

**Conference INGO at the Council of Europe  
Civil Society Committee on the Rights of the Child**

**Webinar: Best Interests and Rights of Children in Parental Separation  
and Care Proceedings, 21 June**

**Parallel Workshop 5:  
How to implement the participation of children  
in expressing their views?**

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An underlying principle that must be at the centre of alternative care is participation. Children's right to have a say – not only in their own lives but in relation to policies which shape the conditions they live in – is written into the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Make participation a priority**

Young people are often completely at the mercy of the decisions made by adults. We need the adults and organisations that work with children and families to prioritize children and families having an active voice in every decision about them.

The ways that child participation is built into the current system in the UK is a one-size-fits-all box ticking exercise. This is often infuriating and damaging to children – to their trust in those who profess to care, to their self-esteem, and to their identity as an individual with rights who is worthy of respect.

**Ensure the right conditions for participation to be possible**

Transportation is often a challenge. Many young people don't drive, and even if they live in areas that are well serviced by the public transportation system, they need for their travel

expenses to be paid to attend meetings. It is also difficult for most young people to attend meetings during school times, and if the meeting is with the care system, it can be stigmatizing for everyone to know that they are in the system.

Some of the barriers to participation in discussions about the care system are overcome through the internet; however, not everything can be done online and there are issues with accessing opportunities digitally.

Young carers tend to be especially disadvantaged, because they have to give time to the relative that needs them, and to arrange for someone else to take over in order to participate in an activity. There needs to be much better support for them.

### **Institute the right to be accompanied**

Many young people are so hurt by the system that they can't speak, they can't show up and fight for themselves. We need to support them by allowing them to have a friend or relative come with them.

### **Offer possibilities to belong to a peer group**

For children to be able to speak out about violations of their rights, it's important for them to be part of peer groups where they can offer one another mutual support, and can go beyond their individual circumstances to try to impact systemic injustices against other children like themselves.