

by Nathalie Rossini

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# Introducing Anacej: Children's and youth councils in France

**Children's councils and youth councils first appeared in France in the seventies, initially at the municipal level. From 1979 they began to grow in importance throughout the country thanks to committed local councillors and also associations dealing with youth and community education. Two associations were created by these contributors and merged in 1991 to form Anacej (Association Nationale des Conseils d'Enfants et de Jeunes, or National Association for Children and Youth Councils). Along with youth and community education associations and with local authorities, young people participate in Anacej's management through a Youth Committee made up of young councillors from all over France. They set up their own projects within Anacej (for example, "Let's put an end to media clichés about young people") and their representatives sit on the board of directors.**

Anacej's purpose is on the one hand to promote participation by children and young people in public decisions and their engagement with local representatives, and on the other hand to assist local authorities in setting up youth participation structures, particularly through children and youth councils.

Over time, children and youth councils have expanded beyond town council level into the departments, regions and metropolitan districts which have become members of the association. Anacej has thus become a reference on matters relating to child and youth participation in local life and related issues.

Ever since it was created, Anacej has been fully aware that noble ideas are not enough to foster youth participation and that it is critical to support the councillors and youth workers who set up these councils through a wide variety of activities. While our primary role is to create a network of members, making it possible for them to follow each other's initiatives as well as the latest developments within each council and to organise meetings at the local and national level to exchange good practices and views on various matters, we have a particular concern for the quality of these exchanges. Our training programme for councillors, youth workers, professionals from the youth sector and voluntary workers concerned with this issue is built around this idea, as are all our educational tools

which help to help set up councils (our handbooks) or discuss their operation (known as «Les Cahiers de l'Anacej»).

Supporting local government organisations in this initiative for children and young people involves a close attention to developments affecting these participation forums and awareness of the questions they raise, their challenges and their implications. That is why Anacej also conducts studies and surveys about children and youth councils.

The expertise built up on youth participation in community life allows us to publicise and promote this issue among authorities and in the media.

If you want to know more about Anacej, please consult [www.anacej.asso.fr](http://www.anacej.asso.fr) ■

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