

Chapter 8

Digital Technology-Based Research With Young People in the Context of Hungarian Child Protection


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Abstract

This chapter discusses how to involve children and young people in decisions and encourage them to express their needs and participate in the decision-making process to develop a quality intervention. By describing the different aspects of projects involving a participatory approach, it shows how giving voice to children and young people unlocked new perspectives regarding the Hungarian child protection system. Participation of children in research is limited in Hungary, partly due to the challenging legislation and authorisation process. This chapter shows how research to develop child-friendly digital tools can contribute to collecting children's views on their needs related to child protection support, and how the process of listening to children can improve parenting and caregiving responses to the needs of younger and older children living with their families or in the child protection system. The chapter analyses the effect of digital applications on children's and young people's capacity to advance towards autonomy, including applications and a video campaign with short video clips created by young people. These projects gave an opportunity for children and youth in the public care system to describe their lives and wishes for the future. The analysis found: (a) for a functional child protection system and to promote development for children and young people, children's voices need to be amplified; (b) by expressing their voices, children become more autonomous; (c) children's voices contribute to decreasing social prejudices against children and young people in public care; and (d) listening to children and youth

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who age out of care can help professionals working in the child protection system better understand their beneficiaries.

Keywords: Hungary; mobile app; digital tools for youth; participatory research; good practices; voice of youth

Introduction

In this chapter, the experience of developing two apps and a video competition is presented as good practice in the Hungarian child protection system to show why it is important to inform and involve children and young people in decisions about their lives and how to encourage them to express their needs in a more targeted way. The opinion of children and young adults can be channelled into the development of high-quality child protection services, and their participation can help professionals better understand their situation and wishes and thus, work together more effectively.

The two online-based tools and video campaign were introduced to create social awareness in Hungarian society of the challenges faced by children and young people in the child welfare and protection system. This proved to be a good example of how although the involvement of vulnerable target groups in research and service development is very limited in Hungary, these programmes were important experiences for child protection professionals and a learning process regarding participatory research methods. The outcome of this participatory research indicates best practices for professionals in the child protection system.

Situation of Children in Hungary

In Hungary, the 1997 Child Protection Act defines the functional, theoretical and practical framework of the Hungarian child protection system. It also defines the fundamental rights and duties of children and their parents; the child protection system, including the benefits and measures taken by the authorities; the child welfare and child protection tasks of the state and local authorities, churches and nongovernmental organisations; and the organisational and main rules of the guardianship administration. The aim of child protection system is to prevent the various social problems that children and their parents face in their daily lives and once they have arisen, to alleviate and eliminate these situations of vulnerability. Nonetheless, systemic barriers exist to meeting this goal in Hungary, including an insufficient professional workforce and high turnover that have led the system to be primarily responsive to acute situations (i.e. ‘firefighting’ work culture), overoccupied with the continually increasing problem of child poverty, and lacking a clear legal definition of child abuse and neglect. A preventive approach, prevention as a way of thinking, and the incorporation of best practices and methods based on this approach are essential, but at present, this cannot be achieved in Hungarian practice (Rác & Sik, 2020; Révész, 2007; Sik, 2020).

Since the regime change in 1989, the increasing poverty of children has been a problem in Hungary. The proportion of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Hungary is 23.8% in 2018, according to a 2018 study (European Court of Auditors, 2020). Child poverty varies widely by region. Children living in small, disadvantaged, segregated settlements have much lower chances of mobility and a higher risk of social exclusion (RÁCZ & SIK, 2020).

Regarding prevention and effective responses to problems that have already developed or are longstanding, various child protection programmes have a very important role to play, including seeking new ways and innovative methods to reach parents and children. Since 2017, the Rubeus Association has been implementing innovative programmes based on a broad partnership with members of state and municipal and civil representatives of the care system, which aim to provide social professionals working in family and child welfare services and child protection system with effective tools to improve their work, address family problems and contribute to a more conflict-free parent–child relationship by developing parenting skills.

Children’s Participation in Evaluation and Development of Child Protection Services

According to the principles recommended by the Council of Europe (2011), ‘social services should ensure that the child is heard and taken seriously’ (p. 7). Participation of children and their families, including hearing their voices, is not common in the Hungarian child protection system. In the last 30 years, different child protection programmes have been implemented in the country with more or less success, but involvement of children and their families in the creation, development, or evaluation of child protection services still happens only on rare occasions. As recommended by the Council of Europe (2016a, 2016b, 2022) and experts in child participation (KENNAN *et al.*, 2016; LARKINS *et al.*, 2014), a framework is needed to systematically collect children’s views on the welfare and care services directed towards them. As for adult beneficiaries of services, involving children would inform the planning, monitoring and improvement process.

The involvement of people younger than 18 in research is generally challenging and requires child-friendly methods (PUNCH, 2002). Success in creating spaces for participation (Council of Europe, 2016a) in child welfare services depends even more on methods used for consultation or collaboration with adults or initiation of research to evaluate and improve social services.

In the Hungarian child protection system, methods to involve children in evaluative or action research are rarely used. One reason is the challenges of working with children and young people in care and the scarcity of good practices adapted to their age-related needs that would facilitate the expression of their opinions. Another reason is related to present legislation – to involve children in research, a complicated authorisation procedure is required (Care Inspectorate, 2012; COSSAR *et al.*, 2013). Thus, the involvement of children in research on issues

that concern them is negligible in Hungary. ‘While many researchers argue for the inclusion of children in research because of the neglected perspective of children and their rights to participation, the primacy of children’s protection can have a significant impact on their actual participation’ (Kutrovátz, 2016, p. 89).

Aiming to respond to the recommendations of the Council of Europe, this study explored how using digital tools to give voice to children is a way to make this process interesting and worthy for children and young adults (Bidargaddi et al., 2017; Dute et al., 2016; Grist et al., 2017; Rác et al., 2022).

Two apps, YounGO and Asszerteen, were developed based on the notion that for adolescents with history of child maltreatment and abandonment or with some kind of child protection problem, starting an independent life upon becoming young adults is a major challenge, especially when there is none or only a fragmented safety net around them. Professionals working with children and young people, helping them in their daily lives and development, often encounter challenging situations linked to crises in their lives (death, illness) or arising from difficulties in the environment (e.g. neglect, family conflicts, abuse). The background to the two applications and video competition involves the Rubeus Association. The Asszerteen app is one development of complex child protection programmes that have been running since 2017.¹ The target groups of these programmes include children and their parents affected by addictions and mental disorders, family abuse, and conflicts. The programmes focus on strengthening the position of children in the family and more broadly, breaking down social stereotypes about children with child protection problems and their parents. In the case of a child who has been removed from the family, the aim is to help them maintain contact and support their effective reintegration.²

The YounGo app is an earlier development of the Rubeus Association, but its promotion and conscious use have been integrated into the association’s programmes since 2017. YounGo was the basis of the Who Am I? video campaign.

The two apps were created to support children as they face difficult life situations, with the aim of helping them develop the skills they need to live independently in the future (FIFTI, 2016; Rác, 2017; Rác & Bulyáki, 2021). In describing the process of developing the apps, this chapter outlines the role of participatory research with children and how their views were incorporated into the apps’ finalisation.

It is important to note that on the international level, many applications exist. The goal of these apps is to help disadvantaged children and young adults to become more independent, increase their social integration and develop their

¹The results and outcomes of these complex programmes are presented by Rác and Homoki (2021); see <http://rubeus.hu>.

²The results of research regarding the effectiveness of the Rubeus Association programmes (with participants including parents, children and professionals via quantitative and qualitative methods) show that involving the participants improved parental skills, strengthened the relationship between parents and children, and decreased the social disadvantages of children. Professionals gained self-confidence and awareness, helping them build partnerships with their clients (Rác & Homoki, 2021).

social skills. The apps reflect the main topics important for growing up successfully, such as housing, education, health, family and relationships.

The results show that young people find these apps useful and prefer them as a way of communicating. The apps help them navigate challenges in their life and provide them up-to-date information. The apps have information about available helplines, so users can access them easily. The organised information also helps professionals connect with young people (Bidargaddi et al., 2017; Dute et al., 2016; Grist et al., 2017; Rácz et al., 2022).

YounGo

The development of the YounGo – Help, I’m Growing Up! phone app involved child protection professionals, researchers and young people placed in the child protection system. The YounGo app is based on thematic groups, which are called clubs,³ and a comic book that describes the specialised care sector, raising awareness of the need for an effective and innovative form of support to help children become autonomous adults. The primary target group of the project is children and young people aged 12–30 growing up without a family in the child protection system. The secondary target group of the project are professionals (social workers, educators, foster parents and guardians) working with children.

The development of the app involved three key studies involving children and young people. Their participation in these studies helped improve the quality of the app. With the help of children, the topics, language and design of the app were more likely to fit the concerned target groups.

Study 1: Focus Groups With Children, Young Adults and Professionals

Participants and Methods

The development process of YounGo was based on focus group interviews regarding the thematic clubs. The goal during the development of YounGo was to determine what kind of support they would need to become adults, what topics they would be interested in and who they would consider credible in terms of providing the information they want. To get information about all these needed supports, four focus groups were conducted with the aim to hear the voices of the children, young adults and professionals who would use the app. The sample for

³The thematic groups or clubs were led by child protection professionals. Each group consisted of five sessions. The theme was, according to the research, helping adolescents become adults. The sessions were interactive, such that every topic was elaborated through group games based on the experiences of the participants. For example, in the topic of school and work career and job search, the participants discussed their school and work career plans, practiced curriculum vitae writing and focused on available mentor programmes and successful ways of job searching. To support the participation of the adolescents, group activities were important and necessary: In the group sessions, the participants had the opportunity to share their opinions, point of view and needs, and give feedback about the sessions (see the detailed script of the sessions in [FIFTI, 2016](#)).

the focus groups included (a) children aged 14–18 and living in children’s homes, (b) children aged 14–18 and living in foster care, (c) young adults aged 19–25 and living in the aftercare system, and (d) professionals (social workers, educators, foster parents and guardians). Twenty children and youth participated, with six to eight members per group. The focus groups were overseen by researchers, and the topics discussed were school experiences, experiences in the child protection system, leisure time, friends and social connections, and challenges of growing up (housing, job search, earning money). Consent from the guardians of minor participants was received prior to the focus groups. The focus groups were conducted according to the guidelines and recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were anonymised for analysis.

The focus groups took place in a new environment: a club room designed for kids where they were offered snacks and drinks and had time to get to know other children from different foster homes. Therefore, the setting of the focus groups developed an atmosphere where young people seemed comfortable and able to express their views in an informal way, sharing their experiences with people from different care settings.

Results

Partly because of their different care placements and partly because of their child protection status, the topics these participants considered important in terms of independent living, the depth of information they had on these topics and their sources of information were minimal. However, several important themes concerning children’s needs were identified through these focus groups.

A main difference between growing up in residential homes or with foster parents regarding preparing for independent living was the importance of time management and recreation. Children in public care perceived sports and hobbies as playing a more important role in their lives than those in residential care. In the process of developing the app, these outcomes were considered, resulting in mental health and recreation as a focus of the app. Participants were unanimous in their opinion that they had found emotional stability in their care placement and integrated into the family, even if they lacked knowledge and concrete plans for starting their lives in many areas. ‘It’s very good for me that I can always count on them, no matter what, no matter what the problem. They are always there for me. So, we are very close, we love them very much’ (Participant aged 14–18 and living in residential care).

When asked how they had experienced coming of age and whether they received help in preparing for the new challenges of adulthood, many participants answered in the negative. In relation to the transition to aftercare, young adults reported that they had not received the necessary preparation and that they still felt like children. Many had concrete plans for their future, but they still had much uncertainty about implementation and detailed steps needed to achieve the plan. When asked about practical tasks of everyday life, such as administration and money management, young adults reported that they often find it difficult to manage simple situations without help. Their opinions were a great help in

structuring the content of the programme and app. ‘I didn’t even know [about] a card, an OTP debit card, because I was afraid to go in because, what can I say? I might not understand what he’s talking about, and I’ll be sitting there like an idiot’ (Participant aged 19–25 and living in aftercare system).

Respondents also welcomed help with psychological conflicts and managing social relationships. Many reported crisis situations in which they greatly needed adequate support, such as struggles with depression, dealing with a breakup, experiences of abuse, and alcohol and substance abuse. When developing the apps, we considered that the young people who were interviewed found it difficult to talk about sensitive issues and had a strong need to reach helplines when in crisis.

Study 2

Following the results of the first study, five clubs focussed on preparing for independent living were created in two locations in Hungary based on the wishes and interests of these participants. The experiences of these clubs were summarised in a handbook (FIFTI, 2016). This was followed by a request for an information and communication technology-based form of assistance that would always be accessible and updated in the language and on the topics of interest to young people. The resulting YounGo app cover topics related to growing up, such as further education, housing, sexuality, living without love, relationships, finding a job and having children. Young people played an important role in both the identification of the themes and the app’s design, given their views have been sought at every stage of the project.

The app can be downloaded to smartphones for free, and there is an accessible website, too. The app contains information about several categories (such as children’s rights, school, job search, health, housing and helplines). Each category is divided into further subcategories. Each category contains links to additional websites, short films, downloadable documentaries and short text descriptions of each topic. For example, the topic about choosing a career has four subthemes: Which school should I choose?; What are my talents?; career choice guide – questionnaires and service providers; and mentoring programmes and scholarships.

Study 3: Testing the App

Before the app was launched, 50 children and young adults in child protection services tested it and gave their input; most of them participated in focus groups, too. The testing took place in groups in different care settings, where everyone tried the app or its equivalent website at the same time. Participants provided feedback on both content and design in discussions. Test results indicated that the app was very well received by children and young adults, easy to use, logical and comfortable. In their opinion, the wording of the content available in the app was to their taste, and the content was rich in news and up-to-date information.

Based on their opinion, the app was finalised in terms of what topics would be important to support independent living, adding topics such as cooking economical meals or accessing helplines. They also asked for information on low-cost housing solutions and services available to improve their self-awareness.

The widespread use of the app has to occur, but the feedback shows clearly that this tool can help not only children and young people but also professionals working with them on a daily basis (FIFTI, 2016; Rác, 2017; Rác & Bulyáki, 2021; Rác et al., 2021). It is important to note that on an international level, many applications exist. The goal of these apps is to help disadvantaged children and young adults become more independent, increase their social integration and develop their social skills. The apps reflect the main topics of importance to growing up successfully such as housing, education, health, family and relationships. According to the results, the target group can use the app and the organised information available through the apps to understand the world around them, access helplines and contact professionals (Bidargaddi et al., 2017; Dute et al., 2016; Grist et al., 2017; Rác et al., 2022).

Dissemination

To promote the app and introduce good practices into child protection, a large-scale Facebook campaign was run in 2018 and a competition was organised among young people to take photos reflecting aspects of their lives and challenges based on the themes of the app. In the Who Am I? campaign, we asked young people to use the app to present their lives and the challenges of growing up through its themes.

Asszerteen

The Awakenings Foundation,⁴ a partner of the Rubeus Association, developed Asszerteen in 2020 and 2021. This app had an organisational predecessor in 2017, Asszertívia, an app that teaches assertive communication and helps people with mental health problems and psychosocial disabilities to cope with difficult everyday life situations and learn assertive communication patterns. This app was further developed with children and young people from child welfare and child protection backgrounds.

Asszerteen's stated aim is to develop teenagers' assertive communication and stress management skills in an easy-to-learn format. It features three domains – positive prompts, negative feelings and positive feelings – which consist of short modules of 5–15 minutes. The free course takes place in a virtual city (Asszertívia), and the user is asked to choose effective expressions and reactions from a set of options for characters (from different generations) in everyday life situations. The app first briefly presents the aim of assertive communication to young people and then builds on hypothetical situations where they learn to notice and

⁴<https://ebredesek.hu/e>

understand assertive communication. It is important to learn how to give feedback in certain pleasant or unpleasant situations. There are also short explanations for each situation so that they learn the correct, inoffensive way to express their feelings. In each task, the users choose from emotion emojis to learn to recognise and express their feelings. The end goal of Asszerteen is to help them use assertive communication in everyday situations with their friends and adults – e.g. dare to ask for favours or help or say no to requests that are inconvenient for them.

The course is accompanied by audio materials. The communication skills exercises were tested and discussed by young people.

As was the case with YounGo, children participated in the development of Asszerteen via research and later tested the app.

Stage 1: Interviews With Children and Professionals

Participants and Methods

As a first step in the development of the app, a needs assessment was carried out through group discussions with six professionals working with young people (social workers, school social workers and psychologists) and teenagers (eight girls, four boys) involved in child protection. The teenage participants were 14–17 years old. One needs assessment interview was held with professionals and three with the target group. The three group interviews with young people explored their knowledge, interest and sensitivity regarding communication and its difficulties with siblings, parents and professionals. The setting of the focus groups was similar to the YounGo study: a neutral and safe place with snacks and drinks and a calm and welcoming atmosphere.

Results

The interviews explored life situations that are sources of difficulties in the lives of teenagers, including their family life, relationships with their peers and in the adult world, and society at large. The interviews revealed that the main concerns in relation to peers are bullying, name calling, teasing, and exclusion and how they can prevent and deal with these issues effectively. Examples were given of the hurtful impact of remarks about appearance, body type or differences in financial means. In relation to the family, the focus was on conflict and the difficulty of divorce, with participants reporting feeling helpless and their parents being irritated. Similarly, the need for help with schooling was identified as an imbalanced communication situation, in which the parents don't understand them, and a source of conflict in the parent–child relationship because of academic performance.

Stage 2: Testing and Finalising the App

The young people were involved in the preparation of the content and design of the app and individually commented on the app multiple times during its testing phase.

For each module, they could indicate in writing whether they would change it and if so, what they would change. Some participants also made textual suggestions on how a communication situation and response options should be presented in the app. For example, participants indicated the phrase ‘My old man just doesn’t understand me’ should be modified because the term ‘my old man’ is not used to refer to fathers. Based on the feedback received, situations and tasks in the app were finalised. The development process in every phase involved the participants, and their reception was very positive in every round (Rác & Bulyáki, 2021).

The two apps, representing good practice from a child-protection perspective, are unique ICT-based tools that aim to develop skills, build self-confidence and prepare children for independent living in the long term. Table 8.1 presents the outcomes and experiences of the apps’ development. They address young people in a modern way, present important topics and life situations, and offer solutions for youth when they feel stuck, whether in a situation involving adults or with their peers, by offering help and support. The latter is done partly through skills development and partly by describing specific helplines and forms of support. A further strength of both apps is that they also address professionals working with young people in an indirect way. They also provide young people and professionals with relevant information in one place. At each stage of development – design, implementation, testing and finalisation – the voice of young people was very much included, and the two development teams sought to ensure that professionals working with the target group were also involved. The aim of these good practices is to raise social awareness of child protection and the acceptance of those already in child protection specialist care. In 2021, the Rubeus Association launched the Who Am I? campaign to make child protection more visible to society.

Who Am I? Campaign

The Who Am I? campaign was based on a video call for entries, wherein children and young people in child protection or any child protection services could submit a short film about their daily life, interests and plans. We asked for videos of up to 2 minutes in which children and young people could talk about themselves: what they like to do currently and what they would like to do in the future and how they support others (which makes them feel better, even for a minute). Two age categories were announced: 12–14 and 15–18. In total, 37 high-quality entries were received, judged by a professional jury, and ranked via a public vote through a Facebook campaign to increase visibility. The campaign was a success and is currently being considered further. Thousands of people voted for the best entries on Facebook. At the seminar where results were presented, participants said they were keen to work on their short films to give an authentic picture of their lives in the child protection system. The Rubeus Association plans to organise more campaigns like this to help children in the public care system raise their voices and show their lives to the rest of society.

Table 8.1. Experiences in Developing Apps to Involve Children.

Apps	Preliminary Research, Consultation Involving Children	Assessment, Testing and Launching the App, Participatory Research	Possible Further Development of the App
YounGo	Missing skills Important topics School, job seeking, deviancies, relations, leaving the child protection system	No redundant topic appears in the list Every main topic is included in the main list Minor amendments needed to finalise certain topics Claims have been formulated for new subtopics	Can be adapted to different child protection, prevention goals The app has to be updated regularly to keep up with new contents and knowledge opinions and interests of users (teens, young adults) are constantly needed to update the content of the apps
Asszerteen	Concerned teens and young adults often face disturbing, harmful and threatening situations. They often are left alone with harsh, difficult emotions after these situations in all parts of their life: peer groups, family and society. Their skills and knowledge about reacting in these situations are fragmented; they need practical advice.	Participating teens and young adults suggested changes, mostly regarding wording. As a result, the app uses the language of teenagers, which improved its approval. Clarity and understandability are important. Simple, clear messages and simple, short and catchy answers are needed.	Education of the children can be done only with the assertive participation of adults. Acceptance is necessary at all levels. Introducing school social work is a chance for children and professionals to connect. The use of this app can help children, parents and professionals better understand each other and value the opinions of children and young adults.

Source: Original work.

Discussion

The examples of good participatory practices presented in this chapter show that for the self-regulation of a child protection system, the voice of children and young people need to be amplified to improve the quality of the system. Expressing their views and voicing their opinions helped children and young people become more independent and develop skills such as self-advocacy, decision-making, relationship-building and assertiveness. Encouraging young people to express their needs related to the care system increases the social visibility of children in the child protection system. By listening to what young people have to say, caregivers become more aware of the emotional dynamics between adults and minors, which can contribute to reducing social prejudice against children and young people in foster care and institutions, as exemplified by the *Who Am I?* competition. In a functional child protection system, the voices of empowered children and young people need to be amplified. Strengthening their capacity to express themselves and be heard facilitates the empowerment of young people and their process of becoming autonomous. Listening to young adults who are about to leave care can help professionals working in the foster care and institutional system to better understand what they need to prepare for an independent life, including their fears and potential stumbling blocks. The apps described in this chapter also provide professionals with up-to-date knowledge, help them understand their clients' feelings and thoughts, and aid them in taking joint action in an effective collaborative way to resolve their personal life.

These tools contribute to children's safety by providing them with quality and adequate information on important topics like independent living or communication with peers, parents and adults. It is important that young people were involved in collecting and analysing these data as research participants, such that their opinions were incorporated into the research, which also guaranteed that the apps would be easy for their peers to understand, like, and use. They said it was important to be able to express their views on difficult issues at the preparatory research stage and when an ICT-based product was developed along these lines, to be able to comment on it in a meaningful way at the testing stage. Their suggestions and requests for changes were acknowledged by the development teams and validated during the finalisation process. Testing was also extended to professionals, such that in all cases, they also indicated that both applications were a great help in their daily work and that they were looking for ways to use them. Participants stated that there was a need for wider use of the application, which is why the continued use of *YounGo* and *Asszerteen* in school social work is being considered. Because the development processes for both apps were participatory, they provided very important lessons on the involvement of children and young people in child protection situations. The results give us a better understanding of their situation and difficulties. The results indicate what type of information and help they need in the process of growing up. The results also show how they communicate with their friends and adults and in which situations they found it hard to express their emotions or opinions. A drawback, however, is that due to the projects' funding and time constraints, this involvement was very

targeted and somewhat limited. Both apps must be updated with new content annually – for example, changes in the judicial system – and updating the YounGo app needs more funding. Table 8.2 summarises the benefits of innovations involving children and young people in research methods.

It is worth thinking about projects and service development in the field of child welfare and child protection that provide more time to recruit a team of children and young people, seek their views, involve them in development and testing, and put their views into practice. Two small-scale examples of this, however, clearly show that there are many benefits of listening to children’s and young people’s views, which are summarised in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2. Benefits of Innovations Involving Children and Young People in Research Methods.

Involving Children in Research Process	Involving Children in Testing and Finalising Apps	Involving Children in Further Development of Apps
Mapping their knowledge and opinion	Finalising app content and design based on	Gaining relevant knowledge for
Clarifying their needs and notions about available support and services	opinions of children and young adults	developing child welfare and child protection services through credible participants
Giving them a chance to raise their voice	Aspects of peer groups appear in app through participants (children and young adults), such	New aspects for development
Sharing information and new experiences	that app is authentic and credible	Strengthens children’s focussed attitude and approach of professionals and adult generation
Learning new skills and abilities (cooperation, collaboration)		Involving children and young adults creates culture of participation in Hungary
Improving confidence and self-assessment		Goals for further development: Raising and hearing voices of children is inevitable
Providing feedback about their experiences in the study		In multiple phases, ask for their opinion during research and development process

Source: Original work based on Elek (2022).

Conclusions

This chapter outlined the experience of developing two applications and one thematically relevant video competition, with the aim of showing the gains and strengths that participatory projects can bring, including as a learning process for professionals. The outcomes indicate that participatory research among children and young adults can help the research process be more targeted, and precise if participants – in this case, children and young adults – are involved.

During the development phases of the YounGo and Asszerteen applications – i.e. design, implementation, testing and finalisation – the representation of young people's opinions was very prominent and they expressed happiness about participating in these phases. Both apps are primary preventive tools for mental health because they help users cope more effectively with everyday stress and problems by developing communication, life, problem-solving, cooperation and other skills, including those needed to become successful adults. All these skills are also much needed by professionals and can be put to good use in their daily work.

This chapter highlighted the advantages of participatory research among children. The participation of children improved the development process of these apps. Their participation clarified their needs and taught them how to express and act for themselves. The outcome of the Who Am I? campaign emphasised that participation gave them an opportunity to introduce their situation and raise their voice. The participants were open to this task and found their voice easily. The chance to share their thoughts about their life and opportunities helped decrease prejudice and generated a positive and authentic image about children and young people in the child protection system. In addition to improved self-confidence and self-assessment, the participants learnt new skills and broadened their knowledge. The results show that participatory research can help define the special needs of children and create a more targeted and efficient child protection system.

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