

Youth Advisory Panel evaluation: 1 year in



“At its best, co-production feels like belonging, where everyone has a voice and that voice makes a difference.”

This short report pulls together feedback from Buttle UK’s Youth Advisory Panel one year into their two-year term. Feedback was collected in two different ways:

- An **online survey** shared with the Panel via their WhatsApp group. This was not hugely effective, with only 4 of the 13 members completing the survey despite multiple reminders via text and in our regular monthly meetings.
- A **workshop delivered as part of the development of our new Theory of Change**, held with five YAP members. Although the aim of this session was not explicitly to evaluate the YAP, it was felt that it would have been too repetitive to run an additional focus group with YAP members, given that the focus was on their experiences of co-production and the impact of their work with Buttle. Instead, members who took part in this workshop gave their consent for the information they shared to also be used as part of the evaluation of the YAP’s first year.

This report is structured under the four domains of the Lundy Model of Youth Participation: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence. This model takes a children’s rights approach to participation and co-production and aims to ensure that young people enjoy the right to both express their views and have their views given due weight, in line with Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Space

In the “space” domain, young people must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view.

All YAP members who responded to the survey strongly agreed that YAP meetings are a safe and welcoming space for members. They also felt that our meetings are inclusive of people from different backgrounds and experiences.

“In the last residential we were going to create our own ideas in groups and I was able to comfortably discuss and share my own personal experiences and wasn’t judged.”

Young people in the workshop were similarly positive about the diversity of YAP members in terms of their nationalities, ethnicities, ages and experiences, and highlighted the value that this brings to their meetings and projects.

“...having a very good diversity, especially in a team of young people, it helps to get different opinions, different views... and it works with everything: nationalities, cultures, ethnicities. So yeah, it's very good.”

YAP members particularly appreciated the opportunities to come together in person, as they felt that they were more effective and productive when they were in the same room together. They also highlighted getting the opportunity to work with all the other young people on the YAP as a positive, as they get to hear new ideas and learn from others, rather than working with the same people all the time.

“Online, I feel like sometimes there's this barrier. I don't know if we just mentally create it or something, but when we're in person, I think we're much more open and honest with each other and we get to brainstorm together... We get to know each other much better... I think it makes us more cohesive as a panel.”

Voice

Under the “voice” domain, young people must be supported to express their views. This includes providing information and training so they have everything they need to meaningfully engage.

Through the survey, YAP members said that they feel able to express their honest views in our meetings and with other members of the Panel. When asked why, YAP members pointed to the comfortable and open environment in meetings, the welcoming nature of staff who regularly invite their views and opinions, and the option to contribute anonymously through the chat or tools such as Mentimeter.

“The Buttle team is encouraging and welcoming. They provide an atmosphere in which I am certain I can express my opinions and voice my thoughts. The YAP have all had different experiences that I think has allowed us each to be open minded and kind to each other.”

In the workshop, YAP members highlighted how the shared values of the group and their strong relationships with each other meant they felt supported and able to share their experiences and views openly and honestly.

“At least for me personally, it's been nice to be able to, like, resonate with an entire group of people and for it to match my values as well. Like I said, I think because of the background and my situation and story, this is a lot more than just a job for me. It's something that I like doing. I look forward to coming to meetings.”

YAP members also reported in the survey that they feel able to fully contribute to meetings. Workshop participants gave more detail on this and pointed to the information and training they had received as key in enabling them to fully engage in discussions about Buttle's work.

"We got to know about how Buttle works and that's allowed us to give input on what Buttle could do better on. I think that's something I'd really like to highlight because once we learn how Buttle gave their grants, we also gave our ideas. For example, what are the demographics or types of crisis of people that we could help."

However, YAP members did feed back that they would like more actions to be given to them to work on in-between meetings and, in particular, that they want to receive more updates on how we have used the ideas, views and feedback they give in their meetings. This suggests that we are strong on supporting YAP members to express their views, but we need to provide clearer, more regular feedback on how staff and trustees have used this to inform our work.

Audience

"Audience" involves ensuring that the people who can make change happen either participate directly or receive information from activities with young people, and that they take young people's views seriously.

YAP members who responded to the survey felt that their views are taken seriously by Buttle UK staff and that we tend to have the right people in our meetings to make things happen. This was echoed by workshop participants who flagged the importance of staff in meetings being open to feedback, wanting to share decision-making and responding appropriately as vital to them feeling that their views were being taken seriously. This was a strong theme in participants' "letters to their future selves" about co-production at Buttle UK:

"Working with adults who actually wanted to share decisions and not make them for us changed everything. It made me realise my voice has power, that my experiences matter and that I can help shape things that make life better for others too. I hope you feel proud of how far you came from being someone who doubted whether anyone would listen to someone who helped lead change."

However, they were less sure about how much their views are considered by our trustees. This is likely to be the result of the limited contact that YAP members have had with trustees to date, with one explicitly asking for more meetings with board members.

When asked what Buttle could do so that YAP members felt that their views were taken more seriously, the call was repeated for more feedback and updates on actions taken as a result of their ideas and inputs.

Influence

The final domain, “influence”, requires adults to take action in response to young people’s views, or at least explain why action cannot be taken.

This domain is where we have more work to do in our co-production programme. In the survey, YAP members were unsure whether they receive feedback and updates about how their ideas have been used. This should be standard practice and is something we need to build into our regular communication with the YAP, and into their meetings. There were a couple of examples of where we had done this well, for example, with the social media and branding work – but overall, this is a clear area for improvement.

Survey respondents were more confident to say that their work had influenced decisions at Buttle UK. Similarly, workshop participants gave many examples of where they felt their work had resulted in changes in things that Buttle has been developing over the last year, specifically our new strategy, our brand refresh, the look and feel of our social platforms, and starting work on our deeper support programme.

Those who responded to the survey were less sure about the impact they have made beyond Buttle UK (e.g. in the wider grants sector). Wider impact across the sector is something we want to focus on in the second year of YAP members’ terms.

Impact

Workshop participants spent some considerable time discussing the impact that being involved in the Panel has made to them personally. Broadly, these changes fell under mental health and wellbeing; social networks and interpersonal skills; wider employability skills; turning adversity into opportunity; and empowerment.

Mental health and wellbeing

A couple of the young people in the workshop explained that working with Buttle and feeling that their voice mattered had improved their mental health and wellbeing. This came from realising that they were not the only ones experiencing the challenges they faced, finding a safe space where they could share their experiences and have them taken seriously, and feeling that they finally had some say over their lives.

“My mental health has been very low in the past and I grew up not being allowed to speak or have opinions. Working with Buttle has helped me not just speak to others openly but helped me get out of my shell mentally.”

Social networks and interpersonal skills

Social networks and individual friendships were a key outcome for a number of the group. One young person described the relationship with her best friend who she met through a previous Buttle UK project. The group generally agreed that knowing that

everyone on the group has experienced poverty and crisis has created an environment in the Panel that is supportive and empathetic. This has helped some overcome the isolation of their experiences.

“Especially because you can feel alone and you can form bonds with others that have experienced a traumatic past you don’t feel as alone anymore.”

For one young person, the meetings and projects she works on through Buttle UK has helped her overcome some of the isolation she felt as a young, single mother.

“I also was a single mother at home and joining Buttle helped me speak to real humans again 🙌 and I felt like I was doing parenthood less alone.”

More broadly, YAP members spoke about the communication and interpersonal skills that they have developed through being on the Panel. The diversity of backgrounds and experiences of members has helped them learn how to engage with people who have different viewpoints and personalities to themselves.

“I do think Buttle’s really helped me with being more open-minded, being able to communicate with lots of different people, because I’ve kind of lived in my bubble of people like myself, if that makes sense. So meeting others who have varied experiences and quite difficult experiences, I think it’s really broadened my own way of thinking.”

Employability and soft skills

Many of the workshop participants spoke about gaining skills such as teamwork, communication, innovation and confidence in presenting through being on the Panel. One young person reflected on her time so far with Buttle UK as her first professional experience, and how it will act as a measure for future employment opportunities.

“Buttle does genuinely take care of us a lot. And they’ve got me to a standard where whoever I work with, they’re going to have to be listening to my voice, and they’re going to have to be like... Do you feel that your voice is being heard? What can we do to make it better? Because that’s just the vibe that it gives every time... Honestly, it’s a standard I don’t know if people can meet later in my life.”

Turning adversity into opportunity

Many of the YAP members in the workshop spoke about the power of using their negative experiences of poverty and crisis to effect positive change for others, and the meaning and pride this gave them. This was not only a strong motivator for young people to join the Panel in the first place, but was described as an outcome in and of itself by YAP members.

“Buttle UK provided me with a space to not only discuss my struggles, but be able to share it with others and then develop on it so that we can help other people who have similar or worse or different struggles.”

Empowerment

Finally, young people spoke more broadly about feeling empowered as a result of being on the Panel. This came in two forms: firstly feeling more empowered in their own lives where perhaps they felt they had little control before. This came about through young people being encouraged to share their experiences and views, and then having those views taken seriously and acted on.

“It gives us an opportunity to have some control and power when a lot of us have never had that before.”

The second version of this outcome was feeling more empowered to continue advocating for change in different ways. This might be for themselves or for others, in organisations or with individuals. This was a powerful outcome that YAP members wanted to build on in the future.

“Buttle UK has allowed me to use my voice for change, which for me, generally is a massive thing. I think it was like a stepping stone to hopefully bring my confidence to the future so that I can advocate for needed change.”

Actions

The overall feedback from YAP members is extremely positive. They feel safe to share their honest views in meetings with staff and other Panel members; feel their views are taken seriously by Buttle staff; can see some of the changes they are making internally at Buttle UK; and have already experienced a range of personal outcomes as a result of being on the Panel.

However, it does appear that our co-production work is currently stronger in enabling young people to express their views, than ensuring that they feel their views are given due weight. There are some clear actions that we can take to address this:

- Implement regular communication about actions taken as a result of the YAP’s work. This might include:
 - having a section at the start of each monthly meeting where we cover all actions taken since the previous meeting;
 - email updates in-between meetings; and/or
 - quarterly roundups which pull together a “you said, we did” summary of feedback for the group.
- Holding more meetings between trustees and YAP members. This is something that the YAP have already built into their current workplan, which includes:

- A lunch and learn for staff and trustees in November 2025
- Running a session at the December Board meeting to introduce the YAP, discuss joint goals with trustees and introduce the Lundy model
- Having a member of the YAP join Board meetings as a youth representative
- More regular engagement with trustees in our monthly YAP meetings and building a relationship with our new Chair
- Starting to build more external-facing work into the YAP's workplan so they can begin influencing how other organisations in the trusts and foundations sector engage with co-production.
- Getting more regular feedback from YAP members on what's working well, how we can ensure they feel their views are taken seriously and whether they know what impact their work is having within Buttle UK and beyond.

Finally, we want to finish with this vision of what co-production means to one of the members of the YAP, as something for us to continually work towards at Buttle UK:

“For me, co-production means working together as equals, where young people and adults both bring their experiences, voices and ideas to make decisions that matter. And it's not about being consulted or just giving feedback at the end. It's about being part of shaping things right from the start. It also means trust, respect, and shared power. Adults listening with an open mind and young people feeling confident that what they say will or can truly influence change. Co-production also means learning from each other. Young people bring lived experience and creativity, while adults bring structures and resources. When those come together, they create something stronger, more honest and more effective.”