



Looking Back Investing in Children Project Pack



Looking back

Project Pack

The project

The 'Looking back' project is a collaborative piece of research between Durham University and four organisations across the North East of England that engage young people.

All four of these organisations believe that young people are valuable citizens, rights holders, people of worth now, not just in the future and that this rhetoric is yet to be fully realised within society.

This project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of a +3 PhD studentship.

The project has involved a variety of methods including focus groups, a questionnaire and in-depth interviews via email, telephone, Facebook chat, Skype and in person.

Investing in Children – a collaborating partner

Investing in Children has been a collaborating partner on this piece of research since it was proposed in February 2012.

The staff have supported PhD student Naomi Maynard throughout each stage of this project.

As part of the project, Naomi interviewed 12 participants, now in their 20's or early 30's, and asked them to reflect back on their time at Investing in Children and comment on whether this experience had any impact on their lives today.

Project Outputs

Project outputs have been developed in collaboration with each of the four organisations and vary depending on their level of involvement and how they can best make use of the findings.

For Investing in Children this has involved the production of briefing notes and case study documents, as well as oral feedback to staff and board members.

Other project outputs will include academic presentations, papers and a PhD thesis.

This pack

This pack contains 3 briefing notes and 1 case study. They have been designed as standalone documents.

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This pack was produced as part of the 'Looking back' project. For further information contact Naomi Maynard on n.p.maynard@durham.ac.uk or @ParticipationNE

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Briefing note 1: Understanding rights: now and then

Key points

Looking back:

- Several participants said that they had little knowledge of their rights before being involved with Investing in Children
- Participants valued the supportive, inclusive, rights-respecting environment created through the practices and relationships at Investing in Children
- Whilst many participants did not directly use the term 'rights', they spoke of being increasingly aware of injustices in the world and the importance of making their voices heard.

Looking forward:

- Half of the participants either currently, or hope to in the future, promote issues of justice, equality and/or rights for people who are traditionally marginalised.

The project

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As part of this project 12 participants, now in their 20's or early 30's, were asked to reflect back on their time at Investing in Children and comment on whether this had any impact on their lives today.

Investing in Children exist to promote the human rights of children and young people. This briefing note explores the references made by participants to this work.

'A new world'

'It has like opened up a new world to children's rights and it's made us a lot more passionate about it coz I've realised the importance of it, I didn't before.'

Several of the participants made reference, either directly or indirectly, to Investing in Children's focus on human rights, often reflecting that they did not know much about rights before their involvement with Investing in Children.

Looking back one participant commented that being involved in Investing in Children led him to slowly shift their attitude towards other people and their rights, acknowledging that young people didn't have to be 'well behaved and bright' to earn their rights, but 'they have rights as people.'

They explained:

'Before I was involved I suppose I was quite self-centred - I'd be interested in what I can get out of things and if I was facing some kind of injustice I'd be bothered but I wasn't particularly caring for those around me. Probably because if I didn't like somebody (and there was a lot of people I had to go to school with that I didn't like) I certainly wouldn't have been interested in trying to change society for them for the better. Whereas Investing in Children kind of opened or changed my view on that, to see the people around me more as citizens with rights because they were people rather than because of something they achieved or what kind of person they were.'

A rights-respecting environment

'Investing in Children is a hugely inclusive project so I was really fortunate to work with a whole bunch of people from very different economic backgrounds and everything else. And that was really good because I think we all learnt something from each other.'

Participants praised the environment created at Investing in Children, its inclusivity between young people but particularly the way young people were treated by the adult staff, as one participant explained: Investing in Children is built on a foundation of relationships exhibiting mutual trust and respect between young people and adults.'

Others said:

'The staff were always on a ground level, you never felt as though they were better than you.'

'They are very approachable and treat young people as individuals and respect their opinions and most importantly listen and give children and young people a voice. I felt very empowered whilst working with Investing in Children.'

Although the participants did not use the language of rights to articulate this, this collaborative, respectful, supportive environment is a product of children and young people's human rights being respected.

One participant explained that at Investing in Children she felt like a valued member of society, a feeling she did not encounter in other areas of her life. This comparison between other areas of their lives was made by several participants, as the quotation below indicates being trusted and given real responsibility can be very powerful:

'Liam really inspired me, the way he approached things. The attitude that he had was just so different from any adult in a position of authority I'd ever met...I was just kind of in awe of him really, but I could see he did practical stuff as well, he wasn't just talking this stuff- he really believed in it and he'd go out of his way to like get you to places, I mean one of the problems for us was living in rural Teasdale getting anywhere as a child on a bus was a nightmare, so he would do anything he could to help with that, he just trusted you to get on and organise things and treated you with a respect that I didn't see from school teachers [or] many of the police.'

More than a voice?

Participants' comments directly about rights often focused on Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is often abbreviated to 'the right to a voice'.

Several participants emphasised that whilst at Investing in Children they became aware of this right and that it was respected at Investing in Children:

'(Investing in Children) makes you aware as a young person you actually have a right to a voice'

'They were making sure everybody got their say in a safe environment'

'Makes you feel like your voice is heard because it's you saying what you want to happen'

There was also an awareness amongst some participants that it was important to ensure that this voice was not just listened to 'but truly heard' - the right to have a say is not enough, this voice should be acted upon to enable change.

Although there was an acknowledgement that these changes did not always happen, several participants praised the fact that the approach taken by Investing in Children was not tokenistic- they always tried to help young people's voices result in changes to improve the lives of children and young people:

'I think that when you look at other organisations and how they work with young people and then look at Investing in Children it's clear they're just that bit different to how everybody else is because they do listen, they do try to act upon what the young people are saying rather than just ticking the boxes saying 'we've listened to them'.'

'They're going to listen to you and whatever they say they'll do their best to try and put into action, they like listen to young people and resolve problems.'

Whose voice?

Some of the participants valued highly the trust put in them by the staff at Investing in Children, encouraging them to express their own opinions.

At times the staff had to play a supporting role in enabling the young people to have their voices heard, either through the way the sessions were designed or as one participant commented, by translating her words into 'adult terms for social workers and stuff to understand', however several participants emphasised that they were encouraged to 'just be yourself':

'I had to open the conference and I remember one of the things that I said in it was I made a point that Liam hadn't made me read my opening speech to him beforehand, he just let us get on with it, because that's how they roll. They don't sit you down and say 'you must say this, you must say that'. It's what you want to say, is what you will say, and to me that's really important.'

'The young people who spoke at those conferences...we were given lots of information and our knowledge was built about what the conference was about and the policies so that we had a good understanding and learning. In terms of the opinions that we gave at those conferences, they might have been somewhat shaped by our experiences with Investing in Children but they were very much our own opinions and our own voices. So it's not like we were being told what to say, we were very much saying what was important to us as individuals.'

Looking forward

The desire to promote the human rights of children and young people is intimately connected to a belief that children and young people are being treated unjustly in society and that this must change.

Several years after their involvement with Investing in Children half of the participants either are, or intend to in the future, promoting issues of justice, equality and/or rights of people who are traditionally marginalised. This was either expressed directly through their jobs or indirectly through their daily attitudes. The Case Study report about 'Jenn' written as part of the 'Looking Back' project provides an inspirational example of this as she tried to be: 'very conscious of making sure that if a young person is being asked to do something that they understand why and have the opportunity to voice any concerns that they have.'

Some participants were involved in promoting the rights of *children and young people* whilst others had, in one participant's words, 'transferred' this 'passion' onto championing the rights of other marginalised groups in society.

This process was not straightforward as participants mentioned that as they had 'grown up' they had become increasingly aware of the difficulties of working within the constraints of funding, health and safety regulations and encountering other people or organisations who were reluctant to engage with promoting rights.

Looking to the future, two of the older participants reflected that they hope to raise their children differently due to their understanding about the human rights of children and young people:

'I'd certainly like him [my son] to think as a child that he's not just an adult-in-waiting, he has opinions that are valid and rights that are important.'

'I think that even when I become like a parent I will have a different way of dealing with my own children when I grow up to how I otherwise would have. I think I even have a very strong sense how it is important for young people to have a voice and be listened to and not to be kind of dismissed as a lesser opinion by adults around them.'

Conclusion

Promoting the human rights of children and young people runs through all the work at Investing in Children, be it overtly through the structure of the agenda days ensuring everyone 'has a say', or more subtly through the way adults working for the organisation interact with young people.

For several of the participants in this project their time at Investing in Children was more than just 'something to do' during their teenage years, encountering an organisation that respected and enabled their human rights played an important part in shaping who they are today and who they hope to be in the future.



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Briefing note 2: After liC: Employment/further education

Key points

- Participants made use of their past experiences at Investing in Children in job interviews, university applications and on their CV's.
- They used connections they had made at Investing in Children to help get voluntary work or paid employment.
- Half of the participants currently work in a caring or justice-focused profession, or intend to in the future. Several connected this to their experiences at Investing in Children.
- Participants reused work-specific skills they learnt at Investing in Children, such as in report writing, presentation skills and group facilitation, in their current jobs or studies.

The project

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As part of this project 12 participants, now in their 20's or early 30's, were asked to reflect back on their time at Investing in Children and comment on whether this had any impact on their lives today.

This briefing note explores the connections made by these participants between their time at Investing in Children and their experiences since in relation to further education and/or employment.

Getting Work – CVs, interviews and applications

'It's put me in good stead with my CV.'

The stated aim of Investing in Children is to promote the human rights of children and young people, it is not to prepare children and young people for employment when they become adults.

However this project found that several participants made use of their experiences at Investing in Children to help them get into further education or employment.

3 of the 12 participants specifically mentioned that being involved in Investing in Children has helped their 'CV'. One participant, when asked how important his time at Investing in Children was now - 3 years after his involvement at investing in Children had ended, said:

‘What’s important now is my CV...my time with Investing in Children is definitely more important than any of the 5 years of part-time work I have had, because anyone can work in a bar, but not anyone can do youth work, which is either for you or it’s not. And I quite enjoyed it to be honest. So in that way it was definitely, it was quite significant. I’d rank it higher than my part time work.’

Several participants explained that they drew on their experiences at Investing in Children in job interviews and when writing university application forms. As the quotations below indicate, some participants (but of course not all) felt that these experiences helped them gain employment:

‘All them sort of opportunities were my foundation to where I am now, because I wouldn't have had the confidence to apply for the job had I not had all them opportunities [at Investing in Children] to build on my confidence...It's got me to the job that I'm in now. It got me the experience that I needed but it broadened my knowledge as well of services.’

‘Since my involvement with Investing in Children I have had a job at Ladbrokes- given to me only because of my previous experience of interaction with people.’

Getting Work – making connections

After becoming too old to work with Investing in Children as a ‘young person’, several of the participants continued to be employed by Investing in Children in various capacities.

In addition to this, as shown below, some participants made other connections during their time at Investing in Children that helped them get further voluntary or paid employment opportunities:

‘They have had a lot of connections, like it's helped me with like getting voluntary jobs. I volunteer still now with Barnardo’s and The Children’s Society. So I think Investing in Children has kind of like broadened my horizons because you make links, you find people that you know and it's just helped us to gradually progress.’

‘I think I can attribute many of my early jobs to my role at Investing in Children and the work I was exposed to. I worked directly in engagement work with young people at the North Yorkshire County Council – again a role I perhaps wouldn’t have considered or been eligible for if I had not worked for Investing in Children.’

What type of work?

Half of the participants currently work in a caring or justice-focused profession, or intend to in the future. To varying extents, several of these participants attributed their careers choices to their time at Investing in Children:

‘I already knew what I wanted to do with my career but I think it kind of influenced that, in terms of wanting to highlight issues of justice I suppose and issues that I felt were wrong and needed to be changed.’

‘I don't think I could do this job that I'm in now without having the experience from there because the passion that I had with the young people, now transferred it over for having the passion for [another marginalised community].’

At Work – reusing skills

Although the purpose of Investing in Children is not directly to equip children and young people with skills they may use as adults in further education or employment, several participants reflected that this inadvertently happened.

Participants reflected on generalised skills such as increased confidence and improved time keeping, problem solving and ‘people’ skills. However they also spoke of applying work-specific skills they had learnt at Investing in Children, such as in report writing, presentation skills and group facilitation, to their current jobs or studies.

One participant is considering using Investing in Children’s ‘agenda day’ format in their current job, whilst two of the participants currently at university praised the research skills they had learnt at Investing in Children which they had reused as they completed their dissertations.

Conclusion

‘My time with Investing in Children has definitely impacted upon me and I feel I wouldn’t be where I am now if it wasn’t for Investing in Children as they definitely stood me in good stead to venture out into the big bad world of employment.’

Although not a specific aim of Investing in Children, the opportunities and experiences given to young people at the organisation helped and for some directed their choices and actions as they became involved in further education and/or employment.



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Briefing Note 3: Getting paid- young people's views

Key points

- Being paid was described as an incentive for some young people, but participants emphasised that it was not 'all about the money'.
- 3 participants demonstrated that they clearly understood and agreed with the reasons why Investing in Children pays young people for their time and work.

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As part of this project 12 participants, now in their 20's or early 30's, were asked to reflect back on their time at Investing in Children and comment on whether this had any impact on their lives today.

Participants were not specifically asked about Investing in Children's policy of paying young people for their time and work. However 8/12 participants made reference to it; this briefing note explores these comments.

An incentive?

Being paid was described as an 'incentive' to some young people's involvement, particularly to travel long distances and attend Investing in Children almost 'every night'. However for the vast majority it was not the 'all about the money':

'It was an incentive but it wasn't the be all and end all, I certainly went to things that I wouldn't have got paid for and I was more than happy to do that'

'It weren't all about the money and stuff like that but it was something to look forward to, like yeah you just sat in a room for an hour and a half or two hours, you'd get a fiver out of it. So it was something to do in your day, getting paid to see your friends but you were also getting your point across'

'It was an incentive to go all that way I guess, but like for most of it wasn't really that, because I was then still hanging out with my friends from home, so it was good, you knew that you were doing good but then you are getting £5 to hang out with your mates, which was pretty good'

One participant commented that he wouldn't have gone if he hadn't been paid, however he was quick to clarify that he didn't think this was an ethical problem as 'I wasn't being given money to do things I didn't want to do'.

He also valued the fact that the staff did not make any judgements about what he wanted to do with the money. This same participant said 'they gave me food and bus travel, sometimes I would only go because I was hungry...Investing in Children was the only time I had money to buy clothes and stuff'.

Why pay young people?

Three of the participants explicitly demonstrated that they understood Investing in Children's reasons for paying young people for their time:

'If everyone else is paid why shouldn't a young person get paid?'

'All the other stuff we'd do [as a young person], it was like "you should be seeing this as a privilege to be involved in this" but Investing in Children were like "no it's your time, it's your effort, it's your work and therefore you should be paid for it". Obviously I benefited from it but it was something I really agreed with when I thought about it'

'Working there gave me confidence that my opinion was valid, worth paying for and listening to'

Further considerations

When considering how much to pay young people it is worth noting that one participant stopped being involved in Investing in Children as 'it was costing too much...sometimes we would go for just an hour and it would cost more for busfare than we we're paid (sic)'.

Although not a motivating factor in Investing in Children's policy about paying young people, one participant reflected that that 'handling my own money at a young age helps me now.'

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Case Study

Name	Jenn
Age	30
Age at time of involvement	13-18
Current occupation	Film production

Comments on Investing in Children's approach:

'It makes you aware as a young person you actually have a right to a voice. It made me question why and how the adults around me were making various decisions and whether young people were being included.'

How has your time at Investing in Children impacted your life now?

'It has made me much more aware of how to tackle things in the wider world and challenge things that I feel aren't right.'

Jenn gave a practical example of this: recently someone she knew was praising the devices placed outside shops that make a high pitched sound to discourage young people from hanging around them. She challenged him on this way of thinking, and said:

'Because of my experiences with Investing in Children I have the confidence to say to people who are making those kind of comments that what they are saying is shocking and unfair and those kind of technologies are just preventing young people from taking part and being included in their wider community.'

Jenn mirrors the way she was treated by adults at Investing in Children in her practices at work with the young people she comes into contact with; she respects their voices and ensures they are properly informed about and comfortable with what they are being asked to do. She says she is:

'Much more conscious as an adult of giving young people that I meet the same opportunity as adults to be included in decisions that affect them'

Jenn does not just apply what she learnt with Investing in Children to challenging the status of young people in society, she explains:

'It influences your awareness of all kinds of discrimination ...particularly working in the film industry which is a hugely male dominated industry...I'm much more conscious now as a woman than a young person of ways in which I experience discrimination and how I can challenge that...I'm often telling young female runners in the film industry that they have a voice to be heard'

Away from the space of employment Jenn believes that her experiences with Investing in Children as a teenager will result in her raising any future children differently. She plans to ensure they have a voice and are listened to and not 'dismissed as a lesser opinion by adults around them'.



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