



# *Youthink*

*enabling the voice of young people to be heard*

## PROJECT GUIDE

## **What is Youthink?**

Youthink is a fast moving multi-media event or series of events within a pre determined time frame. It is the first step on the road to change and can be used in a variety of settings. Youthink events are designed to act as a catalyst for **young people** to identify issues that are of importance to them on any subject and enable them to gather evidence and 'give voice' to those issues in order to influence others and stimulate change.

## **What happens at a Youthink event?**

The programme can vary but the basic format is constructed around content that has been prepared *before* the actual event takes place, preferably with the target group of young people (see pre event preparation). This material may be pre-recorded interviews or vox pops on video generated by the target group that the event seeks to empower. It could be live material that has been produced before the event and delivered as part of the event programme. It could take the form of short dramatic segments or presentation around a particular issue of concern. Whatever the ideas and format the basic purpose of this material is to set the scene for a particular topic or issue and stimulate thought and discussion in preparation for voting.

The programme is divided into segments addressing each topic or issue. Each segment begins with a short presentation of the material mentioned above to 'set the scene'. The subject is then thrown open for the audience to debate if they wish to do so through the voting handsets that contain individual microphones that then 'broadcast' through the event PA. Sometimes a great deal of discussion will ensue and at other times there will be none. Special guests/experts can be invited to come and offer their opinions on the subject matter. In the past Youthink events have been conducted with a more formal panel at the front but we have found this can detract from a spontaneous response from participants. So these guests are now invited to join the audience and speak from 'the floor' along with everyone else.

At the heart of each Youthink event is the electronic voting system. This works on digital phone technology and consists of 50 (soon to be 100) identical handsets given to members of the audience/target group. Each handset has a mic that, as already stated can be used for participating in the debate, and 9 option buttons. These are used to vote in a wide variety of ways on different issues that link to each segment and have been pre programmed into the system beforehand. The pre-programmed questions have multiple-choice answers from a simple YES or NO vote to more complex answers of up to 9 options. Votes can also be taken on a grading between most to least preferred option. Data can also be collected regarding the participants e.g. where they live, gender, age range, education or employment status etc. All handsets are linked to a laptop that automatically collates the results as soon

as the last handset has delivered its vote. All this information is immediately projected from the laptop onto a big video screen display for everyone to see.

Once the voting is completed for that particular segment, which may require voting on a number of questions with multiple choice answers, the programme moves on to the next topic and the voting information is saved in the computer for later analysis.

### **What pre-event preparation needs to take place?**

Pre-event preparation is the key to the success of every Youthink event. The agenda for this is as follows:

- Identifying a clear aim for the event(s).
- Identifying & targeting the young people who will participate.
- Have them identify the issues and subsequently the questions that encapsulate these issues.
- Preparing vox pops or other presentational material based on the subject matter of the, issues & questions.
- Programme questions and multiple-choice answers into the electronic voter.
- Identifying and booking the venue(s) that reflect the target group(s)
- Publicising each event or sequence of events as widely as possible.
- Organising transport to and from the venue if necessary to gain the widest audience and greatest impact.
- Invite guests/experts to help stimulate discussion or respond to issues if appropriate.

The pre-event preparation is all about engaging young people in their environments and is a great opportunity to do some in depth youth & group work whilst addressing issues of Citizenship.

In previous projects over a wide area such as a District, individual 'Venue Managers' have been appointed to work towards establishing venues that reflect the young people the event will engage with. So it may be that there needs to be venues in rural, semi-rural and urban environments. This has the benefit of being able to analyse data from a variety of sources giving more depth to the overall outcome. Or there may be one central venue where participants are brought in from a variety of locations. There may only be a single venue required anyway if the event is to focus on issues that are mainly local or affect that particular user group, a school or youth centre for example.

Venue Managers or local youth workers (they may be one and the same) will also have an ongoing relationship with local young people and these will probably make up the core group who will identify issues, create questions and prepare resources for the main event. They will also play a key role in publicity and bringing in a wider group to participate at the event.

## **What is the role of the Event Management Group? (EMG)**

The event management group is basically a small group who will be responsible to make the whole project happen. Ideally they will be a mix of Venue Managers, representatives from the young people who will participate and 'professionals' who have a 'stake' in the event, eg youth workers, school staff, local political reps, other organisations and agencies. The key role of this group is to stimulate interaction that will get to the heart of the issues those targeted young people want to address and help them express their thoughts and aspirations in a way that will be dynamic and challenging at the event. A longer-term aim is to have a group of young people well versed in Youththink event organisation who will become the event management group as part of a Citizenship initiative. They would also be responsible to deliver the event(s) on the night.

The EMG will meet regularly in the run up to the event and facilitate all the pre event preparation as laid out above. It is vital the group functions well and is clear what needs to be done in order for the event to reach it's maximum potential.

### **Post Event Activity.**

Youththink is really the first step in a longer process designed to engage the participants in a strategy for change either directly or as a part of a wider process. After a Youththink event the data that has been gathered can be analysed in a variety of ways, which the Youthcomm Team will facilitate, and present in the required format.

It is worth noting that a local Youththink represents the beginning of a process that can be perceived as having a high degree of potential for the engagement of young people to facilitate change and engage in Citizenship activity with an emphasis on political education. Therefore Youththink should not be seen in isolation but as the catalyst in an ongoing process of change. A good deal of thought should be given as to how the results should be handled and used. It is important to have given the ongoing process a good deal of thought prior to Youththink taking place and it should be seen as an important ingredient in a well defined strategy.

### **For more info. on Youththink contact :**

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