

RX Radio, by and for children: a case study



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1. Introduction

34% of South Africa's population are children (Hall, 2019),¹ yet their position in society is muted. Too often, our country's children and young people are not given the chance to understand or realise their rights. They often do not have the information, confidence, or opportunity to express their views and contribute to actions and decisions that affect them. Add compounding issues of poverty and chronic illness into the mix, and the situation magnifies. This cannot be our accepted 'norm' and that is why RX Radio is committed to helping children and young people find and raise their voice.

This case study provides a brief overview of children's participation, its legal framework, participation approaches and predicted benefits. The advantages of radio are discussed and why the authors advocate for children's radio as a tool to enhance children's rights. The paper then briefly describes the project and summarizes the approach used – focusing on the objectives, proposed outcomes, and methodology as well as the values and guiding principles of the approach. Finally, this paper concludes by addressing the emerging issues identified and lessons learned from the experience.

The authors acknowledge all the Child and Young Reporters from RX Radio. Through sharing their stories and life experiences they are the key contributors and advocates in enhancing the rights of children, through their participation and sharing in this project.

2. Context

2.1 Children's Participation Legal Framework

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically Article 12 (the right of children to be listened to and to be taken seriously), Article 13 (the right of children to freedom of expression using mediums of their choice), and Article 5 (acknowledges the evolving capacities of the child, which are not only related to age and maturity but to the life experiences and their social and cultural environment) provides the legal framework for children's participation as a right.

However, the subject of children participating in decisions that affect their lives is a complex one that goes beyond legal provisioning. Participation means different things to different people, and the form of participation varies with circumstances, including culture, age, gender, setting, political and economic conditions, available resources, researcher and participant's goals. Implementing children's participation initiatives is challenging and many organizations struggle to achieve meaningful children's participation successfully.

Authentic and meaningful participation requires a radical shift in adult thinking and behaviour, from a world defined by adults to one in which children are allowed to contribute to building the kind of world they want to live in. Thus, although it is reasonable and critical for children to expect that spaces will be created to enable them to safely and freely express themselves, share their views and perceptions on issues that concern them, the reality is that the fulfilment of this right continues to be a rare privilege for many children in the world.

¹ Hall, K. 2019. "Demography: Children in South Africa". Children Count. University of Cape Town, South Africa. <http://childrencount.uct.ac.za/indicator.php?domain=1&indicator=1>

2.2 Approaches to children's participation

Gerison Lansdown (2001)² mentions that approaches to children's participation can be broadly grouped into three categories, with the understanding that these categories are not mutually exclusive and the boundaries are rarely clear cut.

1. Consultative processes in which adults initiate processes to obtain information from children through whom they can improve legislation, policies or services. These are adult initiated; they are adult lead and managed; children have no control over the outcomes; children may be provided with opportunities for organizing together, acquiring skills and confidence and contributing towards influencing outcomes.
2. Participative initiatives where the aim is to strengthen processes of democracy, create opportunities for children to understand and apply democratic principles or involve children in the development of services and policies that impact on them. Participatory initiatives are characterized by the following elements: they are initiated by adults; they involve collaboration with children; they involve the creation of structures through which children can challenge or influence outcomes; they usually involve children taking self directed action once the project is underway.
3. Promoting self advocacy where the aim is to empower children to identify and fulfil their own goals and initiatives. It has the following characteristics: the issues of concern are identified by the children themselves; the role of adults is to facilitate, not lead; and the process is controlled by the children.

Lansdown also mentions that projects can move through from one category to another, as they evolve and as children, and adults, grow in confidence. The RX Radio initiative that is discussed in this case study falls under the self-advocacy approach described above.

2.3 The benefits of children's participation

Based on their research report entitled 'Building a Culture of Participation: Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation', the authors, Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin and Sinclair (2003) set out three broad reasons why children and young people should participate in issues that affect and concern them:

- **Practical benefits to services.** It is accepted that the effectiveness of services depends on listening and responding to customers. Giving children and young people an active say in how policies and services are developed, provided, evaluated and improved, should ensure that policies and services more genuinely meet their needs.
- **Promoting citizenship and social inclusion.** Promoting early engagement in public and community life is crucial to sustaining and building a healthy society. Listening to children and young people is a powerful means of persuading children and young people that they are valued and are able to make a meaningful contribution.

² Lansdown, G. 2001. "Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making". UNICEF, Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy.

- **Personal and social education and development.** Active participation is also seen as contributing to children's and young people's wider personal development, increased self-worth and confidence, and practical skills and knowledge.

3. Why children's radio?

Radio is a powerful tool for communication, advocacy and development and this is even more so in the case of children if their world of meaning and reality is to be widened and deepened.

The use of radio as a tool to promote meaningful children's participation and enhance children's rights can be very successful. Some of the advantages are the following:

- The approach is a hands-on activity in which children engage with a specific medium.
- Technical skills are gained by the children.
- There are tangible outputs such as a radio programme.
- The radio programmes are the vehicles through which children tell their stories.
- Radio programmes can be widely distributed to the general public and specific target audiences.
- The radio programmes can effectively be used as advocacy tools.
- The radio programmes provide an opportunity for peer advocacy to other children.
- Radio programmes can be designed to promote self-mastery by young children.
- From an educational aspect listening, comprehension, reflection and oral skills amongst other skills stand to be enhanced through children producing their own radio programmes.
- Skills gained by children participating in the radio can be used by them later on in life and can help to build their early career pathways and ideas for their life journey.

The challenges with a media driven approach lies in how the media is produced and used if it is to play a significant advocacy role in advancing the rights of children. It is not uncommon to find media practitioners talking on behalf of children, making their own assumptions and on occasion even misrepresenting the child's perspective and context of a given situation as understood by the child. However, it is important to note that there is a great difference between media that is produced *for children* and media that is produced *by children* themselves.

Successful approaches do exist and there are experiences from around the world in which children themselves have been trained to use different mediums to produce their own media programmes to enable them to share their own stories with other children. In cases where children are able to transact and communicate their own stories, such experiences have shown that when media is demystified and made accessible to children, they can use this opportunity effectively as a powerful tool to advocate and to express themselves on issues that affect them.

4. Radio produced by and for children: The RX Radio experience

Background:

RX Radio draws on the experience and learnings gained from one of the author's involvement during the last 30 years in the development, planning and implementation of several initiatives in which children were trained to produce their own media programmes including the following three programmes:

Radio Zibonele (Khayelitsha, Cape Town, South Africa), which was one of the first community radio stations in South Africa. It started broadcasting illegally in April 1993, under the apartheid regime. Radio Zibonele started as part of the Zibonele Community Health Workers Project in Khayelitsha which was an informal housing settlement at the time. For the first two years the station broadcasted mainly health programmes. It was at Zibonele that the first group of 12 children aged 6 to 12 were trained on the necessary life skills and radio skills to broadcast live at the station.

Growing up in a time of AIDS: Abaqophi BakwaZisize Abakhanyayo Children's Radio Project, (Ingwavuma, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa). Established in 2005, as a partnership project between the Children's Institute of the University of Cape Town, Zisize Educational Trust and Okhayeni Primary School, the project aimed to provide children (aged 8 to 14) with the opportunity to fulfil their right to participation and to improve public awareness of critical issues affecting children in the context of HIV and AIDS through the use of radio as a vehicle to provide the children with the opportunity to depict their experiences of growing up in the time of AIDS to a broader audience beyond their immediate circle. Participating children were trained to produce broadcast-quality radio programmes in a variety of formats. In addition to distributing their programmes via the Web, they hosted a regular show on a local community radio station where they air their pre-recorded and edited programmes, facilitate live discussions in studio and with listeners, and report on news collected from schools in the area. Selected programmes were also used to facilitate discussion in meetings and workshops locally and further afield.

Children's Voices: Film diaries (Engoyi, Northern Namibia) was initiated under the auspices of IBIS Southern African Regional HIV and AIDS Programme and continued and expanded by Positive Vibes, a Namibian NGO. In this project, 24 children aged between 8 – 13 years from the rural village of Engoyi made films about their life experiences and thereby challenging the commonly held notion that children should be seen but not heard. In so doing, the project provided adults with the opportunity to better understand and respond to the needs of children. Films produced during the pilot project provided a child's perspective on issues as diverse as family history, corporal punishment, and death and alcohol abuse. Positive Vibes continue with the Children's Voices Project and expanded it to other Namibian Regions using radio and drama.

Who we are – a brief history:

RX Radio is an award winning children's radio station run by and for children operating from the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa. It is one of the first radio stations in the world that trains child reporters to broadcast from within a hospital.

Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital (RCWMCH) is firmly established as the leading children's hospital in sub-Saharan Africa. The selection of this hospital as the ideal site for RX Radio was informed by the demand for children's health services as provided by the hospital and the role that such a project can play in being a vehicle to facilitate children's advocacy, rights and education. The consultation process that took place in October 2007 with all stakeholders at the Hospital showed overwhelming enthusiasm and support to the proposal of establishing a Children's Radio at the Hospital. The management of RCWMCH had given its full support to the concept and agreed to make available space for the radio station, as well as access to staff and patients.

The idea first started in 2008 with a pilot of four children (all of them patients at RCWMCH) – together they were the first team of Child/Young Reporters. They were trained over a period of two weeks in which they learnt life skills such as listening, storytelling, and basic radio skills. The outcome of the pilot was the production of a radio diary by each child as well as a series of interviews with health workers and child patients in the hospital. The pilot was a great success and allowed the review of the methodology

that was developed by a team of people for the projects mentioned above and adapted to the needs of children attending hospital with chronic conditions.

It took almost a decade to take RX Radio from its original pilot to where the project is now. Every step was worthwhile - even if it was sometimes frustrating to deal with red tape and potential partners.

12 years later, three of these children that participated in the pilot are still RX Radio Reporters, and two are Directors in the Board. Sadly, one has passed away, but she will always be in the team's hearts - an important part of the RX Radio journey.

Originally established under the auspices of the RCWMCH Facility Board on the 1st November 2016, RX Radio is now a Non Profit Company registered under the Companies & Intellectual Property Commission and became operational as one in January 2019.

What we do:

More than just a radio station, RX Radio is a unique tool with potential to affect change on many levels. Firstly, it gives young people the chance to build the life skills/confidence needed to voice their opinions, take on new roles, and become actively involved in community life. Guided through a series of radio diaries, interviews, podcasts and live shows, this catalytic move opens conversation between peers, family members and professionals alike – forging reciprocal connections and building shared understanding. Whether it's the patient-listener taking comfort in the knowledge that they are not alone, the child/young journalist forming new friendships and allies, the parents opening-up about their experience, or the healthcare professional taking extra time to allay their patient's fears, each and every link forms a life-changing support system - a marker on the road to physical and emotional recovery, and to the future.

Leveraging the potential of a rights-based framework, RX Radio uses the 'magic of the microphone' to give children attending hospital a platform for expression, information and participation. Enabling children to 'join the conversation', we legitimize marginal voices, break-down social barriers and catalyse the transformative relationships needed to build a cohesive system/network of support (family/peer/professional). From this, RX Radio empowers chronically ill children and their families to reconnect with the world around them – a vital step that builds resilience, improves health and well-being, and creates new opportunities for the future.

RX Radio broadcasts 24/7, LIVE and Pre-recorded programmes (including shows, music, podcasts, and radio diaries). The station transmits audio and images through the hospital's internal television system to all wards and public spaces in the hospital. RX Radio also live streams the same content on their website and app, and frequently update their social media platforms. Magazine-format shows consist of music, interviews, stories, news, weather, and traffic updates. Children in the hospital can also participate in the shows through song requests, dedications, live games and prize giveaways by calling or interacting on social media. To become an RX Radio reporter, children first complete basic training: a week of workshops about important life skills (e.g. listening, storytelling), radio reporting and production skills. At the end of the week, children produce a five-minute audio-visual "radio diary" where they tell a story of their choice, and many narrate their experience in hospital. After basic training, they have the choice to become an official RX Radio reporter. They then can participate in on-going training: workshops led by staff and guest facilitators from a variety of fields. In the last 4 years, RX Radio has trained 100 Child and Young Reporters (ages 4 to 18), at RCWMCH and Paarl Hospital.

Through the on-going training, the reporters are given the opportunity to conceptualise and build their own shows on health issues and topics that they find interesting. However, while the content of the shows includes the children's personal experiences and areas of interest, the content is also informed by the health calendar, and feedback from the hospital community. The production team guides the reporters on script-writing and organising features and guests for their shows and, based on the reporter's availability, health and ability, they will have their shows broadcast either LIVE or pre-recorded.

After the LIVE shows have aired, they are then edited and repeated during the week and remaining weekend days, along with the pre-recorded content. This therefore allows us to broadcast content without having the Child and Young Reporters miss school and other critical appointments in order to be live in studio. The edited LIVE and pre-recorded shows are played for 12 hours every day during peak hours of 09:00 to 21:00 (see Appendix A for the current programme schedule), after which a series of podcasts, radio diaries and syndicated content is played for the remaining 12 hours – thus allowing us to broadcast 24/7.

RX Radio also has a series of health promotion and other educational podcasts that are created with the purpose of disseminating pertinent health information and hospital experience for those coming into hospital, as well as with the general public. Radio diaries are also broadcast that the Child and Young Reporters produce during their basic training. These podcasts and radio diaries are child-driven and share the experiences of children with chronic conditions as well as their family members, and health care workers. In order to entertain the listeners with child-focused stories, the station also airs syndicated content from Takalani Sesame and others. This content is played during shows, as well as part of the after-hours content (see Appendix A for the current programme schedule).

As this is a radio station that brings child participation to the forefront, RX Radio encourages children to express themselves in a language that makes them feel comfortable and confident – which predominantly include English, isiXhosa and Afrikaans, as these are the main languages in Cape Town, South Africa.

Programme activities are delivered by a team of seven staff members, two interns and various volunteers. Together they provide Child/Young Reporters with the training and support they need to design, develop, produce and host their own radio shows. Child and Young Reporters are *always* the ones behind the microphone, and are responsible for choosing their own music, inviting guests, preparing interviews and supporting with events. Their creativity knows no bounds! To date RX Radio's child and young journalists have interviewed a number of special guests (including South African President Cyril Ramaphosa), produced a series of radio-diaries, live and pre-recorded shows, podcasts, PSAs as well as COVID-19 content (listen live at <http://rxradio.co.za/live/>).

Children's Voices on COVID-19

With the outbreak of COVID-19, RX Radio Reporters began utilising WhatsApp voice-notes and other remote recording methods to gather content about the pandemic and act as an educational and entertainment tool for all young listeners and their families. Public service announcements (PSAs) were created and interviews were conducted to give information about the Coronavirus and promote health and safety in the home during the South African National Lockdown.

Children's experiences of the pandemic and the lockdown were also gathered - especially boys and girls with chronic conditions and from different economic, cultural and national backgrounds. Children began sharing how COVID-19 is affecting their lives – as well as giving tips and advice for staying healthy and keeping busy. These experiences were gathered from not only Cape Town, but also from the rest of South Africa and from other countries such as Argentina, China and the United Kingdom.

It was also possible for two of the Young Reporters to broadcast their shows from home and the focus of these shows were largely around the Coronavirus – including a Morale Boosting campaign for frontline workers where comedians and interfaith leaders were interviewed. All of this content was uploaded to RX Radio's website and Podbean/YouTube pages.

This project not only shared children's thoughts and feelings during this pandemic, but also helped them engage with adults – like parents, healthcare workers, policy makers and professionals – to show them that children have a key role in tackling this pandemic and helping to shape the response to the Coronavirus.

This is just the start. Recognising the power and potential of radio journalism, RX Radio is a vehicle to open inter-generational dialogues and empower children and young people to engage with issues that affect and involve them. Whilst much focus lies naturally within child health and healthcare, Child and Young Reporters – and their listeners – are encouraged to speak out on broader topics and become a voice for their generation. To this end, RX Radio has built connections with various children's rights organisations, including the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town. By engaging with like-minded partners, the station is working to develop mutually beneficial relationships that expand its reach, bring critical issues to the fore, and inspire children and young people to have their say.

RX Radio strives to

- Provide a safe platform for children to express themselves on issues that are important to them;
- Improve children's experiences of hospital and of their illness;
- Contribute to the healing process;
- Increase adult understanding of children's experiences of chronic illness/hospital;
- Inform improved health worker and hospital practice;
- Produce quality audio programmes by children and for children that informs, educates, entertains, and promotes respect for children's rights.
- Build lifelong skills of the Child/Young Reporters
- Facilitate intergenerational dialogue between children patients, families and health workers
- Generate content, based on the stories produced by children, which can be used to improve the public's awareness of specific children's issues, as well as targeting policy- and decision-makers.

Sustainability

Sustainability of RX Radio beyond the first four-year period is a key priority for the station and it is approached in a holistic way, taking into account the following three main areas: social sustainability, institutional sustainability and financial sustainability. All three areas are interlinked, but social and institutional sustainability form the foundation for financial sustainability.

- Social sustainability refers mainly to children's participation in the running of the station together with a sense of ownership and belonging that children can express.
- Institutional sustainability is about the way the station is run (governance, policies, partnerships and training) and the support and buy-in from the hospital community and the Provincial Department of Health.

- Financial sustainability refers to the financial resources needed to keep the station running.

In these first four years RX Radio has been successful in achieving, to a great extent, social and institutional sustainability, and have also been successful in raising funds for 2021. The station has developed a fundraising strategy and are in the process of developing an income generation production unit at RX Radio that will contribute to the station's financial sustainability.

Institutional sustainability

To run an organisation like RX Radio, a very strong admin unit is needed to ensure that activities are managed and run smoothly. The work of the admin unit is vast and ranges from financial management, staff and office management, and logistics for events/trainings.

When RX Radio began operations in 2016, the team immediately began developing the following essential policies, forms and guidelines:

- RX Radio Staff manual,
- Volunteer's policy,
- Social Media Policy and Strategy,
- Consent forms,
- Petty cash system and forms,
- Leave forms,
- Transport forms (for children and parents),
- Editorial Policy,
- Staff Appraisal documents.

Since then, RX Radio has grown as an organisation and subsequently became a separate legal entity (Non Profit Company with members, registered with the Companies and Intellectual Properties Commission). With this came the need for a Memorandum of Incorporation to be developed and put in effect as well as for a Board of Directors to be formed. RX Radio currently has 12 directors (three are RX Radio reporters over the age of 18 and there are also two RX Radio parents).

In line with RX Radio's participatory management approach and as a result of the growth of the station in numbers, the station embarked on putting together a Code of Conduct for everyone at the station (staff and reporters). The contents of the Code of Conduct relate to behaviour at RX Radio as well as internet access etiquette. The Code was put together collectively, in a participatory manner, in a workshop held with the reporters. The Code of Conduct has been reviewed by reporters, parents and also with the help of Paula Raubenheimer (author of children's books), to ensure that the Code was in simple and child-friendly language. The Code was adopted and signed by each member of RX Radio in November 2018.

As part of becoming a separate legal entity, RX Radio had to grow its financial systems as this had previously been partly managed by the Red Cross Health Facility Board. RX Radio now has a financial policy which serves as a guiding document to provide principles and guidelines that govern the financial management of the organisation's finances. The policy covers various aspects of the station's finances such as:

- Basis of accounting
- Administration and banking process and procedures
- Financial planning and reporting

- Payroll and purchase procedures

The key things that have made the project a success:

- Buy in from all staff and stakeholders.
- Strong values and principles that guide key decision making and how the station is run.
- Ensuring that fun is had as much as possible. This comes through when working with the children as well as within the team in our interactions.
- Dedication and commitment to producing quality work and ensuring ethical considerations are always done.

Moving forward:

RX Radio has partnered with the Western Cape Provincial Department of Health to increase the reach of the broadcasts in other public hospitals in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. In 2019, RX Radio began streaming to Paarl Hospital and piloted successfully its outreach programme. In 2021, the station will be reaching Brooklyn Chest Hospital and in 2022 another health facility. The vision is to reach every public hospital with a paediatric ward in South Africa.

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) has recently lifted the moratorium on the issuing of community radio licenses that had been in place since 2015. Due to the moratorium, RX Radio was not able to broadcast over FM frequencies, but the station will now be applying for low powered FM transmitter licenses to cover specific hospitals and is exploring the possibility of applying for one of the FM licences that ICASA has made available in the Western Cape. RX Radio is also exploring zero rate access to data to listen to the station via internet with different service providers.

RX Radio is actively pursuing content syndication with community, commercial and public broadcasters. At present there are syndications with two community radio stations in the Western Cape.

Awards and Partnerships

WHO Innovation Challenge

In July 2020, representatives of RX Radio were one of two winners out of 140 entries worldwide for the Reboot Health and Wellbeing Innovation challenge organized by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, WFP, UNAIDS, and the UN.

Since this win, the representatives and RX Radio have met with members from the WHO, EPI-WIN, and UNICEF and have talked about getting involved with the EPI-WIN Youth Networks and interviewing children and experts from youth organisations who make up this network. A research paper is also in the process of being written by members of WHO that focuses on Internet Based Community Radio and RX Radio.

SA Radio Awards

In April 2020, RX Radio was the recipient of three SA Radio awards to individual members of the Team (Young Reporter, Producer and Station Manager). This was the second year in a row that RX Radio had won at the awards. A different producer had won an award in 2019 and one of the shows also made history as their hosts were the youngest nominees at the awards.

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) Isu Elihle Awards

One of the RX Radio reporters, Luzuko Sonkapu, has made the Top 6 for the Media Monitoring Africa Isu Elihle Awards, out of 114 entries in Africa. As part of being a finalist, Luzuko has been awarded R10 000

for the purposes of producing the article he proposed to MMA. The Awards are centred around captivating journalism about children and most of the applications came from professional journalists. RX Radio reporter, Mujahid Wiener, also made it into the top 30.

5Rights Foundation – RX Radio participation in the UNCRC General Comment: Children's rights in relation to the digital environment

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's latest General Comment on children's rights in relation to the digital environment has been published for Public Consultation. RX Radio contributed to this publication and one of the reporters, Tarique Kenny, has been invited to be one of the panellists at the Internet Governance Forum event on the of 3rd November 2020 – where the Steering Group will discuss the General Comment.

5. Training Methodology used

5.1 Proven child-centred training methodologies

Training is fundamental for the success of the project. There is an amazing amount of training, support and supervision that happens behind the scenes for children to become RX Radio reporters. The methodology that is used was developed over the last 15 years, was tested in a variety of different settings, and has been implemented in South Africa and Namibia.

The methodology used is broadly based on the following:

- A participatory child-centred approach is used as the vehicle through which the needs of the 'whole child' are addressed. Children are active participants in the learning process.
- The projects combine child-centred learning and participatory media techniques in its approach to advancing children's rights.
- The children decide on the issues that they want to address.
- Training programs are planned and developed based on children's developmental needs and interests. The workshops are based on free play in a stimulating and safe environment. The concept of the 'whole child' approach ensures that children develop physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually and cognitively during exposure to and involvement in the workshops. The programmes are intended to consider all of a child's interests and needs during this learning-enriched process.

The children's basic radio training workshops are mainly facilitated over a period of five days and the objectives are as follows:

- developing trust amongst children, and between children and facilitators
- learning to work in a group
- developing listening skills
- developing confidence and assertiveness to speak in public
- developing the children's skills in developing oral histories, and narratives
- exploring what are the most common problems/issues that affect them
- understanding the concept and meaning of rights
- creating awareness about children's rights
- exploring which personal narratives children would like to tell

- preparing children for the media workshop process
- learning communication and interviewing skills
- learning listening skills, and the role of sound in producing radio
- learning technical radio production skills, including the use of recording equipment and the elements of producing radio programmes
- recording their personal radio narratives/radio diaries

Advanced ongoing radio training

Ongoing advanced radio training is a fundamental pillar of the training programme at RX Radio and plays a developmental role in the lives of the Child/Young Reporters. The RX Radio ongoing training serves as an opportunity for the reporters to further develop their skills relating to their participation with radio. The training consists of formal workshops (which occur during the school holidays and weekends) and in-house training to hone their technical and life skills (this occurs every time the reporters are at RX Radio and assists with generating material and production).

Beyond their training relating to the mechanisms of radio, another aspect of the in-house ongoing training is for the reporters to become facilitators of the RX Radio basic training. This aids as a chance for them to pass on their skills and first-hand experiences of being RX Radio reporters. This is a principle that is encouraged, to create an environment in which skills are passed on from the seasoned reporters to the newer ones. Not only in training, but in the studio as well.

It is remarkable to see the growth that has occurred in the life skills, technical radio skills, and presenting, reporting and production skills of many of the children since they started at RX Radio.

5.2 Guiding values and principles

The following guiding values and principles frame the establishment and implementation of RX Radio:

- To uphold and promote children’s rights to expression, participation and involvement in decision-making as a central element of RX Radio.
- To promote the concept of the whole child.
- To promote learning through first-hand experience and fun, through play, games and artwork.
- To encourage critical thinking and problem solving skills in all the children participating, through appropriate activities
- To affirm children participating in the project in their own culture, language, religion, and socio-economic background.
- To go through a thorough process of informed consent with the children and their parents/caregivers participating in the activities of the radio station.
- To gain the buy-in and ongoing support of parents/caregivers of the children participating in the radio as well as the broader hospital community.
- To succeed, the programme requires a shift in paradigm at philosophical, conceptual, strategic and functional levels, and which results in the development of a supportive environment that protects and enhances the rights of children participating, supported by the concept of the whole child and a child-centred approach.

5.3 Ethical considerations

In considering the ethical aspects of using radio by children to express themselves it is important to be aware of the delicate balance between the right of the child to be protected and right of the child to participate.

Often in the history of children's rights, the tradition of child protection has been stronger than the tradition that emphasizes children's agency and rights for self determination and personal expression (Melton, GB. 1999)³, and the experiences referred to in this article focuses on the latter aspect and in so doing to inform the integration of the two premises at programmatic level as well as at high-level advocacy. One of the achievements of the Convention for the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the creation of a positive and appropriate space to integrate the two premises that Melton refers to.

As a person, the child deserves opportunities to be heard whilst at the same time children are also recognized to be vulnerable and dependent persons that require special protections and entitlements if they are to be prepared for their role as fully functioning and responsible citizens of society. On the one hand, protection preserves the integrity of the child whilst on the other hand; participation preserves the child's dignity. One of the fundamental principles of the CRC is that these different rights are intended to operate together whilst also being mutually balanced and complementary.⁴

Access to support mechanisms for children needs to be provided to ensure that children are able to progress without undue stress and in a safe environment. Given the nature of children's participation and the relationship of trust that must be developed between children and facilitators, it is possible that specific personal experiences are shared by children with the group or with the facilitators. It will at times be necessary that some issues that arise during such a trust-building process may need to be professionally addressed beyond the scope of the workshops by appropriate professionals to ensure that adequate support and relevant necessary services are provided.

For the children involved in the radio, due and proper consent processes apply as a crucial prerequisite for the children's participation in the project. Programmes need to ensure that all caregivers are well informed of the project through meetings and workshops so that they can participate and ask questions to enable informed decisions in considering the participation of each child in the programmes. In addition to consulting with the caregivers, children also need to participate in workshops that explain the process and outcomes of the project in terms that enable and enhance their own understanding so that they can also decide whether they want to participate without coercion. Formal consent forms are signed by caregivers and the children.

6. Emerging issues and lessons learned

Through the planning and implementation of RX Radio, a number of issues emerged and lessons were learned. Various issues are highlighted as valuable for the planning and implementation of similar projects, including:

- ***Creation of safe and enabling environments to work with children.*** A crucial prerequisite for successful participation. It is the responsibility of the facilitators, the organization and partners involved to make sure this is achieved. This means choosing the right venue and space for the

³ Melton, G.B. 1999. "Parents and children: legal reform to facilitate children's participation". *American Psychologist*, 54 (11), 932-934

⁴ Chawla, L. 2001. "Evaluating children's participation: seeking areas of consensus" PLA Notes 42, IIED London.

workshop, focusing on access to the venue and playing grounds. The space should be child friendly and adequate for the activities designed for the children. Children should feel free and not threatened or placed at risk. A fundamental concern should be to make sure that they are supported and that referral systems are in place (health and psycho-social support services) and are available and accessible to the children in case of need.

- ***The development of child centered methodologies for training.*** There are different approaches and methodologies that can be used. Ideally, workshop methodologies should be developed and tailored by the project team to address the specific needs of the children and the project. They should be piloted and adapted as needed. Facilitators should be cautious of importing and using methodologies developed in other countries that may not be culturally and contextually relevant to the local situation. It is not uncommon to find some approaches are not culturally appropriate because of being developed with a specific target group in mind from a different background. However, there is a lot of experiences from around the world that could be used as guidelines for developing appropriate methodologies and to take lessons of relevance as appropriate.
- ***The need to train adult facilitators to work effectively with children.*** There may be the wrong assumption that the experience of working with children equates to one's own understanding and skills to implement child centered participatory methodologies, and this assumption is usually misplaced and needs to be tested and corrected. It is important that adult facilitators are trained and are able to internalize the approach and methodology that will be used before the projects start. Ideally facilitators should participate in developing the methodology and be experienced in the activities that the children will perform. Working with children using participatory methodologies often requires a change in paradigm from an adult centered to a child centered world.
- ***The need to work in parallel with the parents/caregivers of the children.*** Encouraging and enabling children to fulfill their rights should not happen in isolation. It is fundamental to work in parallel with the parents/caregivers and other relevant community stakeholders to ensure their understanding of the project and their support for the children participating in it. The concept and practice of children's rights is not often understood by many adults. Children will only be able to fulfill their rights in a conducive and enabling environment.
- ***Applying selection criteria for the children to participate in the projects.*** Developing selection criteria for children to participate in the project is always a challenge. There are always more children that would like to participate than places available. The number of children will depend on the purpose of the workshop and the methodology used. In the type of project described above we have worked with a maximum of 15 children per group. It is suggested that children participate in the development of the criteria and in the selection process to ensure that there is a sense of ownership and fairness.
- ***We are changing lives and we can prove it***
As will be discussed below, research shows that the station is positively impacting in the lives of the hospital community, including Child/Young Reporters and families, the hospitalized children, health professionals and the general hospital staff. RX Radio is committed to continue doing relevant research to measure impact, to continue commissioning studies to academics, and to continue with internal audience research that informs the production team.

- RX Radio’s developmental role***

Lifelong skills are being developed in the Children/Young Reporters and supporting them in planning their career paths. The station has an internship program targeting final year media and public relations students and an apprenticeship programme for Young Reporters that are turning 18 years of age or that are not attending school for different personal reasons. Opportunities are also provided to the staff to develop their careers further by supporting studies and attendance to relevant workshops, conferences and events.
- Children’s ownership and participation***

RX Radio strives to be a radio station led by the children themselves. Meaningful participation and decision making are key pillars to the programme. The RX Radio staff plays a supporting and training role behind the scenes, and continues to help develop the capacity and skills of the children to enable them to make informed decisions about the radio station, the content that they develop, and their personal lives. Examples of this are the children participating in the development of the newly adopted RX Radio Code of Conduct, their involvement in producing their own shows and features, and the inclusion of three Young Reporters as Directors on the new NPC Board.
- The power and magic of the mic***

This refers to the transformation that is often observed when the children have access to a microphone to interview and talk with adults. Having the mic helps the children to level the “power dynamics” that is often seen in the communications and interactions between adults and children. Usually adults use a top down approach when communicating with children and this influences the opportunity that a child has of “speaking back” and “voicing” their opinion. Often adults do not listen or take seriously what children say. The radio serves as an enabling platform for children to voice their own issues and holding the mic gives them the power to engage with adults, asking questions and sharing their opinions.
- Bringing together the hospital community***

RX Radio is helping to develop a positive environment in the hospital community by providing the opportunity and the platform for child patients, families and health professionals to engage in an ongoing inter-generational dialogue. Children are being listened to and taken seriously.
- Improve health care delivery***

Children’s voices are helping to influence the way that health professionals communicate with children. Within the hospital environment, adults are starting to question the common assumptions that are made about how child patients feel, what they know and understand, what they need and what they want. As a result of listening to children’s and families’ voices on the radio or podcasts, health professionals are reviewing and changing policies and protocols. A good example is the Procedural Pain Podcast produced by RX Radio, in which children and parents speak about their perceptions of procedural pain and their advice to health professionals on how to minimize it. This podcast has helped to shape the new protocol used by health professionals.

7. Summary of the benefits observed on the children, organizations and communities adjudicated to RX Radio

Measuring the impact:

An exploratory qualitative study from Stellenbosch University provides support for the RX Radio model as a tool that positively contributes to patients' lives. For child reporters, participation in the program builds self-esteem, confidence, communication and social skills, all of which transfer into other spheres (e.g. school performance & career training). Audience research has found that for child listeners, the program improves mood, provides entertainment, calms fears about illness and hospital, and introduces positive role models. Since engaging with RX Radio content, many health workers have reported increased awareness and understanding of children's needs in the face of chronic illness. RX Radio is becoming a tool to improve intergenerational dialogue among patients, families, and health workers. A Master's student from the UCT Psychology department is conducting research on the impact of RX Radio on children, parents, hospital community and listeners that will be ready in the beginning of 2021.

Throughout this initiative the children that participated experienced benefits that can be linked to their participation in the project. These benefits were observed and communicated over time by the children themselves, the project team, parents and caregivers, teachers and other community members.

Benefits related to the children themselves

These benefits are grouped as summarized.

Dignity and respect

Through their participation in the workshops and their own production of media programmes, children gained a sense of dignity and respect. Their levels of enthusiasm and personal pride and self esteem increased through participation in the project. The project helped to create a safe space and opportunity for children to ask questions and to make suggestions to family members and other adults on their own views as to how the issues they raised could be addressed. They also got answers about specific issues and events that helped them to reduce their own levels of confusion and misunderstandings. Having a microphone in their hands empowered them to ask questions and access information they may not otherwise have been able to do.

Quotes from children:

"I always used to feel sometimes that nobody understood me and there was nobody that I could relate to. Here at RX we understand each other, we all feel like one big group, we don't feel different like how we usually feel at school or community. Yes, we have different illnesses but we understand each other."

"Well before I joined RX radio, I still had my friends but I wouldn't talk about it [illness] because I didn't want to bring the topic up. So, I started from one member of the management team and then I started telling more people at RX. Then they said I should talk more about it to find out if anyone else has it so that I can help them with what they are going through. Then after that I got comfortable talking about my condition and I started telling more people. The other children [young reporters] didn't make me feel bad about my condition. They didn't judge me. They told me about their cancers too. I was not alone. I didn't feel bad."

"You know for all my life it's like people didn't see me. Maybe it was because I am different from other kids. Other people would look at me funny and not in a nice way. Since I became a part of RX it's like my community sees me. They saw me on TV the other day talking about RX and now they see me. They greet me and are surprised that I can do some of the things that normal children do."

Enhanced well being

The silence constructed by adults around specific events that affected the children's lives, through time, created anxieties for the children. The media programmes helped to break the silence and for the first time children were able to find out the truth. This access to information helped to reduce anxieties and stresses, and helped them to understand, gain self confidence and in so doing, enhanced their well being.

Quote from a child: *"You talk about your sickness in front of everybody. Then they are going to make a radio diary about you talking about yourself and interviewing your mother, father and anyone from your house. For the first time you get to talk about your sickness and you feel relieved to talk about it and now it's not difficult anymore to talk about my illness and how I feel."*

Contribution to gaining life skills and leadership development that can be built on and used in life

There was evidence from teachers and parents that through their participation in the projects, the children improved their communication skills and became more effective communicators. Listening skills were gained through learning interviewing skills, how to ask questions, and to listen to and respect other people's point of view. Children were able to create dialogue with their peers and adults. Through the workshops children also learned facilitation skills and were given the opportunity to put those skills into practice. They proved that they were able to use media in a creative and effective way to tell their stories to others.

Quotes from children: *"I have a speech problem and most people couldn't understand what I was saying because. I would get frustrated and sad because I can't do anything for myself and I'm in a wheelchair with weak muscles and I needed them to hear me so that they can help me with what I need. Especially at home they, didn't hear me properly. So, RX helped me because they taught me how to speak slowly and how to pace my speech. Also, how to make my words sound better so that people can hear me. Since I joined the programme my speech has improved. Like being respectful, being kind and stuff like that. I learnt to be very respectful towards other children and people. I've learnt a lot about respect since I became a young reporter. It's so nice now with my friends because we talk to each other in a nice way and listen to each other and not be rude or shout."*

Able to take informed decisions

Children made decisions about a number of issues. They decided that they wanted to participate in the project. They decided what personal stories they wanted to share with others. They made decisions about whom to interview for their programmes and how to use the information gathered. Some of the topics discussed in their programmes were difficult and required from them to meet with authority figures such as school principals, health workers, politicians, etc. They felt assertive to engage in discussions with them and asked their own questions, noting that some of them were very difficult to answer. Children felt that they had the right to participate in decisions that affect them and made clear to their interviewees that they expected this right to be fulfilled.

Quote from a child: *"You see we interview guests and get to talk with people from different age groups, and we also interview nurses and doctors and ask questions and learn more about other conditions. Also talking openly with other kids about your illness helps a lot."*

Promoting democratic citizenship

It was interesting to observe how children developed a sense of team and how they operated when taking decisions that affected the group as a whole. Except for very few occasions, individuals were

prepared to motivate for their positions and argue their case. There was a democratic process. Decisions were taken most of the time by consensus and sometimes by voting and once a decision was taken children supported each other to implement that decision. Issues such as sharing materials and equipment for their work, making sure that food was kept for those that were out on an assignment, deciding on breaks, co-facilitating sections of workshops and looking after each other were all signs of responsible democratic citizenship.

Gaining a better understanding of own health needs and encouraged the children to take responsibility for their own health

Many of the programmes produced by the children are related directly or indirectly to health conditions they have experienced and their time in hospital. As part of their radio productions children spoke to health workers, parents/caregivers, family members, friends and also to affected people. In doing so they gained awareness, information and knowledge that gave them a better understanding on the impact of health in their communities and increased responsibility for their own health.

Quotes from parent/caregiver: *“She is able to talk about her problem even when she is admitted she is able to speak about her being ill and explain what is happening...I don’t have to explain to the doctors alone, she speaks for herself about her illness. She now speaks for herself, when doctors ask questions relating to her health, she is able to communicate with her doctor and nurse. I think it’s because ever since she met other children here at RX Radio who have different illnesses that encouraged her as they get a chance every now and then to discuss their illnesses with other children.”*

Educational benefits

Children gained listening, comprehension, reflection, oral skills, language usage and enhanced personal leadership skills. Parents/caregivers, health workers and teachers reported that they could see positive changes at home and at school in the children’s performances and behaviour.

Technical skills benefits and early opportunity to provide career pathway and interest options, including ideas for their life’s journey

In a short period of time children mastered the use of equipment such as field recorders, video and photographic cameras. Many of them produce their own shows or features, live or pre-recorded. Many were introduced to editing processes and gained basic editing skills. The projects managed to demystify media for the children, and they all became aware that anybody that is interested and that has the will can produce their own media. It also prepares them with skills that can be used later in their lives and career paths.

Quote from child: *“They teach you how to use the equipment that I never knew how to work with. Now I want to study media studies because I feel it’s possible. I was worried that what I wanted to study first was going to physically strain me, but broadcasting and media is better for my health.”*

Capturing the interest of children through a hands-on activity

A key advantage of using media as a tool for meaningful children’s participation is that this approach captures the interest of the children immediately; it is a hands-on activity and produces tangible outputs such as the media programmes and the art work that the children and others can relate too.

Benefits related to the children’s parents and families

Caregivers realized the importance of talking and listening to the children under their care. They were surprised about the level of awareness and insight shown by the children when given the encouragement, support and opportunity to tell their stories. Caregivers were encouraged by the experiences of the children to come forward with information about other children who are in need of support.

Quote from parent/caregiver: *“RX Radio for me was a lifeboat for me to be able to find out what’s going on with my child’s life. It opened conversations with my child...Even now we are able to sit in a group at home and talk about it, how her illness also affected all of us. It is such an eye opener. So, RX Radio opens up that space for you to have that conversation with your family.”*

Benefits related to the organizations and individuals involved in the project

A common comment across the individuals that participated in RX Radio is the learnings gained and the personal growth and enrichment experienced. Some realized that their previous experience of working with children does not equal understanding of child centered participatory methodologies. As a result, there was a tendency to control the programme and processes. However, this lasted for a short period, as facilitators began to understand the approach used. The local partners involved with the projects realized the importance of introducing more child participatory methods into their work.

The experiences also helped the organizations involved to strive to develop conducive environments within the organizations to enable the active participation of children, young people, caregivers and staff and this results in the issues affecting children and youth being addressed appropriately.

A noticeable development of the relationship occurred between children and the hospital community, between children and their families, and between all of them and RX Radio. This was new to the stakeholders as previously children did not engage with such depth or trust with the hospital community.

Benefits related to the communities in which the project was implemented

The field recorder enabled children and adults to converse in a way that both parties found comfortable. While the process broke down conventional barriers to communication between adults and children, it did so in a respectful, unthreatening and often liberating way.

Benefits related to the advocacy component of RX Radio

Advocacy materials were produced to improve public awareness of specific children’s issues targeting policy and decision makers, donors, and the public in general to take into account the issues raised by the children through their media programmes.

8. Suggested good practice when implementing children’s participation initiatives

Based on the lessons learned through the initiative described and others, the following guidelines for good practice are suggested when developing and implementing children’s participation initiatives:

- Get to know the children that will participate in the project. Understand their context, their capacity, motivations, interests and how they perceive issues.
- Project strategies for children’s participation should incorporate and build on supportive local structures, traditions, knowledge and practice that involve children.

- Involve children in project design as early as possible. This will help to develop ownership, learning and commitment from an early stage.
- All stakeholders to agree on the purpose and benefits of children’s participation. The decision about the level and nature of children’s participation should involve all project stakeholders including children.
- Assume child capacities and competencies to participate. Age–based assumptions could be misleading. To some degree it is important to assume the competence of children to participate in and focus on the type of support they need to enable them to participate meaningfully.
- Focus on child-centered methodologies to facilitate participation.
- Support adult stakeholders in developing their capacities to support children and implement meaningful participation.
- Ensure that there is appropriate support and essential referral services available for children that participate in specific projects. Ethical considerations and child protection issues should be considered. It is imperative that the physical and emotional wellbeing of the children involved is ensured throughout the project as well as after the project ends.
- Manage flexibly, document the processes and be open to learn. There are many ways of facilitating children’s participation. There is no single model that suits all contexts and situations. It is important to be able to adapt and change according to the specific circumstances and situations. Each project should be a learning process that is well documented so that this can be shared as well as contribute to the knowledge and practice in the field of children’s participation.

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