



A Blueprint for Involvement

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A Blueprint for Involvement: Reflections of Lived Experience Co-Researchers and Academic Researchers on Working Collaboratively to inform Children and Young People's Mental Health Service Provision

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Blueprint Study Aim and Objectives of Co-Researcher Involvement

Study aim: To develop a model for high quality service design for children and young people (CYP) experiencing common mental health problems (CMHPs) by identifying available services, barriers and enablers to access and the effectiveness and acceptability of such services.

Six young adults (aged 18-25) with lived experience of CMHPs were recruited, trained and employed as co-researchers to work alongside academic researchers based at University of Manchester and Cardiff University.

Description of the Study and Nature of Co-Researcher Involvement

Co-researchers worked collaboratively on the qualitative case study phase of the project and were involved in co-interviewing service users (CYP, parents/carers) and service providers of English and Welsh mental health services.

Co-researchers were employed by The McPin Foundation. Co-researcher remuneration was in line with university research assistant pay scales.

Blueprint Co-Involvement Training Programme

A bespoke research methods training programme was delivered remotely (due to Covid-19 restrictions) over six sessions.

Training modules included: introduction to the Blueprint study; the role of co-researcher and guidance on using lived experience; qualitative research methods; research integrity and ethics; interview skills practice; qualitative thematic analysis.

Ongoing research training and supervision was provided for each co-researcher by an experienced academic researcher including pre and post research participant interview planning and debrief sessions. Co-researchers also had access to one-to-one mentoring from the McPin Foundation for both pastoral support and career development.

All co-researchers were paid for attendance at training sessions

Blueprint Co-Researcher Roles

- Co-interviewing service users (CYP, parents/carers) and mental health service providers during remote video calls
- Assisting with data analysis and the development of frameworks and identification and verification of themes
- Co-designing and recording a video version of a participant information sheet for CYP to increase accessibility and support study recruitment
- Attendance at advisory group and research team meetings and contributing to the development of a 'Blueprint' model of service design*
- Writing reflective summaries of the co-researcher journey to reflect on the successes/challenges of this approach and help develop guidelines
- Contributing to a range of dissemination activities including this conference presentation and a journal article*

*Funder's report is currently under peer review

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Reflections on Co-Researcher Involvement

During our collaborative research journey we captured our experiences as researchers (co- and academic) through reflective diaries. We thematically analysed and summarised these reflections to produce the guidelines below.



Guidelines for Involvement**

Enabling access to involvement

- Recruit co-researchers (CRs) at project inception; allow sufficient time and funding to navigate governance procedures, training and mentoring support
- Aim to engage with a broad range of young people with lived experience by advertising roles widely and beyond existing networks
- Emphasise the benefits of involvement to CRs such as what they can gain from the role as well as prioritising lived experience over formal qualifications
- Incorporate flexibility in the hours CRs work and the methods of involvement to ensure the role is accessible to those with other commitments
- Employ a cohort of CRs so there is flexibility of involvement whilst also meeting the needs of the project and offering a supportive peer environment

Supporting and optimising involvement

- Provide training in research methods for CRs and provide ongoing mentoring/support for professional development. Avoid delays between training and related project tasks
- Mentoring and support needs should be determined on an individual basis for each CR and regular one-to-ones should be provided
- Choice and flexibility about the level of involvement and the ways in which co-researchers can contribute to a project should be offered where possible
- Regular contact should be maintained between the research team and the CRs even during quieter times on the project
- Hybrid working should be adopted where possible to meet preferences in working environment and to allow the role to fit with other commitments
- Research teams should be clear from the outset about contracted hours and any funding limits; remuneration should be commensurate with an equivalent researcher role
- CRs should be supported on their journey to involvement in data collection. Initially observing a more experienced researcher undertake interviews can be very helpful. Post research interview debrief sessions are important
- Research teams should build in time to reflect on the process of co-involvement in order to learn from their experiences

**These guidelines are an extract from an article submitted for publication that is currently under review - please contact Claire Fraser for more information.