Planning for Child & Youth Participation

Why:
- Participation is a fundamental human right. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that children and young people have the same rights to participate and to be heard as adults.
- Opportunities to participate enable children and young people to provide input, make decisions, advocate for their own needs and contribute to solutions. This positions them as partners rather than as passive recipients of programs.
- Participation builds the skills and capabilities of children and young people.
- Participation promotes connectedness, responsibility, and leadership and recognises children and young people as current citizens rather than only as future citizens.
- Participation is a key method through which to promote social equity and justice for all citizens.
- Participation which includes children and young people in program design, implementation and evaluation improves relevance, reach, effectiveness and quality, and provides insights into their experiences.

How:
This framework is designed to assist those planning for child and youth participation. It directs attention to six interconnected domains that are relevant to all modes of participation: Purpose, Positioning, Process, Protection, Perspectives and Power Relations. Taken together, a focus on these six domains can help those planning to think critically and practically about how to work with rather than just for or about children and young people.

Framework designed by: Professor Helen Cahill (2016)
For a comprehensive discussion of child and youth participation and this participation model go to the Youth Research Centre website
Planning for Child & Youth Participation

PURPOSE
What is the program aiming to accomplish?
The overarching purpose of the program informs the ways in which children and young people are invited to contribute. Participatory approaches to needs analysis and program design can be used to ensure that children and young people have a voice in shaping program objectives.

POSITIONING
What forms of participation are available to children & young people?
Consider the various ways in which children and young people will be positioned within the program. Empower participants by positioning them as co-contributors and partners rather than as passive recipients.

PROCESS
What methods will be used to structure & enable participation?
Use participatory and interactive methods to support participants to explore and express their views, to listen to those of others, and to think critically about challenges and solutions. Ensure that the processes used are consistent with the principles of respect, recognition and inclusion that underpin a rights-informed approach to programming.

PROTECTION
What methods will be used to provide support, & ensure access & safety?
Design participation experiences that are voluntary, safe, supportive and ethical. Ensure that participation occurs within a safe and supportive physical and social environment. Consider safety and wellbeing in relation to their travel to, from and within the program. Minimise potential risks to participants’ education, reputation, future employment, or home life as a result of their participation.

PERSPECTIVES
Whose views will be considered?
Attend to equity. Ensure that differences are honoured and included. Reach and recruit children and young people from different subpopulations and groups, considering differences in age, gender, ethnicity, abilities, class, religion, location, education and wealth. Use participatory methods that elicit and support the expression of diverse views and experiences.

POWER RELATIONS
How will relationships be managed to ensure equity, respect & positive regard between all parties?
Assess the ways in which interpersonal and structural power relations influence participation and relationship. Use and promote respectful, ethical and enabling practices. Address the impact of unequal power relations.