COMMUNITY GATHERING

Saturday 13 May 2023, Cowdray Hall

Event Playback Report

Contents

1. Purpose of the Event

The community gathering was an opportunity for people and community groups from across the City to **come together to connect** and find out about what is going on in their local community. The event was hosted by Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA), the City's partnership of public, private and third sector organisations working together to improve outcomes for people and communities.

2. What happened?

The main event held in the Cowdray Hall was an exhibition of community information. People gathered to wander around the stalls and learn about the different opportunities to get involved in their local community.

10.00-10.30	Tea, coffee and light refreshments
10.30-10.45	Welcome from Councillor Miranda Radley on behalf of Community Planning Aberdeen (Main auditorium)
10.45-13.30	Morning Exhibition Open to All
10.50-11.30	Workshops Round 1 (Booking only)
11.30-11.50	Break
11.50-12.30	Workshops Round 2 (Booking only)
12.30-13.30	Networking lunch and exhibition

People were also invited to book onto workshops which were held in breakout areas throughout the morning.

Each round of workshops covered the following:

1. What does good community engagement look like and what support and resources do we need to be more active in our communities?

2 How can we improve the health of our communities? Come and find out more about the role of a citizen researcher?

3 Child friendly participation activities for children and young people aged under five and aged 5-12 (Available all morning)
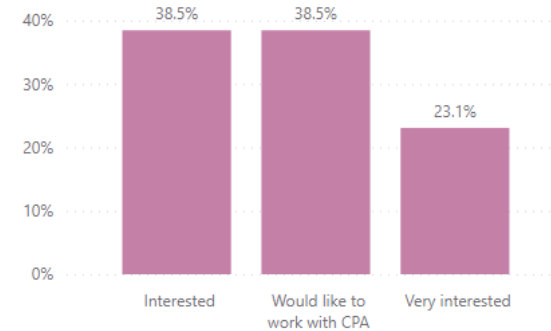
3. Who was there?

25 Community Exhibitors

- Aberdeen Hindu Association
- Tenant & Resident Groups/ NETRALT
- CLAN Cancer Support
- Bridge of Don and District Men's Shed
- Alcohol & Drugs Action
- Growing2gether
- ACVO - third sector interface for Aberdeen
- Aberdeen in Recovery
- Afristyle Dance Club
- NESCAN Hub
- SHMU
- Community Councils
- Grampian 50+ Network
- Aberdeen Cyrenians
- Fresh Community Wellness
- Graveyard Guardians
- Penumbra Mental Health
- Aberdeen Foyer
- Befriend A Child
- One Seed Forward
- Save the Belmont
- Aberdeen Youth Movement (12+)
- Girlguiding Aberdeen
- Childsmile – NHS Scotland
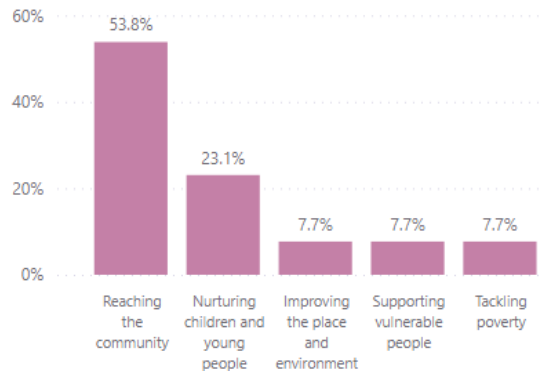- CLD Standards Scotland

What they told us…

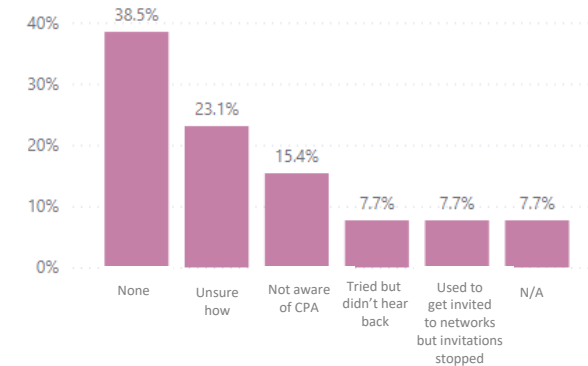**How aware were you of Community Planning Aberdeen before the gathering?**

(A little: 23.1%, Actively working with CPA: 23.1%, Aware: 23.1%, Not at all: 23.1%, Very aware: 7.7%)
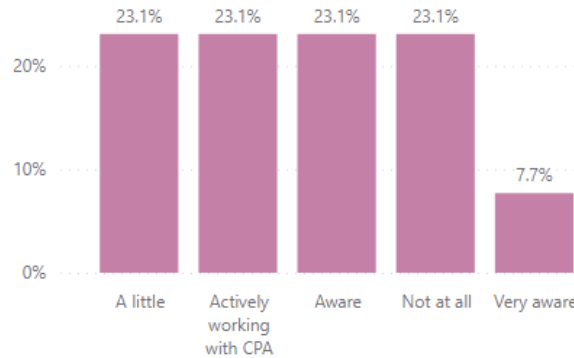
Knowing what you know now, how do you feel about finding out more about Community Planning Aberdeen?

(Interested: 38.5%, Would like to work with CPA: 38.5%, Very interested: 23.1%)

Where do you think there is potential to work together?

(Reaching the community: 53.8%, Nurturing children and young people: 23.1%, Improving the place and environment: 7.7%, Supporting vulnerable people: 7.7%, Tackling poverty: 7.7%)

Which of the following barriers have prevented you from working with us?

(None: 38.5%, Unsure how: 23.1%, Not aware of CPA: 15.4%, Tried but didn't hear back: 7.7%, Used to get invited to networks but invitations stopped: 7.7%, N/A: 7.7%)

Note the data on this page reflect the results of a survey to the event exhibitors. 18 of our of 25 exhibitors responded.
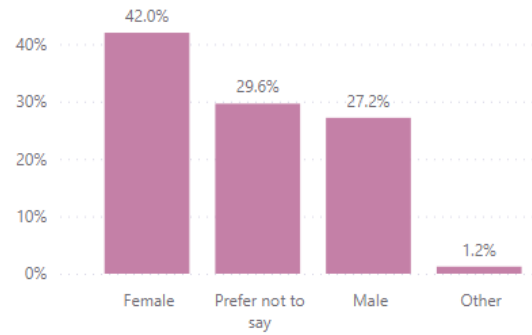
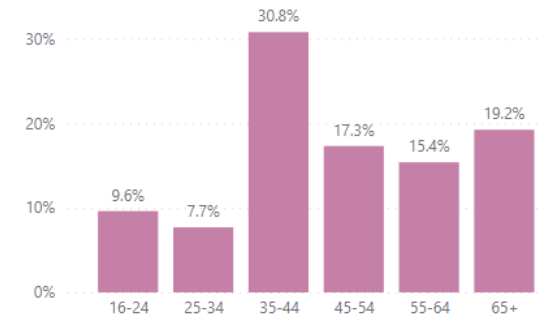## 121 Attendees (general admission, exhibitors and workshop participants)
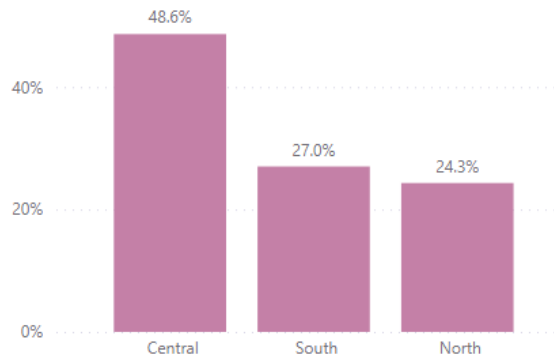
Demographics

Attendees bar chart:
- General Admission: 87
- Workshop Participant: 69
- Exhibitor: 28

Gender identity
- Female: 42.0%
- Prefer not to say: 29.6%
- Male: 27.2%
- Other: 1.2%

Age group
- 16-24: 9.6%
- 25-34: 7.7%
- 35-44: 30.8%
- 45-54: 17.3%
- 55-64: 15.4%
- 65+: 19.2%
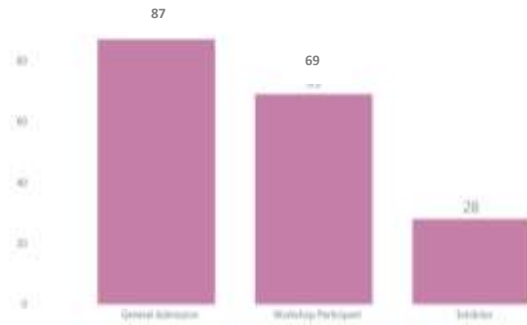
Locality
- Central: 48.6%
- South: 27.0%
- North: 24.3%

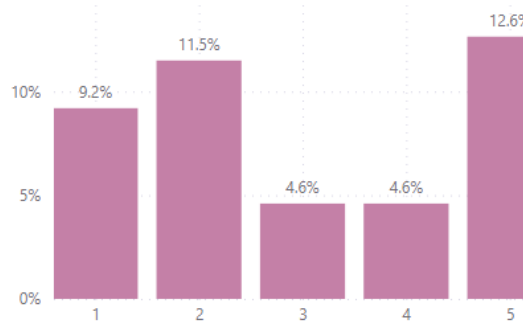### Area by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (1 being most deprived neighbourhoods and 5 being least deprived)
- 1: 9.2%
- 2: 11.5%
- 3: 4.6%
- 4: 4.6%
- 5: 12.6%

Ethnicity
- Prefer not to s...: 41.7%
- Scottish/White Sco...: 25.0%
- White/Other White: 13.1%
- African or Caribbean: 8.3%
- Asian: 4.8%
- Other British: 3.6%
- Other/mixed: 2.4%
- Arab: 1.2%
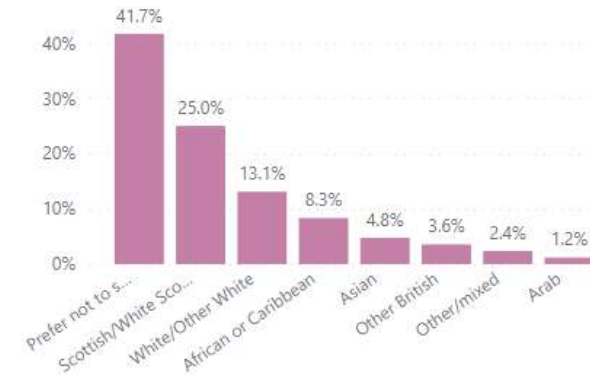
Note the data on this page is from Eventbrite. It does not reflect the people that dropped in on the day without booking or people that did not turn up.

4. Photo Gallery

5. Summary of the Workshops

Workshop 1
Designed and facilitated by Dave Black, GREC and Elaine McConnachie NHS Grampian

Workshop one was held on the theme of **"What does good community engagement look like, and what support and resources do we need to get there?"** It was run over two sessions following the same format. Each workshop session was 40 minutes long, with 18 participants in session one, and 11 in session two.

Part one - Do you feel able to take part in decisions and help change things for the better?
Participants were asked to go into pairs to discuss this question, along with the following prompts:

- Do local people feel listened to?
- Are people able to contribute to decisions that affect them?
- What resources and support allows you to be involved in your community?
- Do local community services or groups allow people to get involved?
- Do organisations such as the council, health services or housing associations actively work with the community to understand their needs?
- Is everyone able to contribute, whatever their age, sex/gender, ethnic group, religious belief, sexuality or disability?

Participants were asked to provide a score between 1 and 7 (where 1 means there is a lot of room for improvement and 7 means there is very little room for improvement) on the following version of the Place Standard Tool (from which the main question and question prompts are adapted):
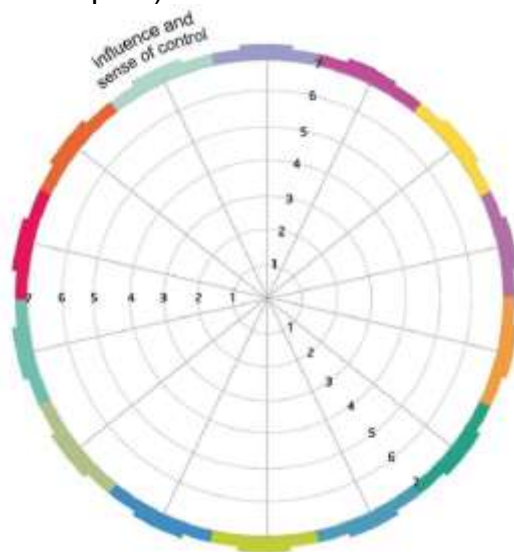
Generally people scored 3 or below on the Place Standard Tool, which is in-keeping with the results to the same question asked regularly through City Voice (Community Planning Aberdeen's Citizen's Panel). Some groups wanted to provide a score

against each of the prompt questions, in which case some scores were higher than 3. However, overall scores tended to be lower, with many groups scoring 1 or 2.

Participants were asked to share in a wider group what factors they felt were important in determining their score. Responses have been themed as follows:

Several participants gave examples of **having got involved in some of the established community engagement processes, finding them to be disappointing** and often felt it was a waste of their time. This was often linked with a feeling that decisions had already been made, and that the potential for community influence over a decision or plan was limited in practical terms – that community engagement in these cases felt like "paying lip-service" or ticking a box. One participant shared their frustrations at coming forward as a "community connector" but not hearing back from others who were meant to be involved in the process.

Many participants brought up the issue of **communication and digital exclusion**. It was felt by several participants that the current general approach does not do enough for those that do not have digital access and/or skills. There was a sense that more and more public bodies are moving services online, without mitigating the impacts on those who will be left behind. In terms of community engagement, some felt there was often a lack of awareness of the ways that people could get involved. The City Council's website was criticised in one group discussion, for being hard to access information. On the other hand, one group fed back that public bodies are not making enough of the engagement possibilities that digital platforms offer. A common theme recurring in the discussions was a desire to see more young people involved and represented, there was a feeling young people offer significant potential in both engagement and volunteering opportunities and digital platforms could be utilised as a way to engage with them.

Connected to the above was a desire expressed by several participants, for more **face to face engagement opportunities**. It seems that there are an increasing number, but a range of meetings are still happening online, and many people do not want to participate in that way.

Several conversations highlighted the importance of **transparency** from public bodies, particularly the Council. This has been a particular issue recently, with community concerns over library and swimming pool closures. Others queried how **accountable** public bodies are in their engagement work, and whether there was any form of audit undertaken on such activity, there was also a desire to publish evidence to ensure appropriate scrutiny of key decisions.

Experiences of being involved with a specific campaign where, when attempts were made to engage with the Council people had **felt 'very shut down'**. The feeling was that the only people who shouted the loudest would be heard. Another group shared their experiences of feeling like the Council seems closed to the public, and that it can often feel like decisions affecting communities have already been taken by the time community members hear about them.
Lack of awareness was another factor that was highlighted in several discussions. This included one participant noting that they were not aware of community councils. Another group raised that **initiatives often seem to be short-lived**, perhaps

because of a dependence on short-term funding. Linked to this, one participant highlighted **that resources are often fragmented and/or out-of-date**, and it can be difficult to find accurate information about the opportunities for engagement that are available.

Part two - How do we move towards being a more democratic city where people feel able to take part in decisions and influence things for the better?

The workshops then went on to explore people's ideas on what needed to change in order to move towards being a city where people do feel they have influence and can take part in decisions. Prompts included asking participants what organisations needed to do differently (or keep doing), what community members needed to do differently (or keep doing), and what resources and support would be helpful in getting us there.

Perhaps the most cross-cutting theme from discussions on how shifts can be made was that public services need to pay care and attention to **ensure that community members are being engaged when there is the genuine opportunity to have influence**; where will people be listened to, and action will be taken. Along similar lines, one participant highlighted that the role for **community members needs to be taken seriously** where attempts are made at co-design (where community members and public services address issues together), i.e. they should have roles like vice-chair, and not be a tokenistic addition.

There were several points raised about **the role of charities**, and how they seem to have more flexibility to reach groups that might otherwise be ignored and to circulate information in various and more targeted ways. Some felt that there are opportunities to have more volunteer involvement in supporting people without digital access. It was also noted that charities are often already at capacity, and there is a risk that public bodies will rely on the safety net of charities to support those who are digitally, and otherwise, excluded.

Other suggestions around **dealing with digital access** were to have an explicit plan in place for how communities will be engaged beyond what is circulated on mailing lists, websites and social media. It was felt to be important that places that support digital access, like libraries, should not have funding cut. Specific support and training services, like Silver City Surfers, were also noted as an important part of the solution, or intergenerational work involving young people. Another participant suggested that people with experience of digital exclusion should be part of a meaningful and mixed group seriously looking at solutions.

One group had a discussion about the need for **resources and funding to be invested** in community-led initiatives if they have a chance of working. If the onus is going to be on community individuals and members to be involved and contribute their time and efforts, there needs to be more support put in by public services for those community members. The current financial climate of public sector cuts was noted by other participants, which makes the "way forward" feel particularly challenging.

Silo working was highlighted as something that needs to be addressed. There was a suggestion that **leadership is required** to capture what is currently happening (how

people can get involved, what people can have influence on, how decisions are being made), and communicating that really effectively with communities.

One participant suggested that community groups need to **galvanise power and influence for themselves**, and not be dependent on public bodies/services to recognise or give them power.

Over the workshops, a few participants noted that engagement is **a two way process**, and that it is partly the responsibility of the public to keep themselves informed and to actively seek opportunity to be involved. However, it was also noted that if systems are not set-up well to include and be impacted by involvement, community members and groups can quickly become disillusioned. One suggestion was that there needs to be **clear expectation setting** when communities are encouraged to get involved in a process. It was felt that this would avoid some of the disenchantment that is often felt from community members. There was some other practical suggestions to make it easier for people to get involved including more advance notice of papers, ensuring materials are produced in summary and easy read versions and are easily accessible.

Another group noted the importance of voting, and **maintaining a connection with those who are elected to represent communities.**

One participant suggested the need for community members to **share knowledge of good practice and good news stories** with others, e.g. through access to some form of shared filing system. Another group spoke about the need for **centralised and up-to-date resources** that can be accessed where there are community facilities, including in non-digital locations (e.g. supermarket and other noticeboards). A further suggestion was for a centralised and neutral point of contact around community engagement, who could be contacted about involvement opportunities but could also provide impartial advice and sign-posting.

Recommendations to be considered by Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA) and its partners:
1. A good practice checklist for use by the Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA) Management Group and Board, to hold officers accountable for community engagement activity, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that community engagement opportunities are meaningful and offer a genuine opportunity to influence. A similar approach to be adopted by key CPA partners.
2. A review of the digital inclusion policies of key CPA partners, and the development of a plan or strategy of how digitally excluded people will be included as part of CPA engagement initiatives.
3. The creation or review of a communications plan on community engagement opportunities for CPA and key partners. This should include exploring the feasibility of a leadership role for a neutral partner to be a central point of contact, as well as looking at developing a centralised resource with up-to-date community engagement opportunities (and associated support).
4. A review of funding from CPA and key partners that goes into supporting community engagement and empowerment activity.

Community Planning Aberdeen

NIHR | Health Determinants Research Collaboration Aberdeen

Citizen Researcher

"What comes to mind when you hear the word "research"?"

This question was asked to try and find out what conceptions (or misconceptions) the attendees had about research

Responses

"Innovative"
"Fun"
"Helping People"

"Theoretical"
"Academic"
"Investigation"

"Dry & boring"
"Political Influence"
"Difficult access"

Positive 27
Neutral 23
Negative 7

32 people took part in the workshop and submitted multiple words or phrases. Of the words and phrases that participants wrote down in response to the above question, 27 responses were felt to be positive, 23 were felt to be neutral, and 7 were felt to be negative

We grouped each word or phrase into 2 categories:

involvement
finding research knowledge
people academic
outcomes funding stories
digging information
influence

Appeal

Barrier

Each category was then split into the following sub categories:

Progress
Research helps to better society and make progress

Finding out new stuff
Research allows us to uncover new information

Making it relevant
Research can be relevant to what people care about

Out of reach
Research is difficult to access and difficult to see happening

Disconnected
Research is done by other people in other buildings

Resource intensive
Research costs a lot of money and is time consuming

This small piece of research will help to inform our messaging about the work of CPA going forward

From the participants at the workshop, around 1 in 3 people have expressed an interest in becoming involved in CPA.

If you would like to find out more about CPA or what it means to be a citizen researcher, please get in touch.

Aberdeen Health Determinants Research Collaborative

Public Contact
Dr. Bea Dawkins
bdawkins@aberdeencity.gov.uk

Workshop 3 Summary
Designed and facilitated by Margaret Stewart, Erin Nelson, Helen Polson, Rachel Thompson, and Amy Walker, ACC/ HSCP

What – Delivering aspects of the Community Gathering that are pitched for children and young people to engage with and progress change ideas within the Improvement Project focusing on Child Rights. There were 3 age-based areas for children and young people: a reading corner for families with children under 5s promoting stories of empowerment and empathy; a space for children 5-12 years to stay with or without their parents/carers to test out different approaches to child friendly consultation; and a spot in the main Community Gathering hall hosted by Aberdeen Youth Movement, promoting their group to all and encouraging sign up of other young people.

Where - Children Make Aberdeen Awesome – consultation activity for 5-12 years olds.
This activity took place in the Learning Space within Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum, stations were set up to test different consultation approaches to understand what works in a drop-in setting and consider how approaches would suits other contexts; such as a school class setting, online surveys or where there are already relationships established. Children were asked about the city, with their responses informing the City Centre and Beach masterplans.

How: Activity took place of the following 5 stations, facilitated by 5 staff/volunteers with 25 children taking part:

Welcome to Aberdeen
Children and their families were welcomed into the space and given an idea of what to expect, contact and any consent information was captured at this point while children were asked a warm-up question: *If Aberdeen had an official ice cream flavour what would it be?* Answers were collected on post it notes and displayed in the welcome area; results included a red and white raspberry ripple, rowie and jam, seaweed and bramble, and honeycomb. This was a clear question and children could see examples so understood quickly what they needed to do.

Tick the box

This station offered a more traditional approach to asking children questions. This time questions were themed around types of play and play spaces in the city. Chairs were lined up like a waiting room and children were asked to sit and fill in the form, with help from an adult only offered if it was asked for it, to gauge how children across this age group would respond when asked for a self-motivated response. Children felt comfortable filling these in, they seemed familiar with the concept and tended not to ask for help. The results were interesting with the majority of children considering their responses and answering the questions asked. 25% of the children ticked all of the boxes to the questions suggesting that they needed additional support or direction, or weren't engaged by the station and just wanted it done. All children who took part completed all the questions asked and 42% provided supplementary written answers to questions.

Yes Ball Games

This stations provided gamification to thinking and responding to questions. Children were asked: **What is important to you about Aberdeen? What could be better? and What questions do you have about the city?** Each question had a matching bucket for the game. The game starts by looking in the 3 buckets set up to see what the previous person contributed. In each bucket is a ball made from scrunched up paper containing the answer to the above questions, the first task is to open these up, read them and add them to the wall for display. This gives an idea of what is important to someone else, and with help from the adult facilitator the child is encouraged to answer the questions for themselves, scrunch them into balls and take shots trying to get them in the right bucket. This activity had children milling round it and staying for some time as they contemplated their answer with adult prompting and readied to take their turn or watch others take theirs. As the session went on, children's responses were collecting on the wall, and were ordered into categories.

What is important to you about Aberdeen?
- My family and friends
- People's feelings
- Aberdeen Football Club
- The Science Centre
- Parks and beaches
- Memories

What could be better?
- Internet and wifi
- People picking up litter / dog poo
- Dealing with online bullying and cyber hacking
- 4 day school week
- Caring for nature

- More libraries
- Be able to swim at the beach

What questions do you have about the city?
- Who made Aberdeen?
- Could the play parks be looked after better?
- How old is Aberdeen?
- Who was the first King?
- Where is the toys?

This activity created a deeper level of big thinking with open questions facilitated by the adult supporting the activity. It offered an opportunity to ask questions of others to balance the expectation of always asking children for their thoughts and recognising that asking questions can bring more clarity or wonder to a situation.

Feeling Awesome

This station used movement and expression to respond to questions, scenarios and ideas, capturing emotions, testing approaches that are more inclusive, non-verbal and non-written. Sessions started with small groups taking part in warm up exercises and games to try out different feelings and emotions, small movements to exaggerated gestures with visual prompts relating to feelings. Different scenarios were shared and physical and emotional responses captured for the following question prompts:

- How does it feel to be here in the art gallery today?
- Do you like going into the city centre?

- How does the city centre make you feel?...
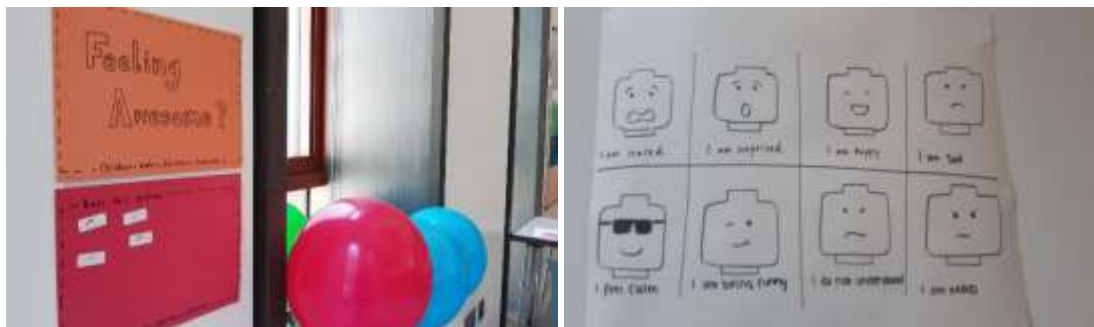
Seeing the future

At this station children could take a bit more time to consider some big questions about our city, think about what the city might be, or could be like, in 5 or 10 years.

- How old are you today? What do you really love to do in the city?
- How old will you be in 5 years time? What might the city be like then?
- How old will you be in 10 years from today, where might you be, what might you be doing?
- If you could make one rule that everyone in our city had to follow, what would that be?
- What one thing could you do to make our city an even better place?

Answers were captured on big rolls of paper on tables with seats all around, or on post-it notes or small pieces of paper and hung up on a washing-line display. These questions required further facilitation from the adult at the station, with the discussion that took place being valuable to spark and progress children's' thinking around the questions.
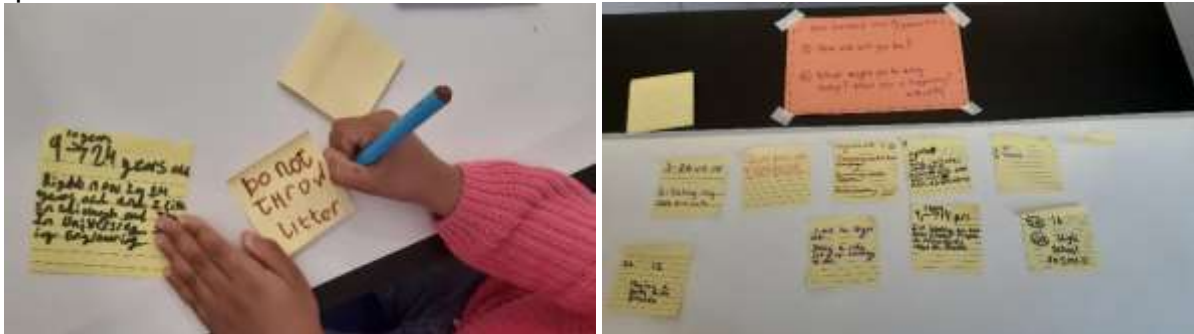
The results from the consultation exercises are being collected and where families consented to receiving the results from this event, they will be sent out. Information collated will also be shared as part of the Improvement Project on Child Rights, and with Creative Learning (Aberdeen City Council) who are working with children on their involvement in the City Centre and Beach Master Planning.

So what

Children were asked to rate their experience of each station before leaving, by placing a 1st, 2nd or 3rd place sticker on their favourite stations, the results were:
1st – Feeling Awesome; Joint 2nd - Yes Ball games & Welcome to Aberdeen; 3rd Tick Box.

Having tested different approaches in the setting we have learned the following:

- Facilitation is really important to help expand children's thinking. What further prompts are required for different age groups?
- Keep the questions simple and unambiguous, test them out beforehand with your target age group and tweak accordingly.
- Be flexible, and adjust if something is not working, however if collecting information, check that the quality of your information collection is not compromised by this, or that your reporting acknowledges this.
- Find the fun but make sure it doesn't overshadow the essence of what you are trying to explore and find out.

Aberdeen Youth Movement (AYM)

AYM are a new group made up of young people 12-25 years who have reinvented the previous Aberdeen City Youth Council. The Community Gathering event enabled a soft launch of their group at as they hoped to network with other agencies and explore how AYM could work together with them on the issue of youth participation. The individuals got lots out of the event: self confidence, self belief, sense of worth and a sense of belonging. AYM were able to network successfully, and got several key contacts made and set up a number of follow up appointments. Over the day 6 group members participated.

6. Meet the event team

The community gathering was organised by a sub group of Community Planning Aberdeen's Community Empowerment Group.

Michelle Crombie

Dave Black

Margaret Stewart

Martin Wyllie

Jade Leyden

Anne Knight

Charlotte Saunders

Carol Hannaford

Thanks also to our staff volunteers for helping out at the event: Lucy Urasa-Skiba, Emma Dobson, Iain Robertson, Kev Donald, Katie Cunningham, Bea Dawkins, Suzanne Thomson, Rachel Thomson, Helen Polson, Erin Nelson, Dorothy Burke, Caroline Hay Crawford, Anne McIntosh, Amy Woodside, Bill Sinclair, Susan Thoms, Susan Hill, Valerie Johnstone, and the libraries team.

Great team effort everyone!

7. Get involved

Community Planning Aberdeen is a partnership of people and organisations working together to make things better in Aberdeen.

Our ambition is for all communities across Aberdeen to be equal community planning partners and we are reaching out to all individuals, community groups and organisations to get involved in our work to make the City a place where all people can prosper, regardless of their background or circumstances.

We have a growing network of community members, groups and organisations who are working with us in many different ways but there is so much to be done that we can do better together.

Find out more about the different ways you can get involved by clicking on the links below.

Find out more about Community Planning Aberdeen

Sign up for community updates

Join a Locality Empowerment Group

Join a Priority Neighbourhood Partnership

Become a member of our Citizen Panel

Find out about other ways of working with communities

Learn about our Community Empowerment Network

Or simply get in touch by emailing communityplanning@aberdeencity.gov.uk

This event was brought to you by the Community Empowerment Group as part of the launch of Community Planning Aberdeen's new Community Empowerment Strategy