

TMS

THE MENTAL SHIFT CIC

The Role of a Young Person

Table of Contents

.....	1
<i>Table of Contents.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Our Commitment to Youth Participation.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Guiding Principles.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>The Role of Young People in Service Design.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>The Role of Young People in Service Delivery.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>The Role of Young People in Evaluation and Quality Assurance.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>The Role of Young People in External Representation</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Safeguarding and Emotional Protection</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Power Dynamics and Ethical Participation</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Communication and Accessibility</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Recognising the Limits of Youth Roles.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Benefits to Young People.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Feedback, Recognition, and Closure.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Reviewing and Adapting Youth Participation</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Summary.....</i>	<i>7</i>

Introduction

Young people are at the heart of everything we do. Our organisation exists to support their mental health, wellbeing, development, and life opportunities; therefore, it is essential that their voices, lived experiences, needs, and perspectives actively shape our work. This document outlines the ways in which young people influence, contribute to, and participate in our services and governance. It sets clear expectations and commitments regarding how we involve young people meaningfully, safely, and ethically across all aspects of the organisation.

We recognise young people not as passive recipients of support but as **active partners**. Their insights strengthen our decision-making, improve service quality, enhance relevance, and ensure that our work reflects the realities they face. This partnership approach demands intention: we design processes that invite honest feedback, recognise power dynamics, and translate youth input into tangible changes.

Our Commitment to Youth Participation

We commit to:

- Creating structures for young people to influence decisions
- Valuing their lived experience as expertise
- Ensuring participation is safe, voluntary, accessible, and empowering
- Removing barriers related to age, background, identity, disability, or confidence
- Offering different ways for young people to express themselves
- Respecting their boundaries, privacy, and emotional readiness

We will provide regular opportunities—such as youth advisory sessions, structured feedback, and co-design workshops—where decision-makers actively listen and respond. Lived experience is treated as a form of professional insight; young people are briefed, supported, and credited for their contributions. Safety is paramount: participation is always opt-in, with clear withdrawal options and emotional check-ins before, during, and after involvement. Accessibility means adapting communication (plain language, visual aids), timing (after school options), and formats (spoken, written, creative) to meet different needs. Crucially, we protect privacy by controlling what is shared, who sees it, and how stories are used; young people choose what to disclose and when.

Guiding Principles

Our participation approach is shaped by:

- **Respect and dignity**
- **Safety first**
- **Empowerment over extraction**

- **Diverse representation**
- **Accessibility**
- **Voluntary participation**

Respect means we treat youth contributions as serious inputs to strategy and delivery, not token gestures. Safety first requires a safeguarding lens on every activity, balancing openness with boundaries and care plans. Empowerment over extraction ensures we never “use” young people’s stories just to promote the organisation; participation must benefit them, not solely us. Diverse representation reminds us that a single youth voice can’t represent all; we recruit from varied backgrounds and experiences. Accessibility extends beyond disability accommodations to include cultural and linguistic sensitivity. Voluntary participation—without penalty for opting out—guards against coercion and supports emotional autonomy.

The Role of Young People in Service Design

Young people help us by:

- **Co-designing programs**
- **Testing new materials and activities**
- **Informing policy and procedure**
- **Identifying gaps in support**

Co-design means we bring young people into the earliest planning stages, inviting them to shape topics, tone, activities, and session pacing. When youth test materials, they highlight clarity, language, and emotional load, helping us refine resources before roll-out. Their input into policies (e.g., participation, accessibility, communications) ensures the “rules” reflect lived reality rather than adult assumptions. By identifying gaps—such as emerging pressures in year groups, stigma points, or digital harms—young people help us respond quickly with relevant services and signposting.

The Role of Young People in Service Delivery

Young people contribute through:

- **Feedback and evaluation**
- **Youth advisory groups (optional model)**
- **Participation in recruitment**
- **Shaping communication and branding**
- **Peer influence and leadership (non-professional)**

Feedback and evaluation are ongoing, combining quick pulse checks with deeper reflections; this produces data we actually act on. Youth advisory groups provide a structured forum for challenge, ideas, and prioritisation; meetings are facilitated with clear agendas and follow-ups so young people see outcomes. In recruitment, young people can suggest questions or qualities to

look for, ensuring we hire staff who are relatable, safe, and respectful. In communications, young people tell us which words, visuals, and platforms resonate—and which put them off. Peer influence is not a professional role; rather, it's insights into student culture and pressures that guide our approach while never placing responsibility for others' wellbeing on the young person.

The Role of Young People in Evaluation and Quality Assurance

They inform quality through:

- **Feedback forms and surveys**
- **Qualitative interviews and focus groups**
- **Case studies and reflective contributions**
- **Monitoring accessibility**

Quantitative surveys help us track changes at scale (engagement, understanding, confidence), while qualitative reflections reveal nuance (feelings, stigma shifts, trust). Focus groups, run with strong ground rules and opt-out options, dig into what works and what overwhelms. Case studies are only used with consent and anonymisation; we never pressure young people to disclose personal details. Monitoring accessibility includes reviewing readability, neurodiversity adjustments, physical space, and support for EAL students—then recommending specific improvements with timelines and owners.

The Role of Young People in External Representation

Where appropriate and safe, they may:

- Take part in youth voice campaigns
- Contribute to awareness materials (anonymously if preferred)
- Share generic insights at events or discussions
- Help shape community messaging around mental health

Public involvement requires careful preparation, consent from the young person (and parent/carer where needed), and a risk assessment covering content, audience, and aftercare. Participation is entirely optional and cannot be tied to access to support. We prioritise anonymity where it increases safety or comfort. Adult staff remain responsible for managing events; young people are never expected to answer personal questions or represent all youth perspectives. We provide debriefs and support after any public contribution.

Safeguarding and Emotional Protection

Our safety measures ensure:

- Young people are never asked to disclose personal trauma
- They can refuse or stop participating at any time

- Adults are responsible for managing emotional safety
- Concerns are handled within child protection protocols
- Youth-involving content is reviewed with a safeguarding lens
- No young person is pressured, exposed, or made vulnerable

The facilitation team prepares clear ground rules, safe-language guides, and opt-out signals before sessions. Facilitators monitor the room for distress and offer time-outs or private check-ins. If a disclosure occurs, we respond with calm, validation, and clear next steps under safeguarding procedures. We review any written or recorded content for potential harm, editing or withholding details that could identify or distress the contributor. We regularly audit participation activities against safeguarding standards and update protocols when needed.

Power Dynamics and Ethical Participation

We address power imbalances by:

- Creating collaborative spaces where every voice counts
- Encouraging safe challenge of adult decisions
- Avoiding tokenism and “youth voice for show”
- Clarifying what influence young people hold
- Feeding back on how input shaped outcomes

Facilitators explicitly name power dynamics and invite respectful challenge. We rotate speaking formats (anonymous notes, small groups, one-to-ones) to include quieter voices. Tokenism is actively resisted; we only run participation activities we can act on, and we are honest where constraints exist (funding, legal, safeguarding). We explain the decision scope at the start—what can change now, later, or not at all—so expectations are realistic. After decisions, we share what changed, what didn’t, and why, giving credit to youth contributors.

Communication and Accessibility

To support meaningful involvement, we ensure communication is:

- Clear, age-appropriate, and jargon-free
- Adapted for neurodiverse learners
- Respectful of cultural needs and language abilities
- Flexible in format (spoken, written, online, creative)
- Honest about what can and cannot be changed

We use plain language, avoid acronyms, and provide examples. Materials are formatted with readable fonts, strong contrast, and logical structure; we offer visuals and summaries for different processing preferences. We accommodate language needs with translation or simplified English as resources allow. Flexibility means students can respond via drawings,

voice notes, short texts, or longer reflections. We set accurate expectations about influence and timelines, which builds trust and reduces frustration.

Recognising the Limits of Youth Roles

Young people are not responsible for:

- Safeguarding other young people
- Making clinical, behavioural, or risk decisions
- Representing all young people
- Being available outside agreed times
- Managing organisational conflicts or pressures
- Delivering interventions or leading sessions
- Acting as spokespeople unless they choose to

These limits protect young people from emotional labour, blurred boundaries, and burnout. Adults hold legal and ethical responsibilities; young people contribute insight, not duty of care. We avoid over-reliance on “star” contributors by building broader participation so the burden doesn’t fall on a few. Where youth do choose a public role, it is time-bound, opt-in, supported, and reviewed for ongoing suitability.

Benefits to Young People

Ethical participation offers:

- A sense of agency, value, and empowerment
- Opportunities to influence mental health support
- Communication, reflection, teamwork, and leadership skills
- Confidence and self-esteem growth
- A deeper understanding of mental health and help-seeking
- Positive relationships with trusted adults
- Recognition that their voice is meaningful and powerful

We build in skill-building moments—e.g., co-chairing a segment, presenting a summary, or crafting a recommendation—at the pace the young person chooses. Increased agency comes from seeing their input shape real changes. Trusted relationships with consistent adults provide safety and modelling of healthy boundaries. When appropriate, we celebrate contributions with certificates, references, or skills logs that support college, training, or employment pathways—always with the young person’s consent.

Feedback, Recognition, and Closure

We commit to:

- Explaining how feedback was used

- Highlighting changes made as a result
- Outlining how future engagement will continue
- Offering appropriate recognition (certificates, thank-you letters, events)

Closing the loop is crucial for trust. We provide short, clear summaries of what we learned and what we changed, sent in formats young people prefer. Recognition is ethical and non-exploitative; we do not tie recognition to disclosure of personal experiences. Where participation ends, we offer a warm “closure” that acknowledges contribution, invites optional future contact, and shares routes for support if needed.

Reviewing and Adapting Youth Participation

This document is reviewed annually with input from both staff and young people. We examine what is working, what requires improvement, and how our approach should evolve alongside emerging needs, changing school contexts, and learning from safeguarding reviews. Adjustments are communicated to staff and youth contributors, and training is updated accordingly.

Summary

Young people are essential partners in shaping and improving our organisation. Their voices, ideas, and lived experiences guide the direction of our work, strengthen the relevance and impact of our services, and ensure that everything we do remains centred on their wellbeing. We commit to enabling meaningful, safe, empowering participation—not as an add-on, but as a core part of who we are. This framework combines quick-reference lists with in-depth guidance, so staff can apply it confidently and consistently.