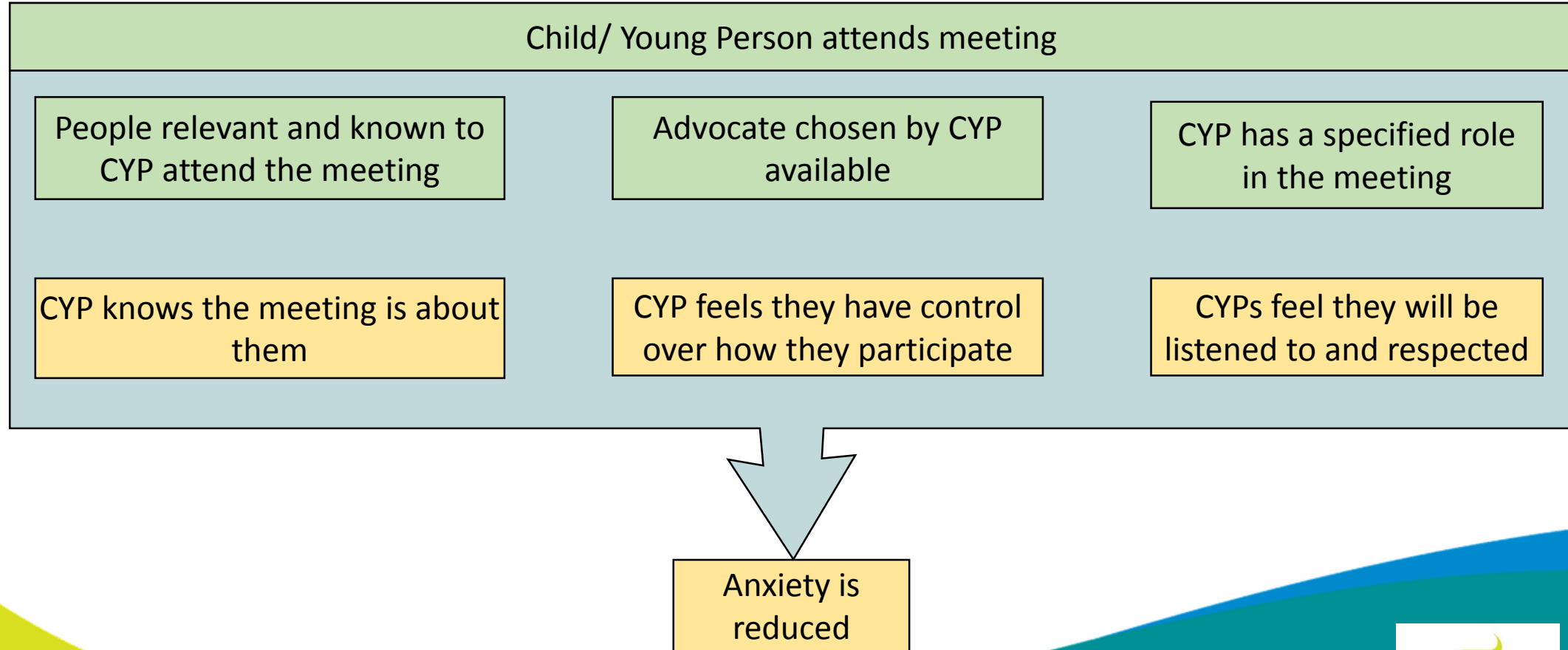
In the meeting: Involvement in decisions

CYP feels comfortable to share their views

CYP can gain insight about selves, care givers and options

CYP feel able to say what they need to succeed

CYP feel able to make decisions about their own care

CYP involved in decision making

CYP feels they have been listened to and involved

CYP feels they have some control over decisions regarding them

Accessible and clear plan with allocated tasks, responsibilities and timeframes agreed by all

In the meeting: Barriers to involvement

Adults interrupt	Adults speak over the young person, do not give them enough space to talk, or shout.
Family conflict	Families have been estranged, or disagree on issues, or professional conflict.
Difficult conversations	Families members say in front of the child they cannot/will not care for them.
Police are present	Families feel nervous/wary about speaking in front of police.
Family members do not turn up	CYP expects family members to turn up for the meeting but they do not show.

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In the meeting: Enablers to involvement

Language/ environment	Language and environment tailored to the individual so that they can understand and participate.
CYP asked for views	CYP asked for their views throughout the meeting, not just at a set point.
CYP given space/time	CYP given enough space/time to speak in the meeting and be involved at their own pace.
Advocate presence	An advocate can support the child/young person to say what they need to, or speak on their behalf when there as difficult things to say.

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After the meeting: Positive outcomes

CYP feels more confident

CYP knows they have support

CYP feels sense of togetherness with family

CYP feels valued

CYP feels proud of their involvement

CYP feels powerful

CYP feels happy

CYP feels relieved

CYP can be involved in monitoring the plan

CYP understands the plan and outcomes of meeting

CYP gains transferable skills for other areas

CYP more likely to attend again

Incorporating non attending CYP

Preparation	Children and young people given the same amount of preparation in terms of understanding the purpose of the meeting
Use of advocate	Advocate can meet with CYP before the meeting and write down what they want said in their own words
Flexibility of medium	Children and young people can be given the opportunity to express their views in a creative medium such as a poem read out.
Use of technology	Technology, such as Skype or Facetime can be used to allow children and young people to express participate from a distance.
Feedback	The meeting can be recorded so that children and young people can hear/see exactly what was said.

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Practitioners role

- What do you do well to support children and young people to take part in decision making?

- What could you do differently?

Research Presented

Children and Young People and Foster carers' views of participation and children in care reviews

- Qualitative study - semi structured interviews, pictures

- 25 Looked After Children and Young People

- 16 foster carers

Aim

- 1. To explore how far children and young people understand the process and purpose of Child in care reviews and how able they are to **meaningfully** participate in these meetings.

Purpose of Children in Care review

- Review care plan

- Minimising drift

- Challenging poor practice

- Ensure wishes and feelings of child heard

(IRO guidance Wales: Adoption and Children Act 2002, review of children's cases (Wales) regulations 2004

Key findings

1. Understanding of the process

2. Children's engagement in the process

3. Barriers and enablers to participation

Understanding of the meeting

Purpose

- Children and young people often misunderstood the purpose of reviews

'I think they are about school'

- Those who did have clearer understanding of IRO role and review process felt more positively about them and found them useful

- *'if you didn't have them then you wouldn't know who to see or what to do and nothing would be changed'*

Purpose cont…

- None of the CYP interviewed identified reviewing their care plan

- CYP divided about usefulness

'I've been with X and Y for 8 years it's not like I need all of that'

'if you didn't have them then you wouldn't know who to see or what to do and nothing would be changed'

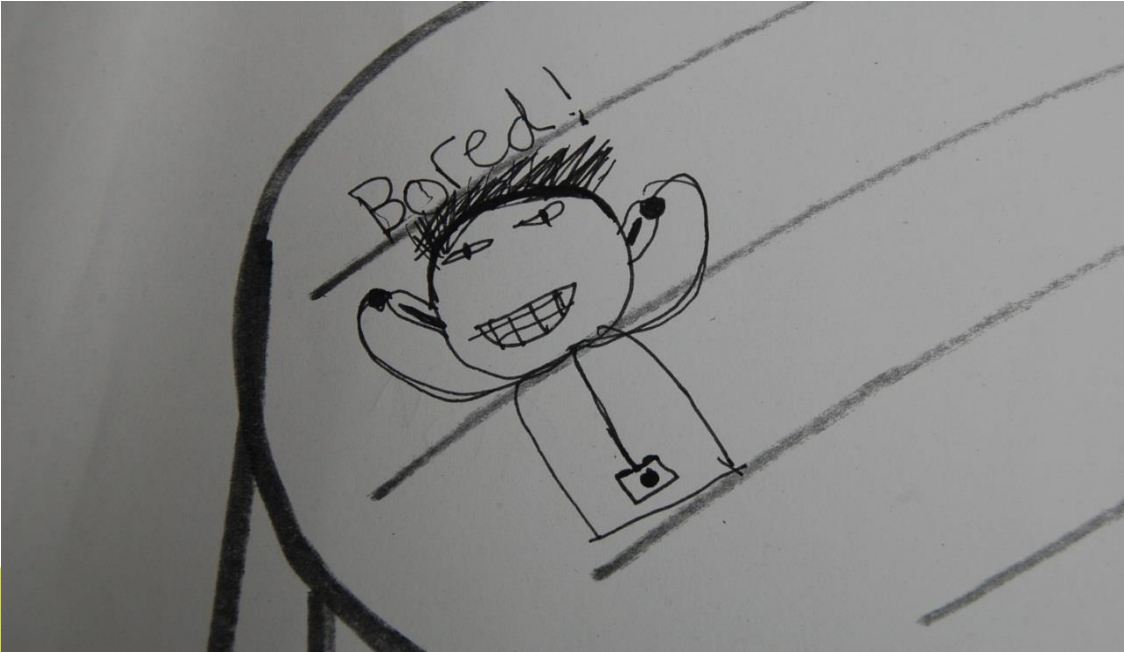*'sometimes there isn't really anything that you want to put across'*

Engagement

Feelings

Adolescents (12-17years)

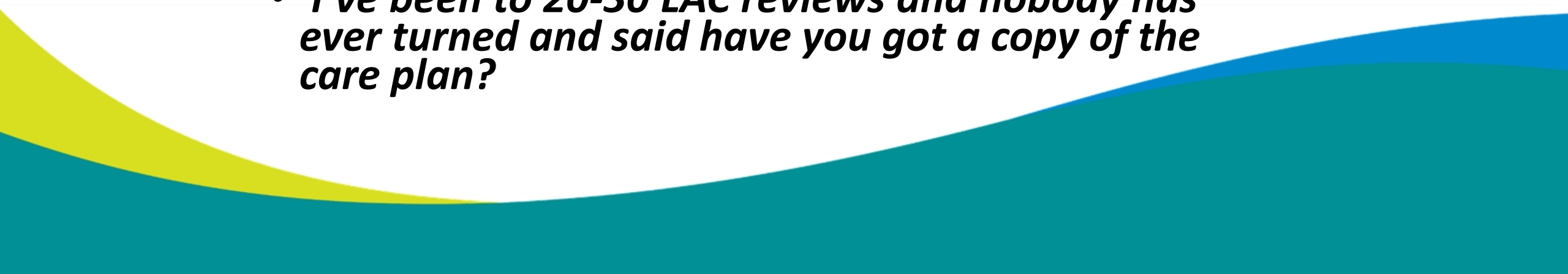Younger Children (8-12years)

'*I don't like attending those meetings, it's awkward they ask you the same questions over and over*'

'*they are hard work.*' '*It's weird. I just want them out the way*'

Usefulness of meetings: Foster Carers

- Foster carers found CiC review useful-goal setting

- Foster carers did not feel that children gained from the meetings directly

- *'It's very repetitive, the children get bored...it just goes on and on'*

- *'I've been to 20-30 LAC reviews and nobody has ever turned and said have you got a copy of the care plan?*

Choice

- CYP not involved in agenda setting, attendees, venue

' The IRO comes with their own agenda, its their agenda really'

'at my last review random people started turning up and I was like –who are you? I didn't know who they were'

'I would have it on a rollercoaster! I would love to see him (IRO) on a rollercoaster!'

Foster carers as resources

- Foster carers taking on advocacy roles in meetings:

' he asks me to say something and I say it in the meeting because he gets embarrassed'.

- Foster carers valued meetings, liked IRO's and children's social workers

Barriers and Enablers

Task 2

- In pairs discuss:

- What are your experiences of barriers and enablers to participation of children in meetings generally?

Perception of meeting

- Children and young people aware of bureaucracy:

' they are ok because….well they happen. Everything is boring but they have to be done'

'It's just tell us about school, how's school? Tell me about your health? Are you happy…'

IRO Role

- 24% of CYP did not know who their IRO was or understood the role

- Drift, particularly therapeutic actions

- Lack of perceived challenge social worker visit regularity.

- foster carer admiration of IRO

'I love it when they sit down with X, they really do their job well'
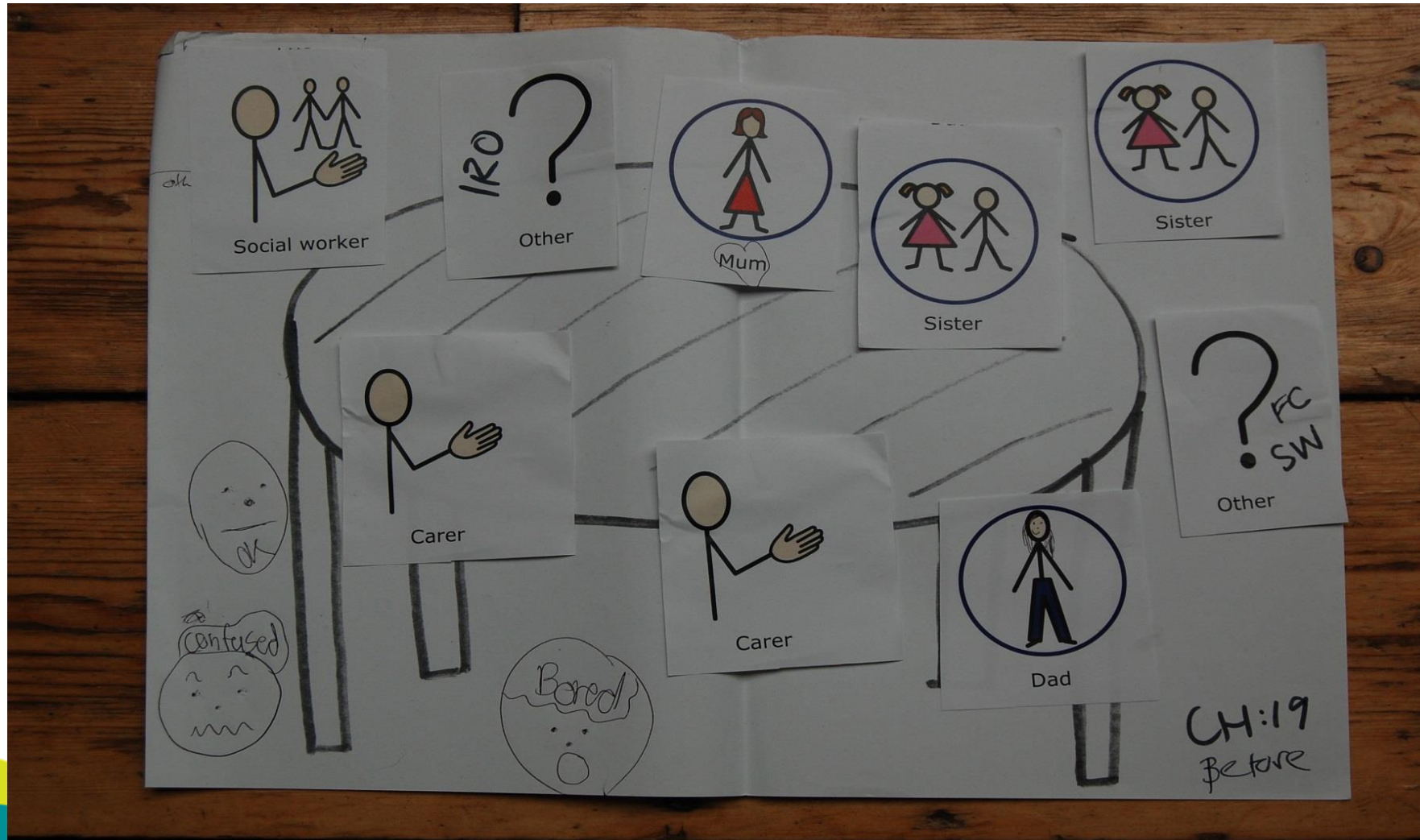
BUT.......

Choice: attendees

- Birth parents and CYP engagement in reviews

'I think the IRO misses stuff because their mother is there. If she wasn't there we could actually make the meetings about the kids'
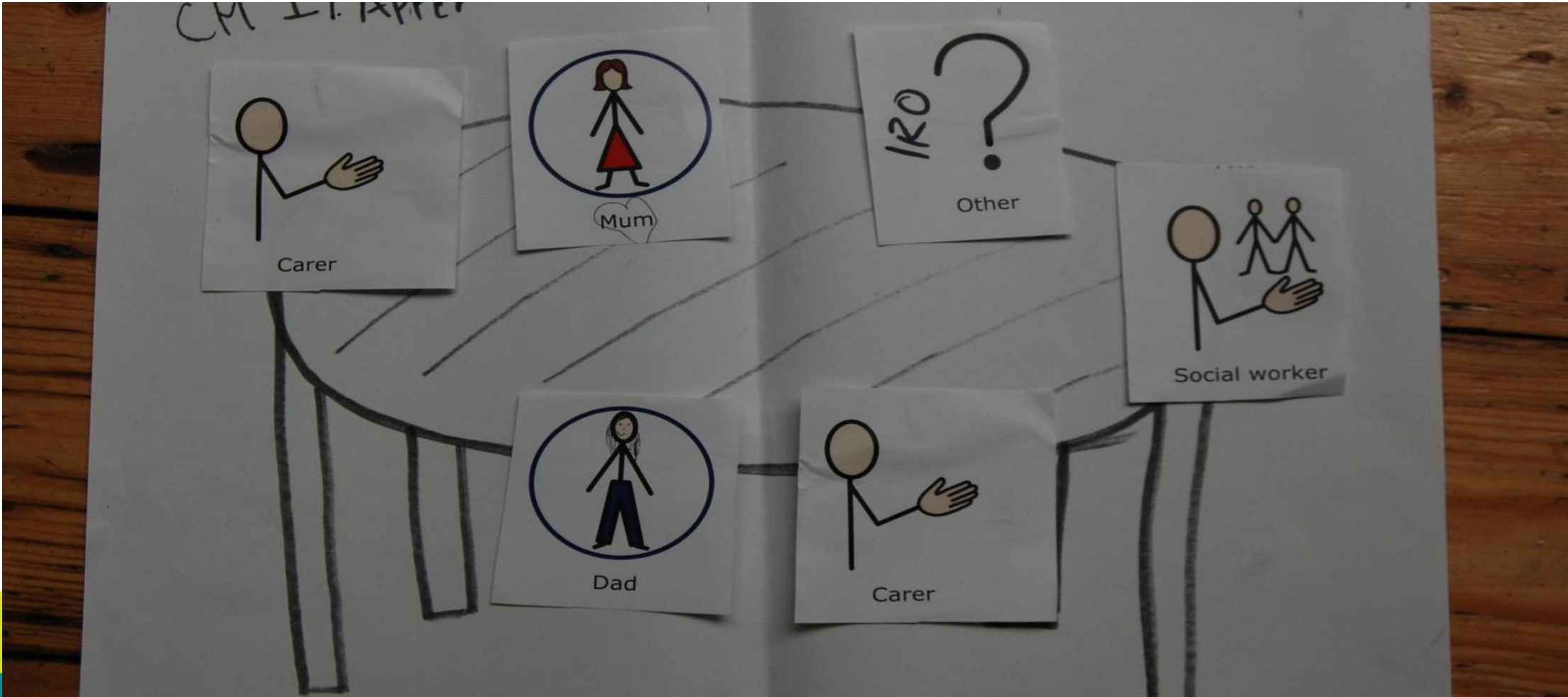
- **Teachers** negative and change focus of reviews

- CYP unhappy at foster carers social worker attendance

Before

After

Task 3- your experiences of participation

In your experience who decides:

1) where the review is going to take place
2) when the review is going to take place
3) who is going to be invited
4) what is going to be on the agenda

Conclusions

Practice Links

- Child focussed or professional centred?
- *Does this child understand:*

  - *who we all are*
  - *What we are doing (right now and in the long term)*
  - *Why we are doing it?*

- Professional commitment to participation makes a huge difference
- Preparation and **choice** essential
- Creative practice essential

- **A good professional is remembered**

Dream Social Workers
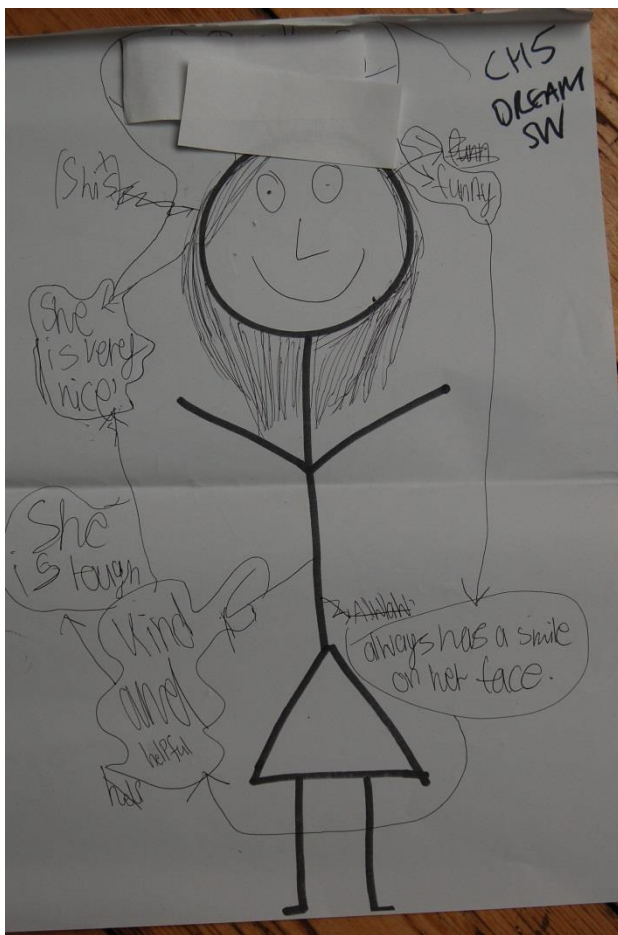
Interviews in a different LA with 10 YP, 11 social workers, 8 IROs and 7 senior managers

Professionals/YP views of Child Participation

Barrier 1: High Turnover of Staff

- **All young people raised the high number of social workers they had had**

'I didn't have a good relationship with any of my social workers up to that point. The social workers kept changing so I never got to know any of them. So, the only person I could speak to at that point was my IRO or my foster carer. So whenever we saw the IRO we would put everything on her to sort it out'.

'I've had three social workers since I've been in care. In my whole life probably about 20'

Barrier 2: High caseloads

SW and IROs raised high caseloads and ensuing time pressures as a barrier

'We have got so many kids coming into care, they're trying to manage going out and seeing children in between reviews-its really difficult- you wing it and you know you deal with crisis, but for me that is what social work is all about' (IRO)

'Social workers are so busy, they are so, so busy, and I don't mean just on the ground but in their heads. They've got so many things they are carrying, so many pressures…. They are not able to think ahead or plan ahead' (IRO)

Impact of this:

1) Reviews taking place on a child's birthday
2) Combining reviews with PEP meetings
3) No care plan and if there is one often not discussed with YP or parents

Barrier 3: inexperienced workforce

•**IROs in particular bemoaned the inexperience of social workers**

'A lot of social workers don't really know what to expect from a Child in Care Review. Not all, but obviously you've got a lot of newly qualified social workers coming through and we have a lot of turnover of social workers' (IRO)

Barrier 4: Depersonalisation

'I did a review the other day, boy was in year 7 with additional needs, there were 4 education representatives and the big male teacher, head of year wanted to take us though the whatever, 28 incidents, and he was just a tiny little boy, very small for his age with some physical disability, and I could just see him shrivelling up. So how on earth can you have a voice in a meeting if somebody just says 'oh, and you on the 14th of the month you called your teacher an effing bxxx or whatever' (IRO)

Foster carers and school staff were particularly seen as using reviews to blame YP.

Barrier 5: Lack of understanding and training in participation

- *'I went to a training a few years ago in Manchester, the training for IROs is atrocious.' (IRO)*

- *'Participation to me just means a group of people all working together for the same goal or achievement.' (senior manager)*

Disconnect between how important social workers said participation is and what appeared to happen in practice e.g unless the child chaired their own review SWs and IROs stated that children played no role in deciding where or when the review took place, who would be invited or what was on the agenda. In fact on occasion they were not even invited to review so that it could meet the timescale.

Enablers of meaningful participation

- **Quality of relationships between child and professionals**

'There was a time when like after the review – because my foster carers were telling her how I do drama and stuff like that, and there was another thing that she told her – and she was like "Oh can I come to your room and have a look?" So we did and we just sat there and chatted for a bit and it was nice but like informal and stuff like that. Yeah, so I'd say a little bit, a little bit of a relationship, yeah, 'cos she was bonkers and I liked that!' (YP 15 discussing her relationship with her IRO)

'

Enablers of good participation

- **Quality of relationships between child and professionals**

'she was really nice. She was a lovely woman. It's just a shame that though because it says something because I would have liked to see her outside my reviews and stuff to have a catch up or a chat because she was really down to earth, but I never had a proper like meet with her before the review.' (YP 16 discussing his relationship with his IRO)

Child/ young person chairing their own reviews

- *'I don't understand why people wouldn't want to chair it, in my perspective, because it's a bunch of people in a room talking about you.' (YP17)*

- Those young people who chaired their own reviews had more meaningful engagement in the review process and had the opportunity to have a say or voice in respect of essential parts of the meeting, such as when it took place, where it took place, who was invited and what was on the agenda.
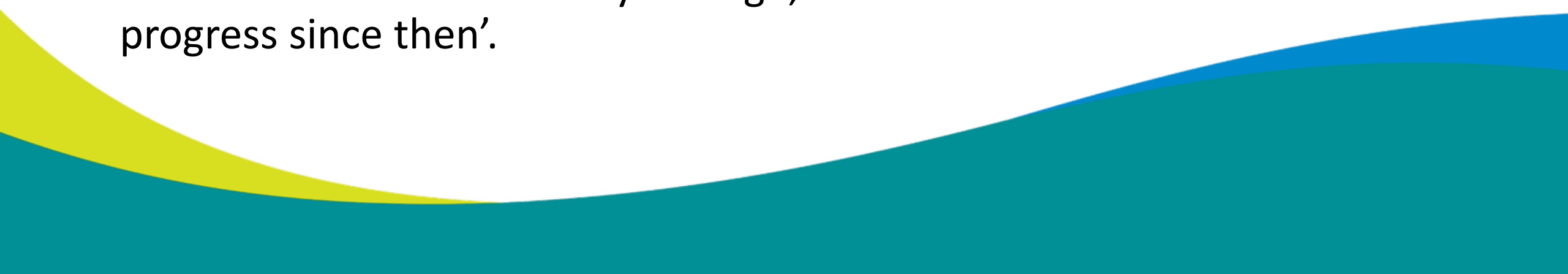
Senior Managers views

- Six of the seven senior managers did not see social work caseloads as an issue, this was in marked contrast to the perceptions of social workers, IROs and young people.

- Senior managers tended to see it as individual social worker's fault when meaningful participation did not happen- 'some of our social workers spend an awful lot of time sat in the office doing paperwork, and we hear a lot about that'.

- Understanding of participation was mixed at times: 'it means CYP are fully engaged with –if we're talking about participation-with us. Fully engaged in our system.. Expressed their views in different forms'.

Senior Manager views

SM ' if everybody was great and good at what they do then things tend to function but the barriers will often be around incompetence. Communication- social workers who don't respond to you- it boils down to social work competence practice.'

'Well the example of good practice, a young person chairing their own review was from about 28 years ago, I don't think we have made much progress since then'.

Wilful blindness

Senior managers ' choose, sometimes consciously but mostly not, to remain unseeing in situations where they could know, and should know, but don't know because it makes us feel better not to know' (Heffernon 2012)

Recommendations

- IROs and social worker caseloads to be reviewed and reduced with increased resources- IRO caseloads of between 50-70 maximum so they can visit children between reviews- meaningfully pre-meeting to consider the location for review, when it is going to take place, who will be reviewed and what will be on the agenda

- YP to receive training on participation and discussions at an early stage re them chairing their own meetings

Recommendations

- Senior Managers to spend at least two weeks a year shadowing social workers and every 5 years spend 3 months as a social worker in a duty team/MASH so they properly understand the pressures that social workers face

- Balance between time spent filling out forms/carrying out bureaucratic parts of the role and face to face time with families needs to change- better use of IT and modern technology

- Reviews should be more enjoyable for YP, a celebration of their last 6 months include eating their favourite food etc...more like FGC

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Additional Reading

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